

UCC suspends ex-president who admitted to affair

by [Adelle M. Banks](#) in the [February 22, 2011](#) issue

The former president of the United Church of Christ has been suspended for one year and ordered to undergo a "program of growth" after he admitted last year to an affair with a former co-worker.

The UCC announced January 21 that an association within the denomination's Ohio Conference would oversee a ministerial fitness review of John H. Thomas, former general minister and president.

Thomas expressed dismay that within 12 hours of a call alerting him to the decision, preparations were under way to make the action public. He said word was being circulated before he had time to talk with his family or consult with colleagues about the suspension.

David T. Hill, an official with the association and a pastor in Oberlin, said Thomas's ministerial standing had been suspended for at least a year, "with reinstatement of standing contingent upon completion of a prescribed program of growth."

Due to term limits, Thomas left office in 2009 after serving as president for a decade. In August 2010, the church announced that he was divorcing his wife and said "he has formed a relationship with another woman with whom he worked" within the Cleveland-based denomination.

Thomas, now a visiting professor at UCC-affiliated Chicago Theological Seminary and adviser to seminary president Alice Hunt, voiced his displeasure in regard to the decision being made public after a brief interval. "Quite

apart from lacking any sense of human decency, this so violates what I understand to be concern for the sanctity and confidentiality of church and ministry proceedings," he said.

"However, given the voyeuristic nature of the church's approach to intimate details of my personal life over the past few months, I guess I should not be surprised," he said in a statement requested and released by the UCC.

Geoffrey

A. Black, the current UCC president, said in a statement he was "very saddened" by the events that led to the decision. "It is my prayer that as a church, we will be gracious and compassionate with each other and move forward together in search of healing and reconciliation." —RNS