

**THE COVENANTAL RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN
THE CHICAGO METROPOLITAN ASSOCIATION
AND THE LOCAL CHURCH**

**Adopted by the Annual Meeting of
The Chicago Metropolitan Association
May 3, 2008**

**Section I: Covenantal Expectations between the Chicago
Metropolitan Association and the Local Church**

**Section II: Local Church Covenant Review Proceedings
in the Chicago Metropolitan Association**

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Section I: Covenantal Expectations between the Chicago Metropolitan Association and the Local Church

Introduction:

In the Chicago Metropolitan Association (CMA)¹ of the Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ (UCC), we understand the relationship between the Association and the Local Church to be one of covenant. This is a covenant in which the Association, the Conference, the Local Church, and the individuals involved realize the benefits of support and the responsibilities for maintaining relationships with integrity and dedication, so that the whole body of the church may be enriched.

PART ONE

Covenantal Expectations of the Chicago Metropolitan Association

The Chicago Metropolitan Association is expected to:

- 1. Support the United Church of Christ Statement of Faith.** As a representative body of the United Church of Christ, the CMA will conduct all of its work as an agency of faith and support within the wider denomination.
- 2. Establish a Constitution and By Laws for the Association that are consistent with the Constitution and By Laws of the Illinois Conference and the UCC (USA).**
- 3. Provide programs, services, and structures that support the institutional life of the Association, the Illinois Conference, and the UCC (USA).** As the administrative agent of the Association, the CMA is expected to:
 - A. Plan and conduct meaningful, regular meetings of the Association.
 - B. Coordinate and support Ecclesiastical Councils, Ordinations, Installations and other celebrations in the life of the wider church.
 - C. Convene standing committees, task forces and working groups of the CMA and provide needed support for these groups within the Illinois Conference and the UCC (USA).
 - D. Collect and interpret statistics, data, annual reports and other information that will help the CMA in carrying out its work.

1. In this document, the terms “Chicago Metropolitan Association” and “CMA” refer to the elected governing body of Local Churches who comprise the Chicago Metropolitan Association.

4. **Conduct the business of the CMA in a manner that will strengthen and enhance the life of the Local Church.** The CMA is charged with the oversight of the business of the Association and of the Local Church. This work includes, but is not limited to:
 - A. Providing pastoral support for clergy² and the Local Church.
 - B. Providing support for the Local Church in the placement of clergy.
 - C. Investigating and adjudicating allegations of misconduct by clergy, staff, or congregations/local churches.
 - D. Preparing and approving candidates for ordination.
 - E. Providing opportunities for continuing education, training and spiritual growth.
 - F. Providing resources for congregations/local churches who need assistance in specific areas of congregational life (e.g., leadership development, fiscal management, Christian Education, etc.)
 - G. Authorizing and granting the standing of clergy and the Local Church.
5. **Serve as faithful stewards of the financial resources of the CMA.** The Association, in partnership with the Illinois Conference, is empowered with using the available resources, in ethical and legal ways, to provide adequate staffing, resources and mission support to strengthen the life and work of the Local Church.
6. **Serve as ethical and caring stewards for all clergy and lay persons who are paid employees of the Illinois Conference and work at CMA.** As in the case of the local church, those employed by the Illinois Conference, who work at the CMA offices, are expected to abide by the Illinois Conference human resources policies and procedures on hiring, supervision, discipline, ongoing employee support, leave of absence, separation and dismissal/termination of employment. With both paid staff members (and unpaid volunteers), the Illinois Conference's CMA office must adhere to the highest standards of practice, including all of the legal standards of employment (e.g., minimum wage standards, workers' compensation, federal and state employment taxes, background checks for those who work with children, etc.).

The CMA is expected to set high standards of practice for providing nurture, training, recognition and support for those who serve in the UCC, by insuring that all paid staff members (and unpaid volunteers), where pertinent:

- A. Are carefully screened and interviewed before hiring (or volunteer assignment). Note: This means that paid clergy have current and active Ordained Ministerial Standing or Privilege of Call in the United Church of Christ.

2. In this document, the term "clergy" refers to all clergy with standing in CMA.

- B. Have written clear terms of call and/or contracts with specific job descriptions (for clergy).
 - C. Receive fair compensation, leave time, training opportunities and benefits.
 - D. Receive regular, fair and helpful performance evaluations.
7. **Operate within reasonable legal and ethical norms.** Understanding that there are occasions where justice may demand civil disobedience, the more usual case is that the CMA is expected to obey the laws of the State, and is expected to conduct its business in an ethical and legal manner. The CMA is expected to protect itself from legal actions. Additionally, the CMA is expected to be honorable in its public and private conduct. This is especially important in the following areas:
- A. Management of funds and resources.
 - B. Observance of professional boundaries, including those of a possible sexual nature.
 - C. Human Resource policies and practices.
 - D. Honesty in information reporting and public statements.
8. **Empower congregations by nurturing, strengthening and resourcing them and their ministries, enabling them to be faithful stewards in their mission to proclaim the Gospel as viable and responsive church bodies in their respective neighborhoods, towns, and cities.**

PART TWO

Covenantal Expectations of the Local Church

The Local Church is expected to:

1. **Support the United Church of Christ Statement of Faith.** The United Church of Christ is not bound by doctrinal creeds. However, the United Church of Christ does have a Statement of Faith that is embraced as a testimony of our faith in Jesus Christ, but not as a test of our faith in Jesus Christ. Consequently, there are a wide variety of expressions of faith throughout the denomination. The United Church of Christ (UCC) is a covenantal communion of Christian Churches, and the denominational polity of the UCC (USA) is also based on our commitment to the autonomy of the Local Church. As a result, it is expected that the Local Church will honestly and forthrightly support the life, work and expressed beliefs of the United Church of Christ, as indicated by our testimony in the UCC Statement of Faith.
2. **Establish a Constitution and By Laws for the Local Church that is consistent with the Constitution and By Laws of the UCC (USA), the Illinois**

Conference and the Chicago Metropolitan Association. Again, in keeping with our dedication to the autonomy of the Local Church in matters of governance and practice, it is anticipated that the Constitution and By-Laws of the Local Church will not conform to any predetermined formula. Within a broad range of expression, however, there is an expectation that the Local Church will organize around the basic principles of governance of the United Church of Christ denomination.

- 3. Conduct regular worship services and publicize the time and place of worship** through various means. A local church is a worshipping congregation. Regardless of the size of that congregation or location of the worship space, information about its worship services should be publically available so that members and visitors can join. This information can be provided through a variety of media including but not limited to telephone messages, internet webpage postings and/or printed documents and signs.

- 4. Participate in the programs and institutional life of the Chicago Metropolitan Association, the Illinois Conference and the UCC (USA).** When all of us participate in the work of the wider church, the decisions, policies and proclamations of the entire church is more imaginative, energetic and representative of the constituent Local Churches. Therefore, the Local Church is expected to:
 - A. Provide delegates to the CMA and Illinois Conference meetings, where wider church policies and positions are determined and national representatives are selected. The delegates are the official representatives of the Local Church.
 - B. Participate in Ecclesiastical Councils, Ordinations, Installations and other celebrations in the life of the wider church.
 - C. Participate in standing committees, task forces and working groups of the CMA, the Illinois Conference and the UCC (USA).
 - D. Provide statistics, data, annual reports, and other information that helps the Association in carrying out its work.

- 5. Provide financial support for the work and missions of the Wider Church.** All of the staff, programs, support, resources, church growth and assistance for the wider church are funded through the contributions of local churches. The extent to which we all contribute dictates the extent to which we are able to be a vital part of the Body of Christ. Therefore, the Local Church is expected to prayerfully consider its ability to give and to provide reasonable and consistent support for the work of the wider church by:
 - A. Making an annual contribution to Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM) through a designated gift that is approved by the local church.
 - B. Providing support for UCC related agencies and special offerings as congregational life permits.

6. **Serve as faithful stewards of the financial resources of the Local Church.**
The Local Church is empowered to use its available financial resources, in ethical and legal ways, to provide adequate staffing, resources and mission support to strengthen its life and work.

7. **Serve as ethical and caring stewards for all clergy and lay persons who are paid employees of the Local Church.** It is our strong belief that justice begins with our own practices and policies. Consequently, the Local Church is expected to abide by reasonable and customary human resource policies and procedures on hiring, supervision, discipline, ongoing support, leave of absence, separation, and dismissal/termination of employment. The Local Church is expected to adhere to the highest standards of practice, including all the legal standards of employment practice (e.g., minimum wage standards, workers' compensation, federal and state employment taxes, background checks for those who work with children, etc.). The Local Church is also expected to set high standards of practice for providing nurture, training, recognition and support for those who serve by insuring that all paid clergy and lay staff members (and non-paid volunteers), where pertinent:
 - A. Are carefully screened and interviewed before hiring (or volunteer assignment). (Note: this means that paid clergy have current and active Ordained Ministerial Standing or Privilege of Call in the United Church of Christ. Additionally, it is expected that the Local Church will utilize the UCC's Search and Call process).
 - B. Have written clear terms of call, as indicated in Call Agreements and/or contracts with specific job descriptions (for clergy), based on the Manual on Ministry's Code of Ethics for the Local Church.
 - C. Receive fair compensation, leave time, training opportunities and benefits.
 - D. Receive regular, fair and helpful performance evaluations.

7. **Operate within reasonable legal and ethical norms.** Understanding that there are occasions where justice may demand civil disobedience, the more usual case is that the Local Church is expected to obey the laws of the State, and is expected to conduct its business in an ethical and legal manner. We expect that the Local Church will protect itself and its constituents from legal actions. Furthermore, we expect that the Local Church will be honorable in its public and private conduct. This is especially important in the following areas:
 - A. Management of funds and resources.
 - B. Observance of professional boundaries, including those of a possible sexual nature.
 - C. Human resource policy and practice.
 - D. Honesty in information reporting and public statements.

Section II: Local Church Covenant Review Proceedings in the Chicago Metropolitan Association

I. Perspectives on Covenant Reviews for the Local Church

Covenant Reviews seldom should be used. Rarely do situations reach the point where formal censure of a Local Church or suspension or termination of standing is called for. However, disciplinary procedures should be instituted when necessary.

- A. In most cases Covenant Reviews will not be instituted until there have been congregational and/or pastoral interventions into the situation and these have not rectified the situation. These interventions may be done by members of the Church and Ministry Committee, by a member of the Association or Conference Staff, or by a person or organization suggested by either the Church and Ministry Committee or by an Association or Conference Staff person.
- B. There are a variety of considerations which the Association, through its Church and Ministry Committee, needs to keep in mind when Covenant Reviews are initiated:
 - 1. Care must be taken to insure that a Covenant Review is not being used to address concerns unrelated to a congregation's willingness or ability to live out its covenantal commitments to the wider church and/or to its staff and members. Issues such as interpersonal conflict and unmet expectations related to the general practice of ministry are best addressed elsewhere.
 - 2. As soon as a representative of the Association is made aware of a concern about a Local Church prompt response is essential.
 - 3. Neither a chair of the Association Church and Ministry Committee, nor a Conference staff person, nor any other individual should ever act alone to determine whether a question of fitness is or is not serious enough to warrant thorough examination through a local church Covenant Review.
 - 4. All questions about covenantal relationships are to be taken seriously and are not to be dismissed without careful review and a response by the association Church and Ministry Committee. In most instances, one or more special meetings of the Church and Ministry Committee will be needed.

5. The process that CMA has adopted should be followed with the utmost care.
6. The Church and Ministry Committee must do careful work to formulate the nature of the covenantal relationship concern and ensure all parties affected have ample opportunity to speak to the question or questions at hand.
7. Persons raising questions about a Local Church's covenantal relationship are to be treated with respect throughout the review. The same high level of respect is extended to every member and representative of the church whose fitness is being questioned.
8. Once a Covenant Review is underway, the person or group raising a question about the covenantal relationship and the congregation whose covenantal relationship is being reviewed should be informed of the procedures that will be used. All parties should have comparable access to information pertinent to the review and should be informed of whom to contact with questions about the process.
9. The Church and Ministry Committee ensures that no person taking part in the Covenant Review has a potential conflict of interest and that the proceeding minimizes perceptions of bias.
10. The leadership of the Local Church (pastoral and lay) must be informed as soon as an allegation is received.

II. Participation

A Covenant Review is convened by the Church and Ministry Committee and includes official representatives of the congregation whose covenantal relationship is called into question, the person raising the questions regarding fitness, a representative of the Conference staff, covenantal partners directly involved, and other persons deemed necessary by the Committee.

A. Conflict of Interest and Perception of Bias.

1. The Church and Ministry Committee needs to take steps to avoid potential conflicts of interest and minimize perceptions that a process is biased or unfair. The Committee establishes policies and procedures that will recuse certain members from participating in procedures where a conflict of interest may prejudice the outcome.
2. Members of the Church and Ministry Committee will recuse themselves as Committee members in certain proceedings involving, but not limited to:
 - a. a church of which they are a member
 - b. a church in which a family member is a member
 - c. a church where they are or have been an ordained or lay staff person.

3. A Church and Ministry member who is recused for one of these reasons may still be asked to provide information to the Committee that may be useful in its deliberations.
4. The Church and Ministry Committee will provide an opportunity as early as possible in any Covenant Review proceeding to consider eliminating possible conflicts of interest and minimizing the perception of bias. After the Committee reviews the circumstances under which it may be inappropriate for persons to participate, each member should disclose if he or she should be recused. The Committee may also ask a person to step aside.

B. Role of the Church and Ministry Committee.

The Church and Ministry Committee has a key role as it:

1. Makes the determination that a Covenant Review is the appropriate oversight proceeding to address the matter at hand.
2. Requests that relevant information be gathered to assist its deliberations.
3. Carefully and prayerfully reviews the information available.
4. Makes a recommendation to the Association Council about a Local Church's continuing relationship with the UCC.

C. Roles of Participants.

1. When a Covenant Review is underway, it is particularly important to give careful consideration to the numerous roles that must be assigned and responsibilities fulfilled. These include but are not limited to:
 - a. Expressing pastoral concern for any persons raising a question regarding a Local Church's covenantal relationship.
 - b. Expressing pastoral concern for the Local Church whose covenantal relationship is being reviewed.
 - c. Gathering information to enable careful decision making.
 - d. Coordinating the process to ensure the process adopted by the Association is used to resolve the matter.
2. Persons should not be placed in a position where they are asked to carry out multiple roles during the proceeding that could result in actual or perceived bias.
3. When a Covenant Review is in progress, the recommended role of an Association Minister is that of coordinating the various functions that have been delegated to other bodies and ensuring that the process outlined in this document is followed.
4. When a Local Church's covenantal relationship has been called into question, the Conference Minister should be immediately informed by either the Association Minister or the Chairperson of the Church and

Ministry Committee. The Conference Minister will serve in an advisory function on an as needed basis.

D. Role of the Association Council.

The role of the Association Council will be to:

1. Review the action recommended by the Church and Ministry Committee.
2. Decide how to proceed if the covenantal relationship is deemed to be damaged or broken.
3. Assign responsibility for implementing the approved action.

E. Role of the voting body of the Chicago Metropolitan Association

The final decision to terminate standing of a Local Church will be made by the voting delegates of the Chicago Metropolitan Association upon recommendation of the Association Council. This will most likely be done at either the fall or spring meetings of the Association although a special meeting may be called.

III. Preliminary Phase

A. How a Covenant Review begins.

The Covenant Review begins when the Association Church and Ministry Committee is made aware of information that calls into question a Local Church's continuing covenantal relationship with the Association. Such information may surface through a Local Church member, a Conference or Association staff person, or any other persons raising a question regarding the covenantal relationship of a Local Church. This information may come from a person directly involved with the local church or from a third party. Such information should be promptly forwarded to both the Association Minister relating to the Church and Ministry Committee and the Chair of the Committee.

B. The Church and Ministry Committee Makes Initial Decision(s).

Since much is at stake when information surfaces that may lead to a Covenant Review, a number of steps need to be taken as quickly as possible. Typically, these steps are carried out by the Association Minister, in collaboration with the chairperson or other representative of the Church and Ministry Committee. The Association Minister or Church and Ministry chairperson must:

1. Notify secular authorities if the concern raised allegedly involves illegalities.

2. Notify the full Church and Ministry Committee regarding the type of information that has surfaced that calls the covenantal relationship into question. To introduce the information without bias, the person should not disclose the identity of the Local Church in question or the person raising the question of covenantal relationship. The Church and Ministry Committee needs to know only the type of questions being raised about a Local Church so it can determine the appropriate oversight proceeding to consider the matter. The Church and Ministry Committee needs to determine which of the following options is most consistent with the information it has:
 - a. Even if found to be true, the information does not call into question the Local Church's covenantal relationship and does not warrant a Situational Support Consultation¹. Therefore no further action is required.
 - b. Even if found to be true the information does not call into question the Local Church's covenantal relationship but does point to a need for a Situational Support Consultation.² If this is the case, the Church and Ministry Committee makes a recommendation to the Association Council to initiate a Situational Support Consultation to address the concern. No further action related to a Covenant Review is required.
 - c. Additional information is needed in order to determine whether there is a question about the covenantal relationship and the Committee directs such information to be gathered.
 - d. The information, if found to be true, does call into question a Local Church's covenantal relationship with the Association. The Church and Ministry Committee votes to begin a Local Church Covenant Review and may request that additional information be gathered on its behalf.

C. Covenant Review is Pending

If option "d" is chosen the Church and Ministry Committee initiates the Covenant Review. The review is then considered to be "pending." Proceeding with the following steps, some of which may take place simultaneously, the Committee:

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1. A Situational Support Consultation is a consultative process rather than a disciplinary procedure. The Situational Support Consultation allows the Association Council to address issues in a nurturing, pastoral manner by identifying the issues, determining the concerns that need to be addressed, and working toward a plan of action with all covenantal partners.
 2. A Situational Support Consultation is not intended to address questions about a Local Church's covenantal relationship. However, if during the course of the consultation information surfaces that raises a question about the Local Church's covenantal relationship, the Association Council will ask the Church and Ministry Committee to initiate a Local Church Covenant Review.

1. Confirms that it has formally adopted the CMA process for Covenant Review and keeps a record of this action in recorded minutes. Failure to follow the adopted process can jeopardize the integrity of the Covenant Review.
2. Focuses the proceeding on the question raised regarding the Local Church's covenantal relationship and states the nature of the breach of the Local Church's covenantal relationship in a written statement.
3. Takes steps to ensure that no person has a potential conflict of interest or will be placed in a position of multiple roles.
4. Identifies non-staff people who are gifted and able to serve as support persons for each party affected by the covenant review.
5. Communicates in writing with the official representatives of the Local Church under review, noting that a question about the covenantal relationship has been raised, stating the general nature of the question, and explaining that a Local Church Covenant Review is underway. The Committee describes the process that will be followed and offers pastoral support for the Local Church.
6. Communicates with the person or people raising the question of covenantal relationship, noting that a Local Church Covenant Review is underway. The Committee describes the process that will be followed and offers pastoral support.
7. Consults with the Association to clarify who is to serve as staff to the Church and Ministry Committee.
8. Identifies a team to interview the parties involved.

IV. The Information-Gathering Phase

The purpose of gathering information is to help the Church and Ministry Committee engage in careful and thorough work as it makes a determination regarding the question of covenantal relationship. The information may help to clarify the specific details of the Covenant Review concern, assist the Committee in developing questions to ask the various parties, and help the Committee in its deliberations about the substance of the concern.

The Committee usually gathers information by sending teams to speak with principal parties involved in the review. The team conducts interviews, writes summaries of the interviews and provides opportunity for the persons interviewed to review and make written comments on the summaries. These interview summaries are then provided to the Church and Ministry Committee.

A. Information is typically gathered from:

1. The person or group raising the Covenant Review concern. This person may write a formal letter to the Church and Ministry Committee outlining specific concerns about the Local Church's covenantal

relationship. In some cases, the Committee may determine that it needs information in addition to that provided in the letter to determine the full extent of the concern and to determine whether the concern does affect the Local Church's covenantal relationship. The Committee may then send a team to secure additional information from this person or other sources. In other cases, the information provided in the letter may be sufficient for the Committee to proceed. If the preliminary information is not received in writing, the Committee may still proceed.

2. Other persons having information regarding the concern that has been raised about the Local Church's covenantal relationship.
3. Members of the Local Church under review. Church members are entitled access to the content of what is being said about their church and by whom. Summarized accounts that have been compiled by the interview team may be one means of sharing this information.
4. Public records or media reports.
5. Experts or others with specialized knowledge in areas of congregational life, financial audits or other areas pertinent to the questions being raised to help inform the Committee's deliberation and decisions.

B. The Committee Reviews Information

The Church and Ministry Committee meets to receive the information gathered, which may include copies of written letters speaking to the covenantal relationship, interview summaries with principal parties, and any other relevant documentation. Usually the Committee meets with those who have gathered the information and solicits their clarification on materials offered and perceptions regarding the question at hand. In some cases, the Committee may request additional information before it proceeds. Once all information is reviewed, the Committee develops a plan to meet with the persons directly involved in the review. The Committee discusses:

1. *In what ways is the Local Church failing to uphold its covenantal relationship to the Chicago Metropolitan Association?* The Committee should prepare a concise summary of the questions that are being pursued in the Covenant Review and be prepared to share this summary with the persons invited to participate in an upcoming meeting.
2. *Who are the principal parties who should be offered an opportunity to speak directly to the Church and Ministry Committee?* These may include the leadership of the Local Church under review, persons directly raising questions about the covenantal relationship and other parties having information that directly impacts the matter.
3. *How will the Committee provide opportunity for the various parties to be heard?*
4. *What questions does the Committee have for the various parties that may help the Committee in its deliberation regarding the covenantal relationship concern?*

C. The Committee Meets With the Parties.

1. The Committee informs the people involved that the meeting will include the following:
 - a. The written statements by the Church and Ministry Committee. These are provided to the primary parties no later than one week prior to the meeting, so the parties can adequately prepare for the meeting. The written statement will include:
 - Notification that the process is one adopted by CMA.
 - The purpose of the meeting.
 - The nature and specific details of the covenantal review concern being raised.
 - A log of Committee activities to date, summarizing Committee actions to date.These statements need to be very specific and include dates related to activities and actions.
 - b. A presentation raising the concern about the covenantal relationship. This often includes the presence of persons or representatives of the persons raising the covenantal relationship concern. It may include calling additional persons to present information and perspectives addressing the covenantal relationship concern. In some instances, one or more members of the Church and Ministry Committee may present a statement.
 - c. A presentation in support of continuing the covenantal relationship. Usually, this includes having the representatives of the Local Church under review present their perspectives. It may include having the Local Church in question provide information pertinent to the concerns raised or calling additional persons to present information from their perspectives that address the covenantal relationship concern.
2. Every effort is made to notify the Local Church's leadership and secure their presence and participation in this meeting. A registered letter must be sent to accomplish this. If the Local Church in question refuses to meet with the Committee or participate in the Covenant Review, the Committee should proceed without benefit of the information the local church may have provided.
3. Typically, a party raising a concern about covenantal relationship and the Local Church whose covenantal relationship is being questioned are permitted to have others participate in the meeting with the Church and Ministry Committee.
 - a. These persons are invited to present information that speaks directly to the covenantal relationship concern under

- consideration for a specified amount of time determined in advance of the meeting.
- b. These persons should be identified prior to the meeting.
 - c. The Committee has the authority to limit the number of persons speaking and uphold the designated time limits.
4. While careful records have been kept thus far in the Covenant Review, it is especially important that detailed information regarding this meeting and subsequent decisions of the Committee be recorded and secured.
 5. The Committee may decide to meet individually with each principal person making a presentation. They may also choose to conduct the meeting with all parties present at the same time. All parties offering information must have a timely opportunity to respond to any information shared with the Committee regarding them. However, it is important to remember that people have not been asked to meet with the Committee in order to seek reconciliation or to have a face-to-face confrontation with the parties. Rather, people must have an opportunity to offer information directly to the Committee and to hear its response. In-person meetings also provide an opportunity for the Committee to know the source of the information cited. The following agenda for this meeting may be used or adapted.
 - a. Prayer requesting God's presence, spiritual guidance in discerning the matter before the Committee, and expressing divine care and concern for all who participate.
 - b. Statement of the role of the Church and Ministry Committee in ecclesiastical matters.
 - c. Introduction of persons participating and their roles in the meeting.
 - d. Statement about how the meeting will be conducted.
 - e. Reading of the questions that have been raised about the Local Church's covenantal relationship.
 - f. Presentation of information that questions the covenantal relationship. This normally would be offered by persons who have pertinent information about the covenantal relationship concern.
 - g. Presentation of information responding to the specific questions raised. This normally would be offered by members of the church under review and persons that they have secured to offer information or perspectives on the covenantal review concern. The number of persons providing information may be limited.
 - h. Opportunity for those raising the concern to respond to the information presented by representatives of the Local Church.
 - i. Opportunity for representatives of the Local Church under review to respond to the information presented by those representing the concern about the church's covenantal relationship.

- j. Questions from the Church and Ministry Committee to any of those offering information and perspectives.
- k. Concluding statement by those representing the concern about the Local Church's covenantal relationship.
- l. Concluding statement by the representatives of the church whose covenantal relationship is being questioned.
- m. Prayer for continued guidance and comfort for those involved in the situation and for those who must make a recommendation about the Local Church's continued ties to the UCC.
- n. Dismissal of all except for the Church and Ministry Committee.

V. Deliberation and Decision Phase

The Church and Ministry Committee considers all of the information and determines:

- A. Were the specific concerns found to have merit, and what is the rationale for this decision?
- B. Is this Local Church currently upholding its covenantal relationship with the UCC?
- C. Based on the Committee's faithful deliberation, what outcome is discerned to be appropriate? The Committee decides from among the available outcomes for a Local Church Covenant Review.
- D. The recommendation of the Committee is written with sensitivity and clarifies the recommendation on behalf of the whole church. The Church and Ministry Committee presents its recommended outcome to the Association Council.

VI. Outcomes

The Church and Ministry Committee may recommend one of the following six outcomes to the Association Council. In making its recommendation, the Church and Ministry Committee should take into account the Local Church's repentance, the probability of rehabilitation and restoration of the Local Church's covenantal relationship, the impact on the persons who have been harmed by the Local Church, and the possibility of future behaviors by the Local Church that may be harmful to others.

A. Reaffirmation of the covenantal relationship.

The Local Church's covenantal relationship is reaffirmed. This is an appropriate outcome when the specific concerns were unfounded or unsupported by the information available to the Committee

1. In the view of the Church and Ministry Committee, the Local Church is upholding its covenantal obligations. There are no restrictions or conditions placed upon the Local Church's affiliation with the UCC.
2. When this is the outcome, recognizing the harm that an unfounded accusation can cause, appropriate public notice needs to be given and pastoral support provided to the Local Church in question.

B. Referral to a Situational Support Consultation.

The Local Church's covenantal relationship is affirmed unconditionally. The Local Church is offered the support and nurture of a Situational Support Consultation to address any remaining concerns. Referral to a Situational Support Consultation is not a disciplinary action, and the church's continued covenantal relationship needs to be widely communicated. The Association Council has the responsibility to appoint the Situational Support Consultation team and is encouraged to use the resources of the Church and Ministry Committee.

C. Conditional Affirmation of Covenantal Relationship with a Prescribed Growth Program.

1. The Local Church's covenantal relationship is conditionally affirmed. The decision of the Association Council could be that the specific concern brought before the Church and Ministry Committee had some merit and that the Local Church continues to be in covenantal relationship as long as the Local Church complies with a program of growth. The Association Council has the responsibility to develop a Prescribed Growth Program and is encouraged to use the resources of the Church and Ministry Committee.
2. The Association Council needs to report this action immediately to the Illinois Conference and the UCC (USA).

D. Censure.

1. The Local Church's current covenantal relationship is conditionally affirmed but the Association Council recognizes that the Local Church has not upheld fully its covenantal obligations. Censure is an official statement of the wider church's disapproval of specific actions and behaviors that contribute to a Local Church's failure to uphold its covenantal obligations. This is an appropriate outcome when, in the decision of the Council, the specific covenantal relationship concern was found to have merit. In most cases, the Association Council also determines that if the behaviors and actions that led to the censure resurface corrective measures will be necessary.

2. A Growth Program will be recommended as part of a censure. After developing Growth Program, the Association Council is responsible for evaluating the Local Church's compliance and progress.
3. Censure is offered as a warning, indicating that further similar actions and behaviors are unacceptable. Failure to comply or satisfactorily complete a required Growth Program most likely will result in suspension or termination of the Local Church's relationship with the UCC. The Association Council needs to report this recommended action immediately to the Illinois Conference and to the UCC (USA).

E. Suspension of Standing.

The concern about this Local Church's covenantal relationship is sustained and it is recommended that the relationship with the Chicago Metropolitan Association and the UCC be suspended. The Association Council determines that the church is not upholding its covenantal obligations at the present time, but a relationship with CMA and the UCC may be restored at some time in the future should certain conditions be met. The duration of the recommended suspension should be stated clearly. Before consideration is given to the lifting of the suspension certain conditions must be met. These conditions are spelled out in a Growth Program developed by the Association Council. In developing a Growth Program, the Association Council is encouraged, but not mandated, to use the resources of the Church and Ministry Committee. The Growth Program is developed to allow time for compliance with other conditions imposed by the Council, and/or to underscore the seriousness of the actions and behaviors. The Association Council needs to report the recommended suspension and its details immediately to the Illinois Conference and to the UCC (USA).

F. Termination of Standing.

It is determined that the Local Church has not upheld its covenantal obligations with the CMA and the UCC. It is recommended that the covenantal relationship with the UCC be terminated. This action typically indicates that it is the view of the Association Council that the covenantal relationship concern was found to have merit, the Local Church is not upholding its covenantal obligations at the present time and in the view of the Association Council is unlikely to uphold them in the foreseeable future. The Association Council brings the recommendation of Termination of Standing to either the fall or spring meeting of the Chicago Metropolitan Association where the recommendation is voted on by the elected delegates of the assembled local churches. The Association Council needs to report the results of this vote immediately to the Illinois Conference and the UCC (USA).