

## **CONFLICT OF INTEREST POLICY AND CONFIDENTIALITY POLICY FOR COMMITTEES ON MINISTRY SAMPLE**

### **Objective of Conflict of Interest Policy**

The Committee on Ministry is committed to the highest possible legal, ethical, and moral standards of conduct. Members of the Committee on Ministry, as well as the staff who support them, have the responsibility to act in the best interest of their Association/Conference and of the United Church of Christ. Many of the processes of a Committee on Ministry are sensitive and highly confidential, even if their decisions are not confidential. This Conflict of Interest Policy defines the term “conflict of interest” and provides a process for identifying and disclosing conflicts of interest in order to minimize the impact of conflicts on the Committee on Ministry. This policy is intended to supplement but not replace any state and federal laws governing conflicts of interest that are applicable to the Association, Conference, and Committee on Ministry.

### **SCOPE OF THE POLICY**

This policy applies to all members of the Committee on Ministry, as well as the staff who provide support to the Committee. It is the responsibility of all COM members and staff to comply with the policy and conscientiously address potential violations of this policy.

### **DEFINITION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

A “conflict of interest” is any relationship or transaction that may compromise the ability of a COM member or staff person to make unbiased and impartial decisions on behalf of the Committee on Ministry and the United Church of Christ. These transactions or relationships may include, but are not limited to, family relationships, business transactions, professional activities, or personal affiliations. Among Committees on Ministry, the most common conflicts of interest relate to a close personal affiliation with an authorized minister, a Member in Discernment, or a congregation within the Association/Conference.

It is impossible to eliminate all personal relationships between members of a Committee on Ministry and those who come before the COM. The world of the church can be small. When people agree to serve on a Committee on Ministry, they do so knowing that difficult questions may arise with respect to colleagues and acquaintances. Committee on Ministry members are expected to be able to engage in discernment and come to conclusions about people that they may know personally, setting aside their own interests and emotions. Accordingly, it is not a conflict of interest for a member of a Committee on Ministry to make decisions about people that they know or with whom they have had personal interactions. Sometimes those personal relationships may be beneficial or even necessary for the discernment of a Committee on Ministry. Nonetheless, members of the Committee on Ministry must take special care to minimize conflicts of interest in their participation, encouraging voluntary recusal and enforcing involuntary recusals in accordance with this policy. A conflict of interest arises when a particular relationship

creates a conflict of interest or the appearance of a conflict of interest that calls into question the member's ability to act in the best interests of the United Church of Christ.

## **VOLUNTARY AND INVOLUNTARY RECUSAL**

Conflicts of interest most commonly arise in the case of Fitness Reviews. In such matters, a conflict of interest definitely arises if a member of the Committee on Ministry is: the Minister in Question; the person raising a concern about fitness; related to the Minister in Question or the person raising a concern; a member of the church where the Minister in Question serves; on staff with the Minister in Question, including in a supervisory role; the pastor or spiritual director of the Minister in Question; has previously served in the same ministry setting where the Minister in Question currently serves; or has any other close personal relationship with those directly involved in the fitness review that would compromise the COM member's ability to make an unbiased or impartial decision related to the individual's continued fitness for ministry.

Members of the Committee on Ministry must disclose all potential conflicts of interest as soon as they become evident. In such cases, the Committee on Ministry member or staff person must recuse themselves from all information, deliberation, and decision-making related to the Fitness Review. If they do not do so voluntarily, the Committee may vote to involuntarily recuse an individual from all matters related to the situation before the COM.

## **VIOLATIONS OF THE POLICY**

Any Committee on Ministry member or staff person who violates this policy is subject to corrective action, up to and including removal from the Committee on Ministry and ecclesiastical disciplinary action when appropriate.

## CONFIDENTIALITY POLICY FOR COMMITTEES ON MINISTRY

Committees on Ministry are a vital embodiment of our covenantal relationships across the United Church of Christ. On behalf of and through their respective Associations and Conferences, Committees have a relationship with Local Churches, Members in Discernment, individuals with standing, every other Committee on Ministry, the United Church of Christ, and the Church Universal. In this role, the overarching ministry of Committees on Ministry is the mindfulness of the Church's well-being and the discernment of the movement of the Holy Spirit in authorizing ministers on behalf of the United Church of Christ.

The nature of the work of a Committee on Ministry is often highly confidential in nature. While the decision of a Committee on Ministry is not confidential, many aspects of their discernment or the information they used to come to their decision are confidential. The ministry of a Committee on Ministry balances transparency of process and outcomes with the confidentiality of certain information used to arrive at those outcomes.

For this reason, members of a Committee on Ministry are bound by the same covenants of confidentiality to which authorized ministers are bound. Members of a Committee on Ministry covenant to bear responsibility for maintaining appropriate confidentiality, sharing details about their decisions only with those who need to know them, when they need to know them. In this way, Committees on Ministry honors the integrity of their own discernment and of the ecclesial nature of their work.

Each year, members of the Committee on Ministry sign the form below, signaling they have received the conflict-of-interest policy and the confidentiality notice, and covenanting to abide by them.

I have read the above policies regarding Conflicts of Interest and Confidentiality, and I agree to uphold the standards contained within this document both in my time of service on the \_\_\_\_\_ Committee on Ministry and after I conclude my service.

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Signature

Date

*Many thanks to the Central Pacific Conference for this document.*