

How to Report Clergy Ethics Violations

In the United Church of Christ (UCC), an individual is authorized for ministry and holds their standing in an Association.¹ Within an Association (or sometimes, a Conference acting as an Association), a body known as the **Committee on Ministry** (or COM) is responsible for support and accountability of ministers, to ensure that ministers are serving with integrity, and to engage in the discipline of the Church when questions of misconduct arise. UCC ministers are accountable to the [UCC Ministerial Code](#), and concerns about clergy misconduct in the UCC are addressed in a disciplinary process known as a **Fitness Review**.

The first step is to reach out to the Conference or Association staff where the minister holds their standing. A map of the Conferences of the UCC can be found [here](#). Contact information for each Conference can be found [here](#). Whether by telephone, email, or letter, the person raising the concern should address their question to the Conference or Association staff or the Committee on Ministry Chair, expressing their concern about a minister's conduct and, if possible, framing it in the context of the UCC Ministerial Code.

The person who is raising the question does not need to have a direct relationship with the minister or the ministry setting in order to raise the concern, nor do they have to have been directly harmed by the conduct giving rise to the concern. This individual is referred to as the "person raising the question." A formal written letter of concern is not required by the Manual on Ministry for the process to begin, although a few Associations do make this requirement, so be sure to check. Committees on Ministry cannot receive anonymous concerns, and if the matter does become a Fitness Review, the minister in question will be informed as to the nature of the concern and the identity of the person who raised it.

It is also possible for information may surface in other ways; for example, a news report of alleged criminal conduct on the part of a minister may have implications for their continued fitness for ministry. Information may otherwise rise to the awareness of Conference or Association Staff, the Committee on Ministry chair, or the Committee on Ministry as a whole. Regardless of the way a concern surfaces, once it has been raised, it is the responsibility of the Committee on Ministry to address that concern in a timely manner. More information about the process and procedure of a Fitness Review can be found in the [2018 Manual on Ministry](#), Section 2:6 "Accountability and Support."

Not all concerns that are received by a Committee on Ministry become Fitness Reviews. Sometimes, the Committee discerns that the concern relates to personnel concerns (how the minister conducts their work or disagreements about their theology, working habits, priorities, etc.), in which case, they would refer the concern to the congregation's leadership team (Council, Consistory, Governing Board). Other times, the Committee determines that the concern is not about ethics or fitness for ministry, but is a conflict that they may be able to help address. In that case, the Committee on Ministry may determine that a **Situational Support Consultation** is appropriate.

Outcomes of a Fitness Review range from Affirmation of Standing to Termination of Standing, with a number of possible outcomes in between including outcomes requiring a

¹ An Association is made up of many Local Churches, most of whom are geographically close to each other. A Conference is a group of several Associations.

program of growth to address the misconduct and to prevent future harm. While Termination of Standing means that the minister is no longer authorized for ministry in and on behalf of the UCC, employment decisions are handled by the calling body directly, not the Committee on Ministry.

Please know that the Committees on Ministry of the United Church of Christ take seriously every concern that is brought to its attention, whether or not it leads to a Fitness Review.