

## SAMPLE LETTER TO MINISTER IN QUESTION AT START OF FITNESS REVIEW

To: MINISTER IN QUESTION

From: Committee on Ministry, ASSOCIATION AND CONFERENCE

CC: Selected Response Team Members

Date: DATE

Re: Fitness Review Process Has Been Initiated

On DATE, the Committee on Ministry receive a concern raising questions regarding your fitness for ministry. The letter raises concerns about you receiving loans from at least one parishioner over the course of the past two years, totaling approximately \$10,000. Further, there are concerns that you may have asked others for loans, that you have not paid back any of this money, and that you may be taking advantage of at least one elderly member of the congregation.

After considering redacted versions of these letters with identifying information removed, the Committee on Ministry of ASSOCIATION AND CONFERENCE found that if true, these concerns raise questions about your fitness for ministry. The Committee on Ministry found that the letters raise questions about adherence to the following sections of the UCC Ministerial Code:

- Covenant with God to: lead a life worthy of the calling to which I have been called.
- Covenant with self and family to: steward my time, talents, and personal financial resources responsibly; and accept responsibility for all debts I incur.
- Covenant with my ministry setting to: speak the truth, not using my position, power, or authority to exploit any person nor using my position for unwarranted personal gain, including financial gain.
- Covenant with all lay and ordained ministers to: maintain appropriate boundaries and practice self-differentiation in

*This paragraph outlines in a general way the concern that has been raised. The sample provided is an example. Note that names are not used, except for the Minister in Question.*

*Please refer to Section 2:3 of the Manual on Ministry (“Ordained Ministerial Standing”) for the UCC Ministerial Code. This letter highlights the portion of the Code related to the concern.*

both my personal and professional life, including within the Local Church where I hold membership.

These concerns also raise questions of competencies related to the following Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers:

*Please refer Section 1 of the UCC Manual on Ministry for specific Marks from the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers that relate to the concern that has been raised.*

- **Caring for All Creation:** Practicing self-care and life balance; attending to one's own spiritual and pastoral care, including engagement in supervision as appropriate.
- **Participating in Theological Praxis:** Practicing theological reflection and engagement as part of one's sense of ministerial identity; embodying the UCC Ministerial Code.
- **Strengthening Inter- and Intra-Personal Assets:** Developing and maintaining a healthy sense of self as shaped by God, community, and life experiences; living in relationships of covenantal accountability with God and the Church; exhibiting strong moral character and personal integrity; respecting the dignity of all God's people; and understanding and ministering to stages of human development across the life span.

*If a Committee on Ministry refers this Fitness Review to another Association or to a Unified Fitness Review Committee, the following statement should be included:*

The ASSOCIATION Committee on Ministry has referred this matter to the Committee on Ministry of the ASSOCIATION AND CONFERENCE/participates in a conference-wide UNIFIED FITNESS REVIEW COMMITTEE where all fitness concerns are referred. That body will handle the Fitness Review process from this point forward through the final conclusion of the Fitness Review. The ORIGINATING ASSOCIATION Committee on Ministry agrees to accept the decision of the COM of the ADJUDICATING ASSOCIATION AND CONFERENCE/ UNIFIED FITNESS REVIEW COMMITTEE without further investigation. Information about this process will be shared with the Process Guide (described below) and can be found here: [share link to conference resource about Unified Fitness Review Process, if relevant].

The Interview Team, members of the Response Team, are tasked with gathering information that will help the Committee on Ministry determine if the concerns have merit, specifically:

- clarifying the nature, frequency, and amount of money received from individuals within the church;
- clarifying whether such monies were gifts or loans, and if the latter, whether repayment has been made in whole or in part;
- understanding how church members became aware of your financial circumstances;
- learning whether any church finances have been misappropriated; and
- determining, to the extent possible, if you have demonstrated a pattern of behavior that raises these or similar questions.

*Please share a summary of the nature of the concerns as presently understood by the Committee on Ministry and the information being sought in the Fitness Review.*

The Interview Team will prepare summaries of their interviews per the United Church of Christ Manual on Ministry and their training and make a written and an in-person report to the Committee on Ministry. Initially persons to be interviewed normally include the person(s) raising the question of fitness, the church's personnel committee chair, the person initially identified as the giver of the loans, any others who have given money to the minister, the minister in question, and others whom they deem to have relevant information shedding light on these questions. The Interview Team for this Fitness Review are NAME and NAME; additional Interview Team members may be appointed as needed.

Process Guides, members of the Response Team, are tasked with proactively providing information to and answering questions from the persons raising the questions, the minister in question, and the congregation's leadership about the Fitness Review process. Your Process Guide for this Fitness Review is NAME.

Your Process Guide will also provide you with a copy of the Fitness Review Process Chart and Section 2:6 of the Manual on Ministry, "Accountability and Support," which outline the process the Committee on Ministry will use to consider these concerns. These resources can also be found at the following web link: [http://www.ucc.org/ministers\\_manual](http://www.ucc.org/ministers_manual).

The Committee is covenantally bound to continue its review even if you choose not to participate. We do hope that you will accept

the Interview Team's request for an interview so that you may share relevant information related to these concerns. You are required to sign the enclosed confidentiality covenant regarding this Fitness Review process. Please note that failure to participate in this process may itself result in the termination of your standing.

The Fitness Review process outlined in the Manual on Ministry and adopted by the Committee on Ministry requires us to inform all covenantal partners that this review is underway. This includes:

- The Minister in Question;
- The person raising the question about fitness;
- The Local Church of membership;
- The ministry setting, if different from the local church;
- The Ministerial Excellence, Support, and Authorization (MESA) Ministry Team of the national setting.

Because the office of Ministerial Excellence, Support, and Authorization in the national setting of the United Church of Christ is one of those covenantal partners, you will not be able to circulate your profile while the Fitness Review is underway; likewise, your ministerial standing cannot be transferred until this process is resolved.

A statement similar to this one is being provided to the CHURCH MODERATOR/COUNCIL PRESIDENT later today; a copy of that statement is being provided to you. NAME AND ROLE [e.g. Rev. Maria Vasquez, our Conference Minister] is the Process Guide for the congregation and will be working closely with this individual to answer questions and provide understanding of the Fitness Review process.

The Committee on Ministry considers only questions of fitness for ministry related to these concerns, not employment or personnel matters. The Fitness Review process is a confidential ecclesiastical proceeding. In the United Church of Christ confidentiality means sharing information only with someone who needs to know it at

the time they need to know it. Confidentiality of this proceeding is expected from everyone involved.

We understand that this can be a time of stress and anxiety for everyone involved in a Fitness Review. In addition to the appointed Process Guide, we encourage you to select a person who can provide you spiritual support during this process. That individual may be the person you have previously identified as your SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR/PASTOR; while this spiritual support person does not have an official role in this process, we hope that you will continue to receive spiritual care from them during this time.

Please know that we take these concerns seriously, that we are interested in learning the truth related to the concerns raised, and that we are praying for everyone involved in this process, especially for you. If you have questions, please don't hesitate to contact NAME OF PROCESS GUIDE.

For the Committee,

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NAME, Chair of Committee on Ministry, ASSOCIATION NAME