

# **American Association of Christian Counselors**

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## ***AACC Code of Ethics***

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### **Y-2014 Code of Ethics**

**Developed by the**

**AACC Law and Ethics Committee**

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The American Association of Christian Counselors (AACC) would like to recognize the following individuals for their time, diligence, contributions and professional expertise given to the AACC regarding the Y-2014 *Code of Ethics for Christian Counselors*:

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## Preface to the Y-2014 Final Code

Welcome to the Y-2014 final revision of the AACC *Christian Counseling Code of Ethics* (herein referred to as the **Code**). This edition of the **Code revises** the 1998, 2000, 2001, and 2003 Provisional **Codes**, **supersedes** and **replaces** those versions of the **Code** in their entirety.

With the publication of this **Code** on the AACC website—[www.aacc.net](http://www.aacc.net)—we publicly present our ethical standards to all U.S. American Association of Christian Counselors (ACCC) members, as well as those members residing in or citizens of other nations. We also respectfully submit this document to the Church at large, the helping professions, courts, legislatures, licensure and regulatory boards, and to mental health and health-care organizations everywhere.

Work on this **Code** has been continuous for over 20 years—since the AACC created the Law and Ethics Committee in 1993. The 2004 **Code** has already been adopted, in whole or in part, in nearly two dozen countries on every continent, and has been translated into Spanish, German, French, Korean and Dutch languages. We prayerfully believe the revised 2014 **Code** will provide a solid foundation for a worldwide statement of Christian counseling ethics and the basis of a 21<sup>st</sup> century global standard for Christian counseling care.

The Holy Scriptures and the AACC Doctrinal Statement are foundational to this **Code**. Other professional ethics codes, in alphabetical order, that were consulted for this revision include those from the:

- American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists (AAMFT), including portions of the California Association of Marriage and Family Therapists (CAMFT)
- American Association of Pastoral Counselors (AAPC)
- American Counseling Association (ACA), including the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES—ACA related), and the Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling (ASERVIC—also ACA related)
- American Psychiatric Association (APiA)
- American Psychological Association (APoA), including APoA General Guidelines for Providers of Psychological Services
- Christian Association for Psychological Studies (CAPS)
- National Association of Social Workers (NASW), including NASW Standards for the Private Practice of Clinical Social Work
- The Society of Professionals in Dispute Resolution (SPDR)

Some rules regarding procedure, the resolution of conflicted values, and the detail in this document was suggested by the legal profession's *Code of Professional Responsibility*, as well as by selected court cases, mental health license statutes, and licensure board administrative rules from California, Virginia, Texas, Colorado, Florida, Minnesota, Washington, and New York.

Sincerely,

Eric Scalise, Ph.D., LPC, LMFT  
Vice President for Professional Development

## APPLICABILITY OF THE CODE

All members of the AACC, as well as Christian counselors everywhere (both nationally and internationally) are invited to fully adopt this *AACC Code of Ethics* in their work as Christian mental health practitioners, lay and pastoral counselors, ministers and chaplains, and caregivers and helpers. This **Code** may inform and enlighten all Christian counselors, ministers and caregivers, but is not strictly enforceable apart from its voluntary acceptance, use and integration into counseling or ministry-related activities.

Ethics can be viewed as *values in action* or the practical rules and boundaries that guide our professional and ministry behavior. Laws can be viewed as *codified ethics*, which are deemed so important by the state or federal government that they have attached civil and criminal penalties when these rules are violated.

The **Code** does however, represent a mandatory ethical standard for all individuals who elect to become credential holders through the International Board of Christian Care (IBCC) or one of its affiliate boards: the Board of Christian Professional and Pastoral Counselors (BCPPC), the Board of Christian Life Coaching (BCLC), the Board of Christian Crisis and Trauma Response (BCCTR), and the Board of Professional Christian Mediators (BPCM)



## INTRODUCTION AND MISSION

The **Code** is designed to assist AACC members and other Christian counselors and caregivers to better serve their clients and congregants and to improve the work of Christian counseling worldwide.

### ***The Mission of the AACC***

The AACC is committed to assisting Christian counselors, the entire “community of care,” licensed professionals, pastors, and lay church members with little or no formal training. It is our intention to equip clinical, pastoral, and lay caregivers with biblical truth and psychosocial insights that minister to hurting persons and help them move to personal wholeness, interpersonal competence, mental stability, and spiritual maturity.

### ***A New Code for an Emerging Profession***

The **Code** is a comprehensive, detailed, and integrative synthesis of biblical, ethical, legal, clinical, and systemic information. It was created this way because vaguely worded, content-limited, and overly generalized codes, are insufficient for the complexities of the modern, 21st-century counseling environment. A more comprehensive and behavior-specific ethical code is needed for Christian counselors, as well as other mental health and ministerial professions, because of:

1. the mounting evidence of unprofessional and incompetent practices among Christian counselors, including increasing complaints of client-parishioner harm;
2. the largely unprotected legal status of Christian counseling, including growing state scrutiny, excessive litigation, and unrelenting legalization of professional ethics; and
3. the vitality and growing maturity of Christian counseling—including its many theories and approaches—indicating the need for an overarching ethical-legal template to guide the ongoing development of biblical and empirically-sound Christian counseling models.

This **Code**—beyond defining the boundaries of unethical practice—affirmatively educates counselors in the direction of becoming helpers of ethical excellence, capable of more consistently securing the best counseling outcomes. Four streams of influence are evident:

1. the Bible (both Old and New Testaments) and historic orthodox Christian theology;
2. accepted standards of counseling and clinical practice from Christian caregiving and the established mental health disciplines;
3. codes of ethics from other Christian and mental health professions; and
4. current and developing standards derived from mental health and ministry-related law.

## ***The Mission of the Code***

The mission of this **Code** is to:

1. help advance the central mission of the AACC—to bring honor to Jesus Christ and promote excellence and unity in Christian counseling;
2. promote the welfare and protect the dignity and fundamental rights of all individuals, families, groups, churches, schools, agencies, ministries, and other organizations with whom Christian counselors work;
3. provide standards of ethical conduct in Christian counseling that are to be advocated and applied by the AACC and the IBCC, and are respected by other professionals and institutions; and
4. provide an ethical framework from which to work in order to assure the dignity and care of every individual who seeks and receives services.

## ***Uses and Limits of the Code***

This **Code** defines biblically-based values and universal behavioral standards for ethical Christian counseling. The intent is for it to become a core document by which Christian counselors, clients, and the Church oversee and evaluate Christian counselors and counseling values, goals, process, and effectiveness. Furthermore, the **Code** asserts a Christian counseling standard of care that invites respect and application by the courts, the regulatory bodies of church and state, insurance and managed care groups, other professions, and by society.

This **Code** should be seen as normative, but non-exhaustive. It provides a common definition of awareness, knowledge and practice; however, it does not presume to be a complete picture of Christian counseling nor does it necessarily cover all ethical issues. This **Code** outlines a foundation of preferred values and agreed professional behavior upon which Christian counselors can shape their identity and build their work. It defines principles where practice diversity is acknowledged and encouraged, and also includes limits beyond which practice deviance is not permitted or tolerated.

The **Code** is aspirational throughout the AACC and enforceable in the IBCC. It consists of four major parts—*Introduction and Mission*, *Biblical-Ethical Foundations*, *Ethical Standards*, and *Procedural Rules*. From time-to-time, the AACC and the Law and Ethics Committee may draft and offer Guidance Documents to further clarify specific standards of professional and/or biblical conduct. The **Code** also aspires to define, in its Mission and the Biblical-Ethical Foundations statements, the best ideals and goals of Christian counseling. The Ethical Standards and Procedural Rules are the codes of individual practice and organizational behavior that help guide the AACC membership. These statements can be consulted in working out the problems and dilemmas of ethics application and procedural rules interpretation.

Concerning language, the **Code** endeavors to avoid pedantic, legalese, and sexist language, but also avoids a radical inclusivism that de-sexes the name of God. Unless otherwise denoted, the term “client” refers to clients, patients, congregants, parishioners, or helpees. “Counseling” is usually a generic reference to clinical, psychiatric, pastoral, and lay helping.

### ***How the Code is Organized***

A significant formatting change in the Y-2014 **Code** revision is to first define ethical standards that pertain to the entire continuum of counselors and helpers and to then break out specific individual sections that pertain first to licensed practitioners, and then to ministry-based helpers (e.g., pastors, pastoral counselors, chaplains, and lay helpers). This is being done due to ongoing confusion across the continuum and to better follow the logic of the IBCC’s credentialing mission and parameters. Additionally, an entirely new section has been added that addresses the ongoing development and use of technology in the helping process.

The **Code** is primarily organized along eight foundational pillars that form the basis for ethical and Christ-centered practice. These **Core Principles** include:

- **Compassion** in Christian Counseling – A Call to **Servanthood**
- **Competence** in Christian Counseling – A Call to **Excellence**
- **Consent** in Christian Counseling – A Call to **Integrity**
- **Confidentiality** in Christian Counseling – A Call to **Trustworthiness**
- **Cultural Regard** in Christian Counseling – A Call to **Dignity**
- **Case Management** in Christian Counseling – A Call to **Soundness**
- **Collegiality** in Christian Counseling – A Call to **Relationship**
- **Community Presence** in Christian Counseling – A Call to **Humility**

### ***Grace for the Task Ahead***

This is a dynamic **Code**, one that will anchor the mission of the AACC and retain some elements without change, but one that will also live and grow with the life and growth of the Association and its membership. The **Code** calls for a lifelong commitment to ethical, competent and excellent service, while challenging its adherents to encourage ethical behavior among colleagues, churches, organizations, and communities. The sincere prayer of the AACC leadership team, Executive Board and the Law and Ethics Committee, is that God would give grace to adopt this **Code** professionally, the strength to live it honorably, and the hope to see it as a foundation of common identity and corporate unity.

## **BIBLICAL-ETHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE AACC ETHICS CODE\***

- 1<sup>st</sup> FOUNDATION:** *Jesus Christ—and His revelation in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible as the inspired Word of God—is the pre-eminent model for Christian counseling practice, ethics, caregiving activities and the final authority for all matters about which it speaks.*
- 2<sup>nd</sup> FOUNDATION:** *Christian counseling maintains a committed, intimate, and dedicated relationship with the worldwide church, and individual counselors with a local body of believers.*
- 3<sup>rd</sup> FOUNDATION:** *Christian counseling, at its best, is a Spirit-led process of change, transformation and growth, geared to help others mature in Christ by the skillful synthesis of counselor-assisted spiritual, psychosocial, familial, bio-medical, and environmental interventions.*
- 4<sup>th</sup> FOUNDATION:** *Christian counselors are dedicated to Jesus Christ as their “first love,” to excellence in client service, to ethical integrity in practice, and to respect for everyone encountered.*
- 5<sup>th</sup> FOUNDATION:** *Christian counselors accord the highest respect to biblical revelation regarding the sanctity and defense of human life, the dignity of human personhood, and the sanctity of marriage and family life.*
- 6<sup>th</sup> FOUNDATION:** *The biblical and constitutional rights to Religious Freedom, Free Speech, and Free Association, protect Christian counselor public identity, and the explicit incorporation of spiritual practices into all forms of counseling and intervention.*
- 7<sup>th</sup> FOUNDATION:** *Christian counselors are mindful of their representation of Christ and His church as Ambassadors of Reconciliation and are dedicated to honor their commitments and obligations in all social and professional relationships.*

\* **NOTE** – This statement of “Biblical-Ethical Foundations” is not a Doctrinal Statement, nor is it intended to substitute for one. The AACC Doctrinal Statement is a separate standard that reflects the baseline religious beliefs and biblical commitments of AACC members. However, these seven foundation statements are implicitly rooted in the AACC Doctrinal Statement. Furthermore, when combined with the Scriptures, the AACC Doctrinal Statement, and the statement of “Introduction and Mission,” this section stands as the baseline ethics policy that will ground this **Code**, assist the search for clear meaning and common interpretation, and guide the resolution of disputed applications of ethical standards and procedural rules.

## ETHICAL STANDARDS

### I. ETHICAL STANDARDS FOR ALL CHRISTIAN COUNSELORS

#### ES1-000: A Judeo-Christian Worldview – Practicing through Faith and Values

This **Code**—and all who follow it—incorporates a Judeo-Christian worldview and meta-ethic, one that is derived from both special revelation (recognizing that Jesus Christ is God-come-in-the-flesh) and general revelation (acknowledging that science and the great arts of humanity also speak a certain measure of truth) as revealed in the 66 books of the Holy Bible. Christian counselors are rooted in this Revelation and consider the Bible to be the final authoritative basis for faith, values and all ethics and interventions.

##### 1-010: Affirming Human Worth and Dignity

Christian counselors recognize and uphold the inherent, God-given worth and dignity of every human person, from the preborn to those on death's bed. Human beings are God's creation and consequently, are due all the rights, respect and ordered logic that this fact of creation entails. Therefore, Christian counselors express appropriate care towards any client, service-inquiring person, or anyone encountered in the course of practice or ministry, without regard to race, ethnicity, gender, sexual behavior or orientation, socioeconomic status, age, disability, marital status, education, occupation, denomination, belief system, values, or political affiliation. God's love is unconditional and, at this level of concern, so must that be of the Christian counselor.

##### 1-020: An Orientation of Beneficence

Christian counselors operate first and foremost from a position of **beneficence** and endeavor to approach the therapeutic alliance in light of the scriptural admonishments found in the following passages: (1) Galatians 6:2 – “Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ;” (2) Galatians 6:10 – “So then, while we have an opportunity, **let us do good** to all people, and especially to those in the household of faith;” and (3) Philippians 2:3-5 – “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus.”

#### ES1-100: Compassion in Christian Counseling – A Call to Servanthood

Christian counselors acknowledge that the primary rule of professional-ministerial ethical conduct is: **First, do no harm** to those who are served.

##### 1-110: No Harm or Exploitation Allowed

Christian counselors proactively avoid every manner of harm, exploitation, and unjust discrimination in all client-congregant relations, and help ensure the overall safety and well-being of clients. Christian counselors are also aware of their psychosocial and spiritual influence and the inherent power imbalance of helping relationships—power dynamics that can harm others, even without harmful intent.

**1-110-a: Avoidance of Client Harm, Intended or Not**

Christian counselors strictly avoid all behavior or suggestion of practice that harms or reasonably could harm clients, client families, client social systems and representatives, students, trainees, supervisees, employees, colleagues, and third-party payers and authorizers.

**1-110-b: Managing Client Conflicts**

Christian counselors acknowledge that client conflicts are unavoidable and attempt to resolve all counseling conflicts in the client's best interest. Counselors tempted to respond in harmful ways to clients shall seek out consultative and restorative help. If self-control is not accomplished—and client harm is unavoidable—counselors shall consider making an appropriate referral in the client's best interest.

**1-110-c: Action Regarding Clients Harmed by Other Helpers**

Christian counselors take appropriate action against the harmful behavior of other counselors and pastors. They will act assertively to challenge or expose those who exploit others, especially those who are most vulnerable and/or at risk, and protect clients against harm wherever it is found, taking care to honor and support client decision-making regarding curative action against violators.

**1-120: Refusal to Participate in the Harmful Actions of Clients**

Christian counselors do not condone, advocate for, or assist the harmful actions of clients, especially those that imperil human life, and agree the protection of human life is always a priority value in any professional or ministerial intervention. Clients who do or intend harm are not to be abandoned and should continue to be served in these troubles, so far as it is humanly possible.

**1-120-a: Application to Deadly and Threatening Behavior**

Christian counselors do not condone, advocate for, or assist the suicidal, homicidal, or assaultive/abusive harm done to self or others by clients, including that which is threatened by verbal or other means. An affirmative ethical duty shall be assumed to prudently intervene for the sake of protecting life, and under certain conditions, to report deadly threats to the proper authorities and those threatened by clients.

**1-120-b: Application to Substance Abuse and Other Addictive Behaviors**

Christian counselors do not condone, advocate for, or assist substance abuse or other behavioral/process addictions by clients, recognizing and accepting the distinction between drug dependence and addiction. Support or assistance to clients may be given for limited periods of time in the use of necessary drugs—even those from which dependencies may occur—when medically justified and under a physician's supervision.

**1-120-c: Application to Abortion**

Christian counselors do not condone or advocate for abortion or the abortion-related activities of clients, especially when the life of the fetus and/or mother are not at risk or in jeopardy. Counselors will consider and inform clients of potential adverse consequences (emotional and psychological consequences including any increased risk of depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation), as well as alternative means to abortion, recognizing the client will ultimately be responsible for the decision that is made. As far as it is possible, counselors will continue to serve clients and work compassionately with them throughout a pregnancy, whenever abortion is being considered and/or whenever emotional and psychological post-abortion consequences may result from a particular decision.

**1-120-d: Application to Separation and Divorce**

Christian counselors do not directly advocate for or assume the decision for client divorce, but may assist clients in understanding biblical parameters, and analyzing and making decisions to separate and/or divorce—recognizing that the decision to divorce always resides with the client. Christian counselors working in divorce mediation are careful to communicate that such work is not an endorsement of divorce, but rather, a decision to offer an alternative choice to adversarial litigation and its destructive family impact whenever divorce is inevitable.

**1-120-e Application to Premarital and Extramarital Sexual Behavior**

Christian counselors do not condone or advocate for the pursuit of or active involvement in premarital and/or extra-marital sexual behavior by clients, acknowledging that sex is part of God’s good creation and a gift when confined to one man and one woman within the boundaries of marriage. Counselors may agree to and support the client’s desire to work through issues related to sexual behavior, identity, and attractions, but will encourage sexual celibacy or biblically-prescribed sexual behavior while such issues are being addressed.

**1-120-f: Application to Homosexual, Bisexual and Transgendered Behavior**

Christian counselors do not condone or advocate for the pursuit of or active involvement in homosexual, bisexual or transgendered behaviors and lifestyles. Counselors may agree to and support the desire to work through issues of homosexual and transgendered identity and attractions, but will not describe or reduce human identity and nature to sexual orientation or reference, and will encourage sexual celibacy or biblically-prescribed sexual behavior while such issues are being addressed. Counselors acknowledge the client’s fundamental right to self-determination and further understand that deeply held religious values and beliefs may conflict with same-sex attraction and/or behavior, resulting in anxiety, depression, stress, and inner turmoil.

**1-120-g: Application to Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide**

Christian counselors do not condone or advocate for active forms of euthanasia and assisted suicide, but may agree to and support the wish not to prolong life by artificial means, and will often advocate for hospice care, more effective application of medicine, and other reasonable means to reduce pain and suffering. Regarding patients or clients who wish to die, counselors will not deliver, nor advocate for, nor support the use of drugs or devices to be utilized for the purpose of ending a client's life. So long as there are no other reasonable methods to alleviate such pain and suffering, the counselor is free to support, advocate for, and participate in aggressive pain management in accordance with sound medical practice, and with the informed consent of the patient or the patient's authorized representative.

**1-130: Sexual Misconduct Forbidden**

Christian counselors refrain from all forms of sexual misconduct with clients in professional, pastoral or lay relationships, and view such behavior as unethical and forbidden. This includes any kind of sexual exploitation, abuse, deception, manipulation, harassment, relationships where the sexual involvement is invited, and relationships where informed consent presumably exists. Due to the inherent power imbalance of helping relationships, as well as biblical principles related to sexual behavior outside of marriage, such apparent consent is considered illusory and illegitimate. Forbidden sexual activities and deceptions include, but are not limited to: (1) direct sexual touch or contact; (2) seductive sexual speech or non-verbal behavior; (3) solicitation of sexual or romantic relations; (4) erotic contact or behavior as a response to the sexual invitation or seductive behavior of clients; (5) unnecessary questioning and/or excessive probing into the client's sexual history and practices; (6) inappropriate counselor disclosures of client attractiveness, sexual opinions, or sexual humor; (7) advocacy of the healing value of counselor-client sexual relations; (8) secretive sexual communications and anonymous virtual interaction via the Internet, sexting or other electronic and informational means; (9) sexual harassment by comments, touch, or promises/threats of special action; and (10) sexual misconduct as defined by all applicable laws, ethics, and church, organizational, or practice policies.

**1-130-a: Sexual Relations with Former Clients Forbidden**

Christian counselors refrain from all sexual behaviors and/or relationships as defined in 1-130 above with regard to former clients, and view such behavior as unethical and forbidden. Furthermore, counselors do not purposely terminate and refer clients or parishioners, even at first contact, in order to pursue sexual or romantic relationships.

**1-130-b: Counseling with Marital/Sexual Partners**

Christian counselors do not counsel with current or former sexual and/or marital partners, but make an appropriate referral.



**1-130-c: Marriage with Former Clients/Patients**

Since marriage is deemed to be honorable before God, Christian counselors may consider marriage with a former client (though it is not advisable in most circumstances), so long as the following parameters are met: (1) counseling relations were properly terminated, and not for the purpose of pursuing marriage or a romantic relationship; (2) the client is fully informed that any further counseling must be done by another; (3) there is no harm or exploitation of the client or the client's family as a result of a different relationship with the counselor; and (4) the marriage takes place no less than three years after the termination of a counseling or helping relationship.

**1-140: Dual and Multiple Relationships**

Dual relationships involve the breakdown of proper professional or ministerial boundaries. A dual relationship exists when two or more roles are mixed in a manner that can harm the counseling relationship and/or the therapeutic process. This includes counseling, as well as personal, fraternal, business, financial, or sexual and romantic relationships. Not all dual relationships are necessarily unethical—it is *client exploitation* that is wrong, not the dual relationship in and of itself. However, it remains the responsibility of the counselor to monitor and evaluate any potential harm to clients.

**1-140-a: The Rule of Dual Relationships**

While in a counseling relationship, or when counseling relationships become imminent, or for an appropriate time after the termination of counseling, Christian counselors do not engage in dual relationships with clients. Some dual relationships are always avoided—sexual or romantic relations, and counseling close friends, family members, employees, business partners/associates or supervisees. Other dual relationships should be presumed as potentially troublesome and avoided wherever possible.

**1-140-b: Proving an Exception to the Rule**

Christian counselors have the primary burden of proof for a justified dual relationship by showing: (1) informed consent, including discussion of how the counseling relationship might be harmed as other aspects of the relationship proceed; and (2) lack of harm or exploitation to the client. As a general rule, all close relationships are unethical if they become counselor-client or formal lay helping relationships. Dual relationships may be allowable, requiring justification by the foregoing rule, if the client is an arms-length acquaintance and/or the relationship is not a close one.

**1-140-c: Counseling with Family, Friends, and Acquaintances**

Christian counselors do not provide counseling to family members or close friends, as dual relationships with other family members, acquaintances, and fraternal, club, association, or group members, are potentially troublesome and best avoided, otherwise requiring justification.

**1-140-d: Business and Economic Relations**

Christian counselors avoid partnerships, employment relationships, and close business associations with clients. Barter relationships in exchange for rendered therapeutic services should be avoided as potentially troublesome, and require justification; therefore if done, barter should be considered a rare and uncommon occurrence. Unless justified by compelling necessity, customer relationships with clients are normally avoided.

**1-140-e: Receiving Gifts**

Christian counselors recognize that sometimes and for certain cultures, a gift, when it is given, is a token of respect and a way of showing gratitude to a counselor. Prior to accepting a gift, counselors consider the cultural narrative of the client, the monetary value of the gift, and any therapeutic implications.

**1-140-f: Counseling with Fellow Church Members**

Christian counselors do not provide counseling to fellow church members with whom they have close personal, business, or shared ministry relations. Dual relationships with any other church members who are clients are potentially troublesome and best avoided, otherwise requiring justification. Pastors and church staff helpers should take all reasonable precautions to limit the adverse impact of any dual relationships.

**1-140-g: Termination to Engage in Dual Relations Prohibited**

Christian counselors do not terminate counseling for the purpose of engaging in dual relationships of any kind. Some counselors and their former clients may agree that any future counseling will be done by another provider if, after legitimate termination and no identified risks of potential harm to the client, they decide to pursue another form of relationship.

**ES1-200: Competence in Christian Counseling – A Call to Excellence**

In addition to being distinctly Christian, faith-based counselors must also uphold a strong commitment to clinical and professional excellence. Competence makes truthful and realistic statements about the caregiver and the caregiving process, keeps pace with relevant research in the field, demonstrates awareness of limitations, avoids dishonest or exaggerated claims, incorporates accountability when there is awareness of hindering personal issues, and makes needed and appropriate referrals.

**1-210: Honoring the Call to Competent Christian Counseling**

Christian counselors maintain the highest standards of competence with integrity, knowing and respecting the boundaries of competence, both personally and with others.

**1-210-a: Knowledge of Standards**

Christian counselors who choose to adhere to the *AACC Christian Counseling Code of Ethics*, have a responsibility to read, understand and follow the Code, as well as comply with applicable state/federal laws and regulations.

**1-210-b: Recognizing Limits of Competence**

Christian counselors do not offer services or work beyond the limits of their competence or scope of practice (i.e., education, knowledge, training and professional/ministerial experience), and do not aid or abet the work of Christian counseling by untrained, unqualified, or unethical practitioners or helpers.

**1-220: Duties to Study and Maintain Expertise**

Christian counselors keep abreast of and, whenever possible, contribute to new research, knowledge, issues, and resources in Christian counseling and their respective fields. Counselors maintain an active program of personal/professional growth, study, and continuing education to improve helping effectiveness, biblical integration and ethical practice. They also seek out specialized training, supervision and/or advanced certification/credentialing if they choose to gain expertise in a particular area and before practicing and advertising in recognized specialty areas of counseling and clinical practice.

**1-230: Maintaining Integrity in Work, Reports, and Relationships**

Christian counselors maintain the highest standards of integrity in all their work, in professional reports, and in all professional relationships. Counselors delegate to employees, supervisees, and other subordinates only that work these persons can competently perform, meeting the client's best interests and done with appropriate supervision.

**1-240: Duties to Consult and/or Refer**

Christian counselors consult with and/or refer to competent colleagues, supervisors and other resources when their limits of counseling competence or effectiveness are reached as described by the following: (1) when facing issues not dealt with before or not experienced in handling; (2) when clients need further help outside the scope of one's training, practice and expertise; (3) when either counselor or clients are feeling stuck in the therapeutic process or confused about counseling goals and neither party is clear about how to proceed; (4) when clients are deteriorating or making no realistic gain over a number of sessions; (5) when clients present an actual or imminent danger to harm themselves (e.g., severe depression, suicidal intent/behaviors, running away, excessive substance abuse, severe eating disorders, etc.); (6) when clients present an actual or imminent danger to others (e.g., extreme hostility, aggression, violence or threats thereof); when clients experience a marked decline in the ability to care for themselves and function in day-to-day life, whether at home, school or in the workplace setting; (7) when the client's excessive alcohol or substance abuse/dependence will require detoxification; (8) when the client's reality testing is severely impaired to the extent that judgment, orientation, emotions, and/or memory is disordered (e.g., delusions, visual/auditory hallucinations, dissociation, severe bipolar cycles, etc.); (9) when there is a strong transference or countertransference dynamic that seems at an impasse despite attempts to address the issue; (10) when the possibility of a dual relationship exists or arises; and (11) when the client asks for a referral to another counselor or caregiver.

### **1-250: Consultation Practice**

When counseling help is needed, and with client consent, consultation may be attempted first, when in the client's best interests and secondly, to improve the helper's knowledge and skill where some competence exists. Counselors shall take all reasonable action to apply consultative help to the case in order to gain/maintain reasonable progress toward client objectives. The consultant shall maintain a balanced concern for the client discussed and the practice/education needs of the consultee, directing the counselor-consultee to further training or special resources, if needed.

#### **1-250-a: Referral Practice**

Referrals should be made in situations where the client's needs are beyond the counselor's ability or scope of practice or when consultation is inappropriate, unavailable, or unsuccessful. Referrals should be offered only after the client is provided with informed choices among referral sources. As much as possible, counselors referred to shall honor prior commitments between client and referring counselor, organization or church.

#### **1-250-b: Seeking Christian Help, If Available**

When consultation and referral services that advocate and support a Judeo-Christian worldview are requested by the client, Christian counselors first seek out the best faith-based help available at a higher level of knowledge, skill, and expertise. If Christian-oriented help is not available, or when professional skill is more important than the practitioner's religious beliefs, counselors shall use the entire network of professional services available.

#### **1-250-c: Avoid Counsel against Professional Treatment**

Christian counselors do not counsel or advise against professional counseling, medical or psychiatric treatment, the use of medications, legal counsel, or other forms of professional service merely because they believe such practice is wrong or because the provider may not have a Christian orientation.

### **1-260: Protective Action When Personal Problems Interfere**

Christian counselors acknowledge that sin, illnesses, mental disorders, interpersonal crises, distress, and self-deception, still influence personal well-being and practice—and that these problems can adversely affect clients and parishioners. When it is realized or highly likely that personal problems may incapacitate or bring potential harm to one's clients, Christian counselors will refrain from or reduce those particular professional-ministerial activities that are or could be harmful.

#### **1-260-a: Accountability**

**Christian counselors seek** out regular, ongoing and reasonable accountability relationships in order to maintain competent and ethical practice, as well as attend to personal well-being. During times of incapacity or where professional competence is compromised, the counselor will seek out and use those reparative resources that allow for problem resolution and a return to a fully functioning role, if possible.

## **ES1-300: Consent in Christian Counseling – A Call to Integrity**

The fundamental right of client self-determination is a foundational pillar for counselors and their clients. Consent allows for the counselor to operate transparently and with integrity, and for the client to make an informed and voluntary decision to engage in the helping process.

### **1-310: Securing Informed Consent**

Christian counselors secure client consent for all counseling and related services prior to the initiation of care or services. This includes the video/audio-taping of client sessions, the use of supervisory and consultative help, the application of special procedures and evaluations, and the communication of client data with other professionals and institutions. Counselors take care that: (1) the client has the *capacity* to give consent; (2) that counseling has been discussed together with the client and that the client *reasonably understands* the nature and process of counseling; the costs, time, and work required; the limits of counseling; and any appropriate alternatives; and (3) the client *freely gives consent* to counseling, without coercion or undue influence.

### **1-320: Consent for the Structure and Process of Counseling**

Christian counselors respect the need for informed consent regarding the structure and process of counseling. At the onset of counseling, counselors and clients should discuss and agree upon the following: (1) the nature and course of counseling, including expectations; (2) client issues and goals; (3) potential problems and risks, as well as reasonable alternatives to counseling; (4) counselor status and credentials (If the counselor is under supervision, that fact shall be disclosed and the supervisor's name and role indicated to the client); (5) confidentiality and its limits; (6) fees and financial procedures; (7) limitations about time and access to the counselor, including directions in emergency situations; and (8) procedures for resolution of disputes and misunderstandings.

#### **1-320-a: Consent from Parent, Legal Guardian or Client Representative**

Christian counselors obtain consent from parents or the client's legally authorized guardian or representative when clients are minors or adults who are legally incapable of informed judgment or giving consent (e.g., severely, emotionally or intellectually disabled, organically impaired, those who are actively psychotic, elderly with significant Alzheimer's/dementia, etc.).

#### **1-320-b: Documentation of Consent**

Christian counselors document client consent in writing by professional service agreement, contract or consent form.

#### **1-320-c: Negligent or Harmful Practices**

Christian counselors do not allow clients to unknowingly or unwittingly consent to negligent or harmful caregiving practices, especially those that involve dual relationships with the counselor.

### **1-330: Consent for Biblical and Spiritual Practices in Counseling**

Christian counselors do not presume that all clients want or will be receptive to explicit, spiritual Judeo-Christian interventions in counseling and therefore, obtain consent that honors client choice, receptivity to these practices, and the timing and manner in which these elements are introduced. This includes, but is not limited to the following: (1) prayer for and with clients; (2) Bible reading and reference; (3) spiritual meditation; (4) the use of biblical and religious imagery or music; (5) assistance with spiritual formation and discipline; (6) incorporation of fasting in the treatment plan as a spiritual discipline; and (7) other common spiritual practices.

### **1-340: Special Consent for More Difficult Interventions**

Christian counselors obtain close or special consent for more difficult and potentially controversial practices. These include, but are not limited to: (1) deliverance and spiritual warfare activities; (2) cult deprogramming work; (3) recovering memories and the treatment of past abuse or trauma; (4) the use of hypnosis and any kind of induction of altered states; (5) authorizing (by medical doctors) medications, electro-convulsive therapy, or patient restraints; (6) the use of aversive, involuntary, or experimental therapies; and (7) engaging clients who are struggling with same sex attraction, crisis pregnancy/abortion decision-making and/or end-of-life issues.

#### ***1-340-a: Additional Documentation Required***

The above listed interventions require a more detailed discussion with clients and/or client representatives regarding specific procedures, risks, and treatment alternatives, and a detailed written consent agreement for the procedure should be obtained.

### **1-350: Changes in the Counselor's Role**

Christian counselors recognize their role in the helping process can change or transition from time-to-time (e.g., from individual counselor to marital/family counselor or vice versa; from evaluator, researcher, mediator or life coach to counselor or vice versa; etc.). Counselors secure new and/or additional informed consent that is congruent with any new therapeutic role, as well as discuss the benefits and the risks inherent in the transition.

## **ES1-400: Confidentiality in Christian Counseling – A Call to Trustworthiness**

Confidentiality recognizes that every client has a fundamental, moral and legal right to privacy and to have a wide range of personal thoughts, opinions, beliefs and behaviors that are protected from public knowledge. The therapeutic alliance between counselor and client is enhanced whenever there is an environment that offers an appropriate level of confidentiality, privacy and safety. This dynamic helps promote strong and effective trust relationships and is an essential factor in facilitating self-disclosure and the potential for personal, relational, and spiritual growth and wholeness.

### **1-410: Maintaining Client Confidentiality**

Christian counselors maintain client confidentiality, privacy and privileged communication to the fullest extent allowed by law, professional regulations and ethics, and church or organizational rules. Confidential client communications include all verbal, written, telephonic, audio or videotaped, electronic, or Internet and web-based communications arising within the helping relationship. Apart from consented to, regulatory, mandatory or legally required disclosure, counselors shall not break confidentiality regarding client communications without first discussing the intended disclosure and securing written consent from the client or client representative.

#### **1-410-a: Discussing the Limits of Confidentiality**

Clients should be informed about both the counselor's commitment to confidentiality and its limits before engaging in counseling. Christian counselors avoid stating or implying that confidentiality is guaranteed or absolute, and discuss the limits of confidentiality, privacy and privileged communication with clients at the onset of counseling.

### **1-420: Asserting Confidentiality or Privilege Following Demands for Disclosure**

Protecting confidential communications, including the assertion of privilege in the face of legal or court subpoenas, shall be the first response of Christian counselors to demands or requests for client communications and records.

#### **1-420-a: Disclosure of Confidential Client Communications**

Christian counselors disclose only that client information they have written permission from the client to disclose or that which is required by legal or ethical mandates. Counselors shall maintain confidentiality of client information, outside the bounds of that narrowly required parameter, to fulfill the disclosure and shall limit disclosures only to those individuals having a direct professional interest in the case.

#### **1-420-b: The Client as the Holder of the Privilege**

Christian counselors understand that disclosure of all client communications (other than those required by regulatory, mandated or legal standards), is at the discretion of the client or the client's legal representative and that clients may both consent to the release of information or revoke consent at any point in the counseling process.

#### **1-420-c: Subpoenas**

In the face of a subpoena, Christian counselors neither deny nor immediately comply with disclosure demands, but should assert privilege in order to give the client sufficient time to consult with an attorney to direct disclosures.

### **1-430: Protecting Persons from Deadly Harm – The Rule of Mandatory Disclosure**

Christian counselors accept the limits of confidentiality when human life is imperiled or abused. Counselors take appropriate action, including necessary disclosures of confidential

information, to protect life in the face of client threats (e.g., suicide, homicide, serious bodily harm to others, life-threatening disease, and/or the abuse of children, elders, and dependent persons).

**1-430-a: *The Duty to Protect Others***

The duty to take protective action is triggered when the counselor: (1) has reasonable suspicion, as specified in state and/or federal statute, that a minor child (under 18 years), elder person (65 years and older), or dependent adult (regardless of age) has been harmed by the client or has been perpetrated upon the client; or (2) has direct client admissions of serious and imminent suicidal threats; or (3) has direct client admissions of harmful acts or threatened action that is serious, imminent, and attainable against a clearly identified third person or group of persons.

**1-430-b: *Guidelines to Ethical Disclosure and Protective Action***

Action to protect life, whether regarding a client or a third-person, shall be that which is reasonably necessary to stop or forestall deadly or harmful action in the present situation. This could involve hospitalizing the client, intensifying clinical intervention to the degree necessary to reasonably protect against harmful action, consultation and referral with other professionals, or disclosure of harm or threats to law enforcement, protective services, identifiable third-persons, and/or family members able to help with protective action.

**1-430-c: *Special Guidelines When Violence is Threatened against Others***

Action to protect third persons from client violence may involve or—in states that have a third-person protection (*Tarasoff*) duty—require disclosure of imminent harm to the intended victim, to their family or close friends, and to law enforcement. When child abuse, elder abuse or abuse of dependent adults exists, as defined by state law, Christian counselors shall report to child or elder protective services, or to any designated agency established for protective services as required by applicable law and regulatory requirements. Counselors shall also attempt to defuse the situation and/or take preventive action by whatever means are available and appropriate. When clients threaten serious and imminent homicide or violence against an identifiable third-person, counselors shall inform appropriate law enforcement, and/or medical-crisis personnel, and the at-risk person or close family member of the threat, except when precluded by compelling circumstances or by state law. When the client threat is serious but not imminent, the counselor shall take preventive clinical action that seeks to forestall any further escalation of threat toward violent behavior.

**1-440: *Disclosures for Supervision, Consultation, Teaching, Preaching, and Publication***

Counselors under supervision will disclose that fact to their clients, and adequately disguise client identifiers by various means when presenting cases in group or public forums. Christian counselors do not disclose confidential client communications in any supervisory,



consultation, teaching, preaching, publishing, or other activity without written or other legal authorization by the client.. Counselors do not presume that disguise alone is sufficient client protection, but will consider seeking client authorization when client identity is hard to conceal.

**1-450: Maintaining Privacy and Preserving Written Records**

Christian counselors will preserve, store, and transfer written records of client communications in a way that protects client confidentiality and privacy rights, and as may be required by state/federal law. This requires, at minimum, keeping records and files in locked storage with access given only to those persons with a direct professional interest in the materials and with proper consent and authorization, as well as by applicable state and/or regulatory requirements.

**1-460: Advocacy for Privacy Rights Against Intrusive Powers**

Christian counselors hear the most private and sensitive details of a client's life—information that must be zealously guarded from public disclosure. Rapidly expanding and interlocking electronic information networks increasingly threaten client privacy rights. Accordingly, counselors wisely protect and assertively advocate for privacy protection on behalf of their clients against the pervasive intrusion of personal, corporate, governmental, and even religious powers.

**ES1-500: *Cultural Regard in Christian Counseling – A Call to Dignity***

Cultural, ethnic and racial diversity are important factors for consideration in the delivery of counseling related services. Cultural competency signifies a minimal level of knowledge and awareness that represents such things as the values, norms, and traditions of another that influence perception, thoughts, attitudes, beliefs, identity, communication, relational dynamics, behaviors, life experiences, customs, spirituality and the understanding of the cause, symptomology and remedy of human problems.

**1-510: Affirming the Worth and Value of Others**

Christian counselors recognize and acknowledge that all people have been created in the image of a Holy God and therefore, all clients have an innate right to be valued and respected, to receive ethical care, and to be treated with the utmost dignity.

**1-520: Cultural Competency**

Christian counselors earnestly strive to develop and maintain culturally competent awareness and practices such as, but not limited to: (1) awareness of one's personal worldview and its impact on the counseling process; (2) knowledge of various cultural practices and worldviews, including those that may conflict with a Judeo-Christian worldview; and (3) cross-cultural sensitivity and skills that enhance the helping process.

**1-530: Working with Persons of Different Faiths, Religions, and Values**

Counselors work to understand the client's belief system, always maintain respect for the client and strive to understand when faith and values issues are important to the client and

foster values-informed client decision-making in counseling. Counselors share their own faith orientation only as a function of legitimate self-disclosure and when appropriate to client need, always maintaining a posture of humility. Christian counselors do not withhold services to anyone of a different race, ethnic group, faith, religion, denomination, or value system.

**1-530-a: Not Imposing Values**

While Christian counselors may *expose* clients and/or the community at large to their faith orientation, they do not *impose* their religious beliefs or practices on clients.

**1-540: Cultural Sensitivity**

Christian counselors proactively communicate with clients in a culturally sensitive manner, especially when obtaining consent, defining the scope of care, during assessment and evaluation procedures (including instruments that are selected), and addressing any developmental and/or linguistic issues that may be present.

**1-550: Action if Value Differences Interfere with Counseling**

Christian counselors work to resolve problems—always in the client's best interest—when differences between counselor and client values become too great and adversely affect the counseling process. This may include: (1) discussion of the issue as a therapeutic matter; (2) renegotiation of the counseling agreement; (3) consultation with a supervisor or trusted colleague or; as a last resort (4) referral to another counselor if the differences cannot be reduced or bridged (and then only in compliance with applicable state and federal law and/or regulatory requirements).

**ES1-600: Case Management in Christian Counseling – A Call to Soundness**

Comprehensive and thorough case management always considers the whole person—biologically, psychologically, emotionally, cognitively, socially, culturally, relationally and spiritually. It requires a thoughtful and systematic coordination of needed services that are in the best interests of the client, including assessment, diagnosis, treatment planning, care implementation, ongoing therapeutic review, and discharge and aftercare coordination. Soundness for Christian counselors implies the use of empirically validated and evidence-based treatments that also integrate biblical principles.

**1-610: Treatment Planning**

Christian counselors actively involve clients in the treatment planning process and in doing so, identify potential support systems and resources that may be engaged, and which are sensitive to sociocultural dynamics.

**1-610-a: Treatment Plan Considerations and Principles**

Treatment plans are developed utilizing the following principles: (1) based on the client's presenting problem(s) and/or issue(s); (2) promote a sense of client ownership; (3) incorporate the results of any assessment and diagnostic work; (4) based on client strengths; (5) identify clear treatment goals and parameters

with specific objectives; (6) ensure that whenever possible, treatment goals and objectives are attainable, behavioral and measurable; (7) are sensitive to sociocultural factors and seek to treat clients within the confines of his/her worldview; and (8) provide ongoing case review and adjustments as needed.

**1-620: Case Notes and Proper Record-keeping**

Christian counselors maintain appropriate documentation of their counseling activities, adequate for competent recall of prior sessions and the provision of later services by oneself or others. Records used in legal and other official capacities will show the quality, detail, objectivity, and timeliness of production expected by professionals who practice in these arenas.

***1-620-a: Client Record Composition***

Protected client information should be collectively maintained in an appropriate file and includes, but is not limited to: (1) client service agreement or contract for services; (2) all necessary consent forms; (3) assessments and assessment results; (4) treatment plan documentation; (5) case notes, including non-session communication with clients, family members and other pertinent contacts; (6) record of service dates and fees/remuneration (where applicable); (7) relevant correspondence and documents from the client or outside sources; and (8) discharge and aftercare planning.

***1-620-a: Records Maintenance and Ownership***

Records of professional activities will be created, maintained, stored, and disposed of in accordance with the law and the ethical duties of the counselor, with an emphasis on preserving client confidentiality. Typically, original client records belong to an employing organization or to the therapist/caregiver in a private, group practice, agency or organization. Due to the expanding right of client record access and the ethic of continuity of care, client records may follow the client, pending appropriate consent for the release of confidential information.

**1-630: Working with Couples, Families, and Groups**

Christian counselors often work with multiple persons in session—marriage couples, families or parts of families, partners and small groups—and should know when these forms of counseling are preferred over or used as an adjunct to individual counseling. In these relationships counselors should identify a primary client—the group as a unit or the individual members—and discuss how differing roles, counseling goals, confidentiality and consent issues are affected by these dynamics.

***1-630-a: Safety and Integrity in Family and Group Counseling***

Christian counselors maintain their role as fair, unbiased, and effective helpers in all marital, family, partner and group work, and should remain accessible to all persons, avoiding enmeshed alliances and taking sides unjustly. Counselors also respect the boundary between constructive confrontation and verbal abuse

within group, marital/partner and family relationships, and will take reasonable precautions to protect client members from any physical, psychological, emotional or verbal abuse from other members.

**1-630-b: Confidentiality in Family and Group Counseling**

Christian counselors do not promise or guarantee confidentiality among clients in marital, family, partner and group counseling, but rather explain the problems and limits of keeping confidences in these modes of therapy and avoid the role of keeping secrets. Counselors communicate the importance of confidentiality and encourage family or group members to honor this principle, as well as include discussion of consequences for its breach. Christian counselors also do not share confidences by one family or group member to others without permission or prior agreement, unless maintaining the secret will likely lead to grave and serious harm to a family member or someone else.

**1-630-c: Avoiding and Resolving Role Conflicts**

If/when Christian counselors are asked to perform conflicting roles with possible unethical consequences (e.g., pressure to keep “secrets” or called to testify as an adverse witness in a client’s divorce or custody hearing), they should clarify their therapeutic, neutral, and mediation role and/or decline to serve in a conflicted capacity, if possible. Counselors may consider contracting for professional neutrality at the beginning of the helping process, securing client agreement not to have oneself or one’s records subpoenaed or deposed in any legal proceeding.

**1-630-d: Screening for Group Work**

Christian counselors provide appropriate screening and assessment of client readiness and efficacy for participation in group counseling prior to the onset of the group process.

**1-640: Continuity of Care and Service Interruption**

Christian counselors maintain continuity of care for all clients and avoid interruptions in service to clients that are too lengthy or disruptive. Care is taken to refer clients as necessary and network with other professionals and resources to provide emergency services when faced with counselor vacations, illnesses, job changes, financial hardships, or for any other reason where services are interrupted or limited.

**1-640-a: Avoiding Abandonment and Improper Counseling Termination**

Christian counselors do not abandon clients. To the extent the counselor is able, client services are never abruptly cut-off or ended without giving appropriate notice and adequately preparing the client for termination and/or referral.

**1-640-b: Termination of Counseling**

Discussion and action toward counseling termination and/or referral is indicated when: (1) counseling goals have been achieved; (2) when the client no longer wants or does not return to counseling; (3) when the client is no longer benefiting from counseling; (4) when counseling is harmful to the client; or (5)

when the client asks for a referral. Christian counselors discuss termination and/or referral with clients, offer referral if wanted or appropriate, and facilitate termination in the client's best interest. If crisis events alter or end counseling prematurely, the counselor (if it is safe and proper) should follow-through with the client to ensure proper termination and referral.

### **ES1-700: *Collegiality in Christian Counseling – A Call to Relationship***

Christian counselors and counseling leaders recognize the value and benefit of forming and maintaining effective professional and ministry relationships with colleagues across multiple domains. These include, but are not limited to: (1) fellow mental health practitioners; (2) community and ministry leaders; (3) supervisors and supervisees; (4) mentors and mentees; (5) educators and students; (6) researchers; and (7) counseling related referral sources. Collegiality, cooperation and professional respect are encouraged, as are opportunities to work on common ground and for common purposes—to the extent that these activities do not violate one's conscious or constitute an egregious disregard for Judeo-Christian principles.

#### **1-710: *Relationships in the Professional and Ministerial Workplace***

Some Christian counselors serve in senior professional roles—as administrators, supervisors, teachers, consultants, researchers, and writers. They are recognized for their counseling expertise, their dedication to Christ, the ministry or profession to which they belong, and for their exemplary ethics. These individuals demonstrate responsible leadership for: (1) the development and maturation of the Christian counseling profession; (2) serving as active and ethical role models; (3) raising up the next generation of Christian counselors and leaders; (4) creating and preserving honorable relationships in the professional workplace, whether church, counseling agency, or other setting; (5) maintaining the utmost honesty, respect, and integrity in all employment and collegial relationships; (6) contracting relationships that balance the best interests of clients, colleagues, and organizations; (7) avoiding all actions and appearances of greed, fraud, manipulation, and self-serving action in collegial and employment relationships; and (8) disclosing and discussing all reasonably foreseen problems to colleagues before they enter into relationships.

##### ***1-710-a: Honorable Relations between Professional and Ministerial Colleagues***

Christian counselors respect professional and ministerial colleagues, both within and outside the church. Counselors strive to understand and, wherever able, respect differing approaches to counseling, and maintain collaborative and constructive relations with other professionals serving their clients—in the client's best interest.

##### ***1-710-b: Solicitation of Clients Under Another's Care***

Christian counselors do not solicit clients nor do they knowingly offer professional services to those under the care of another mental health practitioner or caregiver, except with that provider's knowledge, or when someone is in crisis. When approached by clients being served by other

counselors and caregivers, due regard will be given that relationship with a commitment to encourage client resolution with the other party before starting new professional relations.

***1-710-c: Maintaining Honor Toward Others When in Conflict***

If a counselor learns that a current client is receiving care from another mental health practitioner or caregiver, reasonable steps should be taken to inform the other party and resolve the situation. Professional relations in this case are to be maintained, as much as is possible, with a priority of Christian love and peace. Any action to challenge or confront the wrongdoing of other service providers will be done with accuracy, humility, and protecting the dignity and reputation of others. Behavior that slanders, libels, or gossips about colleagues, or uncritically accepts these things from others about other service providers, should be strictly avoided.

**1-720: Christian Counselors as Employers**

Employers of Christian counselors should provide a personnel program that honors the dignity and promotes the welfare of employees. Information should be given about the mission, goals, programs, policies, and procedures of the employing person or organization. Employers should deliver regular programs of in-service training, supervision of staff, and evaluation and review of employee work performance. Employers do not coerce, manipulate, threaten, or exploit employees or colleagues.

***1-720-a: Employers Avoid Discrimination and Promote Meritoriously***

Employers do not discriminate in hiring or promotion practices on the basis of age, race, ethnicity, gender, disability, medical status, socioeconomic status, or special relationship with employer or other staff. Employers hire, evaluate, and promote staff meritoriously—based on staff training, experience, credentials, competence, performance, responsibility, integrity, and ethical excellence.

***1-710-d: Toward Clear Role Boundaries and Work Definitions***

All professional/employment relations should be mutually understood and described in sufficient detail by work agreement. Administrators and staff should reasonably understand: (1) required work behavior, expectations, and limits; (2) lines of authority and responsibility; (3) bases for and boundaries of accountability; and (4) procedures for voicing and curing disagreements and substandard work performance. When such guidelines do not exist, employers encourage the development of sound collegial and employer-employee rules and relations.

**1-730: Christian Counselors as Employees**

Counselors accept employment only when they are qualified for the position—by education, supervised training, credentials, skill, and/or experience. They honor and advance the mission, goals, and policies of employing organizations. Since employees have duties to

both employers and clients, in the event of conflict between these duties, they strive to resolve those conflicts in ways that harmonize the best interests of both parties.

***1-730-a: Employees Serve with Integrity and Dedication***

Employees serve with dedication, diligence, and honesty, maintaining high professional and ethical standards, and do not abuse their employment positions or presume excessive demands or rights against an employer.

***1-730-b: Moving From an Agency to Private Practice***

While employed in a counseling agency or organization, and for a reasonable time after employment, employees do not take clients from an employing organization to develop a private or group practice of a competing kind. Any part-time practice while employed must be kept strictly separate from the clients and resources of the employing agency. If an independent full-time private practice is developed with intent to resign employment and take current clients, each client shall be apprised of his/her right to choose to stay with the employing organization or go with the counselor.

**1-740: Base Standards for Educators and Supervisors**

Christian counseling educators and supervisors maintain the highest levels of clinical knowledge and experience, professional skill, biblical integration and ethical excellence in all teaching and supervision responsibilities. They are knowledgeable about the latest professional and ministerial developments and responsibly transmit this knowledge to students and supervisees.

***1-740-a: Preparation for Teaching and Supervision***

Christian counseling educators and supervisors have received adequate training and experience in teaching and supervision methods before they deliver these services. Educators and supervisors are encouraged to maintain and enhance their skills through continued clinical practice, advanced training, and continuing education.

***1-740-b: Educators and Supervisors Do Not Exploit Students and Trainees***

Christian counseling educators and supervisors avoid exploitation, appearances of exploitation, and harmful dual relations with students and trainees. Students and trainees are taught by example and by explanation, with the mentor responsible to define and maintain clear, proper, and ethical professional and social boundaries.

***1-740-c: Sexual and Romantic Relations Forbidden***

Christian counseling educators and supervisors: (1) shall not engage in any form of sexual or romantic relationships with their students and trainees; (2) shall not subject them, by relationship with others, to any form of sexual exploitation, abuse, or harassment; and (3) shall not pressure them to engage in any questionable social relationships. The standards of **Section 1-130**, "Sexual Misconduct Forbidden," shall fully apply here.

**1-740-d: Dual Relationships Cautioned**

Integrity and caution shall be the hallmark of dual relationships between educator and student and between supervisors and supervisees. Those relations that harm or are likely to harm students and trainees, or that impair or are likely to distort the professional judgment of supervisors and teachers shall be avoided. The standards of **Sections 1-140-a through f**, “Dual and Multiple Relationships,” and **1-740-e-f** below shall apply here.

**1-740-e: Educators and Supervisors Do Not Provide Counseling**

Christian counseling educators and supervisors do not engage in counseling relationships with students or supervisees. Personal issues can be addressed in teaching and supervision only insofar as they adversely impact counselor training and supervision. Students and supervisees needing or wanting counseling or psychotherapy shall be referred to appropriate resources.

**1-740-f: Acknowledgement of Professional Contributions**

Christian counseling educators and supervisors fully acknowledge the contributions of students and trainees in any creative professional activity, scholarly work, research, or published material. This shall be done by co-authorship, assistance in speaking or project presentation, or other accepted forms of public acknowledgement.

**1-750: Specific Standards for Counselor Education Programs**

Christian counselor education programs are dedicated to train students as competent practitioners using current theories, techniques, biblical integration and ethical-legal knowledge. Christian counseling educators ensure that prospective students and trainees are fully informed and able to make responsible decisions about program involvement.

**1-750-a: Baseline Program Standards**

Christian counseling educators accept students on the basis of their educational background, professional promise, ethical integrity, and ability to reasonably complete the program. Program information should clearly disclose: (1) the subject matter and coursework to be covered; (2) program relationship to national accreditation and credentialing organizations; (3) the kinds and level of counseling skills necessary to learn; (4) personal and professional growth requirements and opportunities; (5) the requirements and kinds of supervised clinical practicums and field placements offered; (6) the kinds and quality of research opportunities, including thesis/dissertation possibilities and requirements; (7) the basis for student evaluation, including appeal and dismissal policies and procedures; and (8) the latest employment prospects and program placement figures.



**1-750-b: Student and Faculty Diversity**

Christian counseling educators ensure that their programs seek and attempt to retain students and faculty of a diverse background, including representation by women, minorities, and people with special needs.

**1-750-c: Student and Trainee Evaluation**

Christian counseling educators provide students and trainees with periodic and ongoing evaluation of their progress in classroom, practice, and experiential learning settings. Policies and procedures for student evaluation, remedial training requirements, and program dismissal and appeal shall be clearly stated and delivered to student-trainees. Both the method and timing of evaluations are disclosed to students in advance of program involvement.

**1-750-d: Overcoming Student Limitations**

Christian counseling educators help students overcome limitations and deficiencies that might impede performance as Christian counselors. Student-trainees will be assisted and encouraged to secure remedial help to improve substandard professional development. Honoring student due process, supervisors and educators will retain and fairly exercise their duty to dismiss from programs student-trainees who are unable to overcome substandard performance.

**1-750-e: Student-Trainee Endorsement**

Christian counseling educators and field supervisors endorse the competence of student-trainees for graduation, admission to other degree programs, employment, certification, or licensure only when they have adequate knowledge to judge that the student-trainee is qualified.

**1-750-f: Integration Study and Training**

Christian counseling educators ensure that programs include both academic and practice dimensions in counselor training and integrate biblical-theological study with learning in the bio-psycho-social sciences, however these are emphasized. Students, if not producing research, should learn to be effective research consumers.

**1-750-g: Exposure to Various Counseling Theories Encouraged**

Christian counseling educators develop programs that expose students to various accepted theoretical models for counseling and evidence-based treatments, including data on their relative efficacy, and will give students opportunities to develop their own practice orientations. If a program adheres to or emphasizes one particular theoretical model, that fact should be clearly stated in all public communications without asserting that the model is superior to all others.

**1-750-h: Teaching Law, Ethics, and the Business of Practice**

Training programs should teach students about the legal, ethical, and business dimensions of Christian counseling and incorporates the eight Core Principles described in the **Code** (*Compassion, Competence, Consent, Confidentiality, Cultural Regard, Case Management, Collegiality and Community Presence*). This includes study of these issues throughout didactic and clinical training. Students should be able to make competent ethical judgments and assess their own practice limitations, learning how to analyze and resolve ethical-legal conflicts and do consultation and referral competently.

**1-750-i: Field Placement, Practicum, and Intern Training**

Educators develop clear policies and procedures for all field experience, practicum, and intern training experiences. Roles and responsibilities are clearly delineated for student-trainees, site supervisors, and academic supervisors. Training sites shall meet required training standards, including national accreditation standards if applicable. Field supervisors shall be competent and ethical in their clinical and supervisory work. Educators do not solicit and will not accept any form of fee, service, or remuneration for the field placement of a student-trainee.

**1-750-j: Clients of Student-Trainees**

Academic and field supervisors ensure that clients of student-trainees are fully informed of trainee status, and the trainee's duty to honor all professional obligations. Trainees shall secure client permission to use, within the bounds of confidential duties, information from the counseling work to advance their counseling education.

**1-760: Specific Standards for Counselor Supervision Programs**

Christian counseling supervisors ensure that supervision programs integrate theory and practice and train counselors to respect client rights, promote client welfare, and assist clients in the acquisition of mutually agreed goals in the counseling process. Supervision programs in Christian counseling shall adhere to the **Code**, to those of other applicable professional groups, and to all applicable state and federal laws. Counseling programs shall only accept supervisees who are capable of professional practice, are fully informed about the program, and are committed to engage in counselor training following: (1) mutual agreement that the supervisee meets base standards of education and experience; (2) disclosure of the training goals, supervisory site policies and procedures, and theoretical orientations to be used; (3) understanding of program relationship to national accreditation and credentialing organizations; (4) understanding of the standards, procedures, and time of evaluations of supervisee skill, professional-ethical awareness, and clinical effectiveness; and (5) disclosure of the manner and expectations regarding remediation of professional deficiencies and substandard performance.

**1-760-a: Supervisor Training**

Supervisors have undergone specific supervision related education, coursework and training that qualifies them for the role and meets all necessary legal or regulatory requirements.

**1-760-b: Supervisors to Provide a Varied Experience**

Christian counseling supervisors provide a varied counseling experience, exposing the trainee to different client populations, clinical activities, and theoretical approaches to counseling. Supervisees should gain experience in direct counseling practice, clinical evaluation, treatment planning, record keeping, case management and consultative presentation, legal and ethical decision-making, and the development of professional identity.

**1-760-c: Supervisors Are Responsible for Services to Clients**

Christian counselor supervisors ensure that each supervisee's work with clients maintains accepted professional and ministerial standards. Supervisors do not allow supervisees to work with clients or in situations where they are not adequately prepared. Supervisors retain full professional, clinical and ethical responsibility for all supervisee cases.

**1-760-d: Supervision Evaluation and Feedback**

Christian counseling supervisors meet frequently and regularly with supervisees and give timely, informative feedback about counselor performance and effectiveness. These evaluations shall minimally require supervisor review of case notes and discussion or brief check of each client case. Evaluative feedback is given in both verbal and written forms, covering counseling content, process, and ethical-legal issues of counselor training.

**1-760-e: Supervisors Are Aware of Licensure and Certification Requirements**

Christian counseling supervisors are aware of and honor the legal, ethical, and professional requirements of supervisees who are pursuing state licensure and specialized certification standards.

**ES1-800: Community Presence in Christian Counseling – A Call to Humility**

Christian counselors are aware of the larger role they play in their communities, as well as society in general. Christian counselors further acknowledge they may live in a post-Christian, post-modern and pluralistic culture that no longer shares a common Judeo-Christian value base and therefore, are mindful to present themselves at all times as "Salt and Light" and as "God's Ambassadors." In doing so, they conduct themselves with the utmost dignity and humility, avoiding any behaviors and practices that may bring dishonor to themselves as caregivers or to the name of Christ.

### **1-810: Advertising and Public Relations**

All advertising and public communications by Christian counselors shall be done with accuracy and humility, with a primary goal of assisting clients to make informed choices about counseling services.

### **1-820: Statements in Public Communications**

Christian counselors make only factual and straightforward public communications and avoid statements that: (1) are false, inaccurate, exaggerated or sensational; (2) are likely to deceive or mislead others because it is partial or taken out of context; (3) are testimonials by current clients; (4) exploit the fears or distressing emotions of others; (5) note the inferiority or negative characteristics of another counselor; and (6) express unique or unusual helping abilities outside the range of accepted Christian counseling practices.

### **1-830: Communication of Association with the AACC and Other Groups**

Public communication of the American Association of Christian Counselors (AACC) or other professional membership should adhere to all the requirements of this section and should not express or imply that such membership confers special status, expertise, or extraordinary competence in counseling.

#### ***1-830-a: Communication about Professional Status and Credentials***

Christian counselors do not state that professional credentials—state licenses, graduate degrees, specialized training, church, professional, or governmental certifications, or any other credentials—confer greater status or power than the credentials actually represented (e.g., using the title of “Dr.” when a degree is unearned, from an unaccredited institution or not in counseling or a related field). Advanced credentials shall be communicated with accuracy and humility, adhering to the guidelines of the credential itself.

#### ***1-830-b: Communication of Unaccredited and Unrelated Credentials***

Christian counselors avoid public communication of degrees or credentials received from schools and organizations: (1) not holding or maintaining a reputable and widely-known national stature; (2) not accredited by recognized state, regional, or national authorities; (3) not substantially related to counseling, pastoral counseling, or mental health services; and (4) denoting the distinction between earned and honorary degrees. Holders of only a religious license or credential for church ministry, shall not state or imply that they are counseling professionals or that they hold a mental health practice license.

### **1-840: Communication of Work Products and Training Materials**

Christian counselors ensure that advertisements about work products and training events adhere to these ethics. They take care to avoid undue influence and respect informed consumer choice in promoting their work to anyone under their professional influence or authority.

**1-850: Testimonials**

Christian counselors do not solicit testimonial statements from current clients and from former clients, unless and only if after obtaining proper consent and ensuring there is no apparent harm or risk to the client in doing so.

**1-860: Guidelines in Public Statements by Others**

Christian counselors ensure adherence to these ethics by third parties they engage to create and make public statements about their work—employers, publishers, producers, sponsors, marketers, organizational clients, and representatives of the media. Christian counselors do not pay for or compensate the news media for news items about their work, and are responsible to correct, in timely fashion, any misinformation by third parties.

**1-870: Ethical Relationships with the State and Other Social Systems**

Christian counselors will strive to maintain ethical relations with the local and worldwide church, with the state in its various forms, with the mental health professions and associations to which they belong, with other professions and organizations, and with society-at-large.

***1-870-a: Ethical Relationships to Other Professions and Institutions***

Christian counselors recognize and respect that they are part of larger networks of Christian ministry and of mental health care. Christian counselors honor and preserve these relations, challenge value differences with respect, and build the best relations possible with all professions and institutions.

***1-870-b: Working for a Caring Church, a Just Government, and a Better Society***

Christian counselors are dedicated to build a more caring church, a more just government, and a better society in which to live. In doing so, Christian counselors: (1) honor the laws and customs of their culture, and challenge them when they threaten or abuse freedoms, dishonor God, or deny the rights of those most vulnerable and powerless; (2) strive to offer better alternatives where appropriate—model programs to govern ecclesiastical, socio-cultural, and governmental life; (3) support the cause of Christ and advocate for Christian counseling in the church, in ministries and professions, and in society; (4) work to shape laws and policies that encourage the acceptance and growth of Christian ministry generally and Christian counseling in particular; and (5) facilitate harmonious relations between church and state, to serve and advocate in the best interests of their clients.

**1-880: Writing and Publication Ethics in Christian Counseling**

Christian counselors maintain honesty and integrity in all writing and publication ventures, giving full credit to whom credit is due. Christian counselors recognize the work of others on all projects, avoid plagiarism of another's work, share credit by joint authorship or acknowledgement with others who have directly and substantially contributed to the work published, and honor all copyright and other laws applicable to the work.

***1-880-a: Submission of Manuscripts***

Christian counselors honor all publication deadlines, rules of submission of manuscripts, and rules of format when submitting manuscripts or agreeing to write invited works. Articles published whole or in major part in other works shall be done only with the acknowledgement and the permission of the previous publisher.

***1-880-b: Review of Manuscripts***

Christian counselors and editors who review manuscripts for publication shall consider the work strictly on its merits, avoiding prejudice for or against a particular author. Reviewers will diligently protect the confidential, reputational, and proprietary rights of all persons submitting materials for publication.

***1-880-c: Avoiding Ghost Writers***

Christian counselors shall resist use of ghostwriters, where the name of a prominent leader-author is attached to work substantially or wholly written by someone else. Authors give due authorship credit to anyone who has substantially contributed to the published text. Order of authorship should typically reflect the level of substantive contribution to a work.

**1-890: Ethical Standards for Christian Counseling Researchers**

Christian counseling researchers honor and respect accepted scientific standards and research protocols in all research activities. Research is ethically planned and competently conducted. Researchers do not undertake nor do they allow subordinates to initiate research activities they are not adequately trained for or prepared to conduct.

***1-890-a: Protecting Human Research Participants and Human Rights***

Researchers maintain the highest care for human participants and respect human rights in all bio-psycho-social-spiritual research activities. Researchers plan, design, conduct, and report research projects according to all applicable state and federal laws, ethical mandates, and institutional regulations regarding human participants.

***1-890-b: Special Precautions to Protect Persons***

Researchers take special precautions and observe stringent standards when: (1) a research design suggests deviation from accepted protocol; or (2) when there is any risk of pain or injury to participants, whether of a physical, psychosocial, spiritual, reputational, or financial nature. In all such cases, appropriate consultation is obtained that apprises participants of these risks and secures informed consent.

***1-890-c: Minimizing Undesirable Consequences***

Researchers reasonably anticipate and diligently work to minimize any adverse or undesirable consequences of the research on human participants. This includes a commitment to minimize any possible long-term research effects,

including those on the participants' person, family and family life, spiritual beliefs, moral values, reputation, relationships, vocation, finances, or cultural system.

***1-890-d: Informed Consent and Confidentiality in Research***

Researchers obtain informed consent from research participants using language that the participant can understand. This consent shall disclose: (1) a clear explanation of research purposes and procedures; (2) any risk of harm, injury, or discomfort that the participant might experience; (3) any benefits that the participant might experience; (4) any limitations on confidentiality; (5) a commitment to discuss all concerns of the participant about the research; and (6) instructions on the right and the way to honorably withdraw from the research project. Researchers shall honor all commitments made to research participants. Data and results shall be explained to participants in ways that are understandable and that clarify any confusion or misconceptions.

***1-890-e: Consent from Those Legally Incapable***

Researchers obtain consent from parents or a participant's legal representative when the research participants are minors or adults incapable of giving consent. Researchers inform all participants about the research in understandable language, seeking the participant's understanding and assent.

***1-890-f: Concealment and Deception in Research***

When a research design requires concealment or deception, the researcher shall apply these methods most narrowly and will inform participants as soon as possible after the procedure. The research value of a deceptive practice must clearly outweigh any reasonably foreseen consequences, especially how such deception may reflect adversely on Christ and the church. Normally, methods of deception and concealment are not used when alternative research procedures are available to accomplish the project objectives.

***1-890-g: Protecting Confidentiality and Voluntary Participation***

Researchers ensure participant confidentiality and privacy, and that subjects are participating voluntarily in the project. Any deviation from these ethics shall: (1) be necessary to the project and justifiable upon panel review; (2) shall not harm the participants; and (3) shall be disclosed to the participants, ensuring their consent.

***1-890-h: Reporting Research Results***

Researchers report research results fully, accurately, and without alteration or distortion of data. Data and conclusions are reported clearly and simply, with any problems with the research design fully discussed. Researchers do not conduct fraudulent research, distort or misrepresent data, manipulate results, or bias conclusions to conform to preferred agendas or desired outcomes.

***1-890-i: Protecting Participant Identity***

Researchers are diligent to protect the identity of research participants in all research reports. Due care will be taken to disguise participant identity in the absence of consent by participants.

***1-890-j: Reporting Challenging or Unfavorable Data***

Outcomes that challenge accepted policies, programs, donor/sponsor priorities, and prevailing theory, shall be reported and all variables known to have affected the outcomes shall be disclosed. Upon formal request, researchers shall provide sufficient original data to qualified others who wish to replicate the study.



## II. USE OF TECHNOLOGY AND TECHNOLOGY-RELATED APPLICATIONS

### ES2-000: Additional Ethical Standards in the Use of Technology

Christian counselors are aware of and knowledgeable regarding rapidly expanding technologies that have created opportunities for electronic and distance forms of care, billing services and client record storage, transfer and maintenance.

#### **2-010: Technology Orientation**

Christian counselors are well versed in current mental health related technologies and understand these application may include, but are not limited to computer use (hardware and software applications); telephones (landlines and cellular services/devices); facsimile, the Internet and World Wide Web; social media applications and outlets; online assessment, diagnostic and treatment planning applications; and other communication and electronic devices.

##### **2-010-a: Computer Systems**

Christian counselors ensure that they are up-to-date on current e-counseling and e-care technology, including but not limited to issues such as data encryption, system back-up and restore functions, password and virus protection protocols, Internet firewalls, etc.

### ES2-100: Core Ethical Standards in the Use of Technology

As with *Section I.* of this *Code*, core ethical principles inform and set appropriate standards of care whenever technology is used in the delivery of services.

#### **2-110: Compassion in Technology Applications**

Christian counselors understand the potential risks for harm to clients in the exposure to certain technologies or in having client information stored and/or transmitted electronically. Christian counselors therefore limit their practice of e-counseling/e-care only to counseling-related activities likely to be of benefit to their clients in areas such as, but not limited to intake, screening, assessment, spiritual care or direction, psychoeducation, supportive counseling, brief interventions, motivational enhancement, etc.

##### **2-110-a: Social Media**

Christian counselors do not engage with active clients through social media sites, virtual communities or social networks (e.g., Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, Instant Messenger, Instagram, etc.) and avoid dual relationships.

##### **2-110-b: Application to Addictive Behaviors**

Christian counselors do not condone, advocate for, or assist behavioral and/or process addictions by clients that utilize technology sources (e.g., online gambling, Internet pornography, etc.).

**2-110-c: Potential Benefits of E-counseling and E-care**

Christian counselors are aware that potential benefits include, but are not limited to alleviating geographic isolation; provision of services to those with physical disability and/or illness; counseling for those who might not seek traditional counseling; and counseling for clients who have greater comfort with written expression.

**2-110-d: Potential Limitations of E-counseling and E-care**

Christian counselors are aware that potential limitations include, but are not limited to concerns with confidentiality; challenges to developing and maintaining the therapeutic alliance; the lack of nonverbal communication information; clarifying and resolving practice and licensure jurisdiction issues; provision of emergency services; the relative lack of efficacy studies; and the lack of ethical guidance.

**2-110-e: Accountability and Availability**

Christian counselors enhance client accountability through availability and responsiveness to clients between appointments, when emergencies arise, and during the termination process.

**2-120: Competence in Technology Applications**

Christian counselors who use electronic means of communication in the provision of counseling services clearly operate within the bounds of competence to do so.

**2-120-a: Scope of Practice**

Christian counselors utilize available technology only if sufficient education, knowledge, training, experience and skills can be demonstrated. Christian counselors are accountable for being adequately trained and current in their knowledge of e-counseling technologies and techniques.

**2-120-b: Supervision and Consultation**

Christian counselors seek appropriate supervision, consultation and oversight in the provision of e-counseling services when their education, training, and experience are inadequate.

**2-120-c: Practice Standards**

Christian counselors understand that the emphasis in training, knowledge, and experience in e-counseling and e-care continues to reflect traditional face-to-face clinical standards.

**2-120-d: Legal, Statutory and Regulatory Issues**

Christian counselors are informed of and apply legal, statutory and regulatory issues related to: (1) jurisdiction for both counselor and client location regarding the delivery of services across state or national lines; (2) informed consent for electronic services; (3) applicable licensure requirements for multistate services; (4) any relevant third party payer protocols; and (5) use and maintenance of

electronic client records (e.g., compliance with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act [HIPAA]).

### **2-130: Consent in Technology Applications**

Christian counselors fully inform potential and actual clients about the nature, quality, extent, and types of electronic services available. Types of services to discuss as part of the informed consent process include applications that utilize landline and cell phones, asynchronous email, text messaging, synchronous chat, and videoconferencing.

#### ***2-130-a: Benefits and Limitations***

Christian counselors thoroughly discuss the benefits and limitations of e-counseling and e-care, coping with potential misunderstandings due to lack of visual/auditory cues, the role ambiguity often present in electronic means of counseling, issues related to the security and privacy of information, matters of jurisdiction relevant to both counselor and client, and the reality that electronic counseling is not necessarily a substitute or replacement for face-to-face counseling, but is, instead, a unique form and process of counseling in its own right.

#### ***2-130-b: Access to Counselor and Technology***

Christian counselors should fully inform clients about the degree and means of access to counseling services and to technology assistance when using electronic forms of counseling. This includes informing clients of alternative means of service provision in the event that technology fails or changes.

#### ***2-130-c: Client Capacity***

Christian counselors assess a client's capacity to understand, utilize and benefit from e-counseling and e-care applications and whether these approaches are appropriate to the delivery of effective care.

#### ***2-130-d: Standard Operating Procedures***

As in face-to-face counseling, standard procedures for how the Christian counselor's practice operates should be discussed with clients. These include how to access services, billing protocols, records maintenance and therapist ownership, handling emergencies, limitations of confidentiality, and the provision of remote and local backup in the case of counselor unavailability.

### **2-140: Confidentiality in Technology Applications**

Christian counselors utilize technology systems, data storage and transfer, and telecommunication records that incorporate the use of secure Internet sites and encryption coding, as well as adhere to the following:

#### ***2-140-a: Limits of Confidentiality***

Christian counselors are aware that electronic data can be compromised and subject to Internet hacking and that the same standards defined in **Section 1-430** are applicable to e-counseling and e-care.

**2-140-b: *Maintaining Privacy in Electronic Databases***

Christian counselors take special precautions to protect client privacy rights with records stored and transferred by electronic means. This requires, at minimum, use of password entry into all electronic client files and/or coded files that do not use client names or easy identifiers, as well as abiding by any state and federal privacy laws. Client information transferred electronically—facsimile, email, Internet or other computerized network transfer—shall be done only after the counselor determines that the process of transmission and reception of data is reasonably protected from interception and unauthorized disclosures.

**2-150: *Cultural Regard in Technology Applications***

Christian counselors demonstrate high levels of cultural competence in the delivery of e-counseling and e-care, including sensitive responsiveness to issues related to time zone differences, local customs of clients in different geographic regions, and cultural and language differences.

**2-160: *Case Management in Technology Applications***

As with traditional face-to-face counseling practices, Christian counselors who provide e-counseling and e-care must engage in thorough intake, screening, and assessment processes. While this principle is important for effective counseling generally, it is especially important for e-counseling due to the possible need for referral when certain client issues are present.

**2-160-a: *Referral for E-counseling and E-care***

Christian counselors make referral to more traditional counseling settings as clinically indicated in certain cases (e.g., sexual abuse, domestic and other violence, eating disorders, severe substance abuse or dependence, thought disorders, suicidal/homicidal ideation, etc.).

**2-160-b: *Referral Source List***

Christian counselors proactively and intentionally develop appropriate and varied referral and community resources in any geographic area in which they provide e-counseling and e-care.

**2-170: *Collegiality in Technology Applications***

Christian counselors endeavor to represent themselves with dignity and humility in all forms of electronic communication and are mindful of their professional and leadership status when utilizing various forms of social media.

**2-180: *Community Presence in Technology Applications***

Christian counselors accurately portray their education, knowledge, training and experience in providing e-counseling and e-care to the public. Counselors also provide thorough and accurate information on web sites and other forms of electronic communication that includes, but is not limited to the counselor's qualifications, practice credentials, practice locations, and services provided.

### III. ADDITIONAL ETHICAL STANDARDS FOR LICENSED AND PROFESSIONAL CHRISTIAN COUNSELORS

#### ES3-000: Fees, Client Billing and Financial Relationships

##### **3-010: Setting Fees**

Professional Christian counselors set fees for services that are fair, customary and reasonable, according to the services contracted and time performed, and with due regard for the client's ability to pay. Counselors avoid all deception, confusion, and misrepresentation about fees and in their financial relationships with clients and client systems.

##### ***3-010-a: Disclosure of Fees and Payment History***

Fee schedules and rules for payment shall be outlined clearly for client review at the outset of counseling. Moreover, agreement about fees and payment schedules will be made as early as possible in the course of professional relations. Christian counselors provide clients or their representatives with a full and accurate account of previous and current charges upon request.

##### ***3-010-b: Sliding Fee Scales Encouraged***

Christian counselors are free, within the bounds of biblical, professional, and community standards, to set their own fees. Clinicians are encouraged, however, to utilize sliding fee schedules, scaled to a client's ability to pay, and other reduced payment methods to increase counseling accessibility to those of lesser financial means. These adjustments are also reflected in the fee structure used for third-party billing.

##### ***3-010-c: Pro Bono Work***

Christian counselors are encouraged, beyond their fee schedule, to make a portion of their time and services available without cost or at a greatly reduced fee to those unable to pay.

##### ***3-010-d: Avoiding Self-serving Financial Relations***

Christian counselors avoid financial practices that result or appear to result in poor stewardship and self-serving outcomes. Counselors do not select clients or prolong therapy based on their ability to pay high fees, nor do they quickly terminate counseling with low-fee clients. When making referrals, counselors do not divide fees with other professionals nor accept or give anything of value for making the referral. Christian counselors also do not exaggerate problems nor refer exclusively for specialized services to get clients into special programs or institutions in which they have a proprietary interest.

##### ***3-010-e: Financial Integrity with Insurance and Third-party Payers***

Christian counselors maintain financial integrity with client insurers and other third-party payers. Christian counselors do not charge third-party payers for services not rendered, nor for missed or cancelled appointments, unless specially authorized to do so. They do not distort or change diagnoses to fit restricted

reimbursement categories. Any special benefits or reductions in client fees are typically extended in full to third-party payers.

## **ES3-100: Third-party Payers and Managed Care Entities**

### **3-110: Problems with Managed Care**

Christian counselors acknowledge that the managed care system has expanded its influence in health and mental health service delivery, including problems in client-provider-managed care relations such as breach of confidentiality, client abandonment, failure to maintain continuity of care, incompetent care, restriction of therapist choice and access, and the infliction of emotional distress.

#### ***3-110-a: Responsible Action***

Christian counselors work to correct any unethical entanglement and unintended client harm due to managed care relations, including, but not limited to: (1) diligence in protecting client confidences in relations with insurance and third party payers, employee assistance programs, and managed care groups; (2) exercising caution regarding demands for confidential client information that exceed the need for validation of services rendered or continued care; (3). Not disclosing or submitting session notes and details of client admissions solely on demand of third-party payers; and (4) narrowly disclosing information that the client has given written authorization only after discussion with the client and with assurance that the client understands the full implications of authorizations signed or is contemplating to sign.

## **ES3-200: Testing, Assessment and Clinical Evaluation**

### **3-210: General Parameters**

Christian counselors conduct clinical evaluations only in the context of professional relations, in the best interests of clients, and with the proper training and supervision. Christian counselors avoid: (1) incompetent and inaccurate evaluations; (2) clinically unnecessary and excessively expensive testing; and (3) unauthorized practice of testing and evaluation that is the province of another clinical or counseling discipline. Referral and consultation are used when evaluation is desired or necessary beyond the competence and/or role of the counselor.

#### ***3-210-a: Use of Appropriate Assessments***

Christian counselors use tests and assessment techniques that are appropriate to the needs, resources, capabilities, and understanding of the client. They select appropriate assessment instruments for the purpose of answering any referral questions and consider measurement validity, reliability and psychometric limitations. Christian counselors apply tests skillfully, administer tests properly and safely and substantiate findings with knowledge of the reliability, validity, outcome results, and limits of the tests used. They avoid both the misuse of testing procedures and the creation of confusion or misunderstanding by clients about testing purposes, procedures, and findings.

**3-210-b: Reporting and Interpreting Assessment Results**

Christian counselors report testing results in a fair, understandable, and objective manner. Counselors avoid undue testing bias and honor the limits of test results, ensuring verifiable means to substantiate conclusions and recommendations. They recognize the limits of test interpretation, and avoid exaggeration and absolute statements about the certainty of client diagnoses, behavior predictions, clinical judgments, and recommendations. Due regard is given to the unique history, values, family dynamics, sociocultural influences, economic realities, and spiritual maturity of the client. Counselors also state any and all reservations about the validity of test results and present reports and recommendations in tentative language and with alternative possibilities.

## IV. ADDITIONAL ETHICAL STANDARDS FOR PASTORAL AND LAY CHRISTIAN COUNSELORS

### ES4-000: Definitions and Roles of Pastors and Pastoral Counselors

#### **4-010: The Pastor and Pastoral Counselor – Ordained Ministers of the Gospel**

Pastors and pastoral counselors have central roles in the counseling and care ministry of the church. They are normally ordained ministers, recognized by a reputable church denomination as called of God, set apart for special church ministry, and have fulfilled the education and preparatory tasks the church and/or denominational authority requires for that ministry.

##### ***4-010-a: The Specialized Pastoral Counselor***

Pastoral counselors and psychotherapists have received advanced training in counseling and psychotherapy and typically counsel in a church or a specialized counseling setting. Pastoral counselors often have advanced degrees in counseling, have undergone counseling practicum training under supervision, and may be certified by national associations as a pastoral counselor or pastoral psychotherapist.

#### **4-020: Rules of Ethics Code Application and Exemption**

Pastors and unlicensed pastoral counselors—by law and/or regulation—are not typically required or held to the same standard of professional conduct as licensed practitioners. Nevertheless, they recognize possible moral and/or ethical imperatives that may still exist as part of a Judeo-Christian ethic.

##### ***4-020-a: Incorporating and Honoring the Code***

Pastors and pastoral counselors are encouraged to incorporate and honor this **Code** in its entirety, except for those code sections: (1) not applicable due to their clinical professional nature; or (2) because a higher duty to church or ministry rules require a narrow exemption from this Code.

#### **4-030: The Call of Christian Counseling to Gospel Fidelity**

Pastors and pastoral counselors have a special call as intermediaries between Christian counseling and the church. In their pastoral role, they can: (1) challenge Christian counselors to hold faith to the Gospel and to apply counseling ministry to the mission and work of the church; (2) mediate, explain, and refer parishioners to Christian counselors; (3) encourage involvement for those who need help; and (4) communicate and explain the guidelines of the **Code** so that parishioners can better judge the value and safety of the Christian counseling work.

#### **4-040: Accepting Fees or Communicating False Roles**

Pastors and pastoral counselors typically should not seek or accept personal fees or other remuneration for direct ministry-based counseling and people helping services (i.e., individual, couple, family, or group counseling). They do not state or allow helpees to believe they are licensed or professional counselors. Some pastoral counselors may receive a salary as a church or ministry employee, perform certain ceremonial or professional functions associated



with their roles (e.g., weddings, funerals, seminars, training, etc.) or through “suggested donations” made to a non-profit ministry. However, this income should not be confused with a fee for service arrangement for direct counseling activities.

#### **4-050: Aiding and Abetting Unauthorized Practice**

Pastors and pastoral counselors do not aid and abet the practice of unlicensed, untrained, unqualified, or unethical counseling or lay helping by anyone. In counseling situations requiring help clearly beyond the scope, training, experience, or license required of the helper, appropriate consultation and/or referral should be pursued.

### **ES4-100: Definitions and Roles of Lay Caregivers and Non-ordained Ministers**

#### **4-110: The Lay Caregiver and Non-ordained Ministers**

Lay caregivers and non-ordained ministers have a significant role in the counseling and care ministry of the church. They are not professional clinicians nor ordained ministers, but may work as salaried staff or as volunteers in designated helping roles. These caregivers often function in one-to-one crisis care and helping roles and are increasingly involved in developing and leading the many small support and recovery group ministries of the contemporary church.

#### **4-120: Rules of Ethics Code Application and Exemption**

Lay caregivers and non-ordained ministers—by law and/or regulation—are not typically required or held to the same standard of professional conduct as licensed practitioners. Nevertheless, they recognize possible moral and/or ethical imperatives that may still exist as part of a Judeo-Christian ethic.

##### ***4-120-a: Incorporating and Honoring the Code***

Lay caregivers and non-ordained ministers are encouraged to incorporate and honor this **Code** in its entirety, except for those code sections: (1) not applicable due to their clinical professional nature; or (2) because a higher duty to church or ministry rules require a narrow exemption from this Code.

#### **4-130: Lay Caregivers Under Supervision of the Church**

Lay caregivers minister only under the supervision of the church, a Christian counselor or a Christian counseling organization. They seek out and secure supervision and spiritual-ethical covering by pastors and professional clinicians. Independent, unsupervised, and solo practice or ministry by lay and unlicensed caregivers and non-ordained staff should be avoided due to the excessive risk for legal, ethical, spiritual, interpersonal, and ecclesiastical problems.

#### **4-140: Accepting Fees or Communicating False Roles**

Lay caregivers typically should not seek or accept personal fees or other remuneration for ministry-based counseling and people helping services (i.e., individual, couple, family, or group counseling). They do not state or allow helpes to believe they are licensed, professional or trained pastoral counselors. Some lay or non-ordained caregivers may receive a salary as a church or ministry employee, perform certain professional functions associated with their roles

(e.g., seminars, training, etc.) or through “suggested donations” made to a non-profit ministry. However, this income should not be confused with a fee for service arrangement for direct counseling activities.

**4-150: Aiding and Abetting Unauthorized Practice**

Lay caregivers and non-ordained ministers do not aid and abet the practice of unlicensed, untrained, unqualified, or unethical counseling or lay helping by anyone. In counseling situations requiring help clearly beyond the scope, training, experience, or license required of the helper, appropriate consultation and/or referral should be pursued.

## V. STANDARDS FOR RESOLVING ETHICAL-LEGAL CONFLICTS

### ES5-000: Base Standards for Ethical Conflict Resolution

#### 5-010: Base Rules for Resolving Ethical-Legal Conflicts

Christian counselors acknowledge there are sometimes conflicting responsibilities to clients, to colleagues and employing organizations, to professional ethics, to the law, and to Christ. If a higher obligation to Christ or to the client's best interest suggests or requires action against legal, ethical, or organizational rules, they will act peaceably and humbly in its outworking, and in a way that honors God and their role as Christian counselors.

#### 5-020: Attempting First to Harmonize Conflicting Interests

When caught between legal-ethical demands and the way of Christ or the best interests of the client, Christian counselors first attempt to harmonize biblical, clinical, legal, ethical, and client interests, if possible. Christian counselors secure proper consultation and take action that defines and offers a better and harmonious standard of professional conduct.

#### 5-030: When Conflicts Cannot Be Harmonized

Christian counselors' fidelity to Christ sometimes calls them to respectfully decline adherence to non-Christian values and behavior. When such conflicts cannot be harmonized, some Christian counselors may choose to stand firm or act on Christian principle against the law of the state, the ethics of one's profession, or the rules of one's employing organization.

##### *5-030-a: Responsible Action*

Such action should be: (1) defensible biblically and ethically; (2) according to the client's best interest; (3) done without self-seeking purposes; (4) done with sober consideration after consulting with informed colleagues and Christian counseling leaders; and (5) done with a willingness to face any adverse consequences. Such action must never be done to hide wrongdoing or to justify an obscure or self-promoting position.

##### *5-030-b: Resolution Parameters*

The AACC suggests that priority values in the resolution of these conflicts be: (1) integrity to Christ and the revelation of Scripture; (b) in the client's best interests; and (c) fulfilling one's legal, ethical, and organizational obligations in a way that is least harmful to Christ or to a client's interest.

### ES5-100: Resolving Conflicts with Employers and Colleagues

#### 5-110: Ethical and Value Differences with Employers and Colleagues

If values and other differences with employers or colleagues become a source of conflict or influence client injustice, Christian counselors take appropriate action to resolve these problems in a way that honors Christ while also serving the client's best interest.

### **5-120: Christian Counselors Working in Public Agencies**

Christian counselors working in public agencies will respect fair and circumspect rules against client evangelism or communicating Christian values without client consent. However, they may also challenge unjust prohibitions against the free expression of beliefs, grounded in the biblical and Constitutional right to religious freedom. These legitimate expressions of Christian beliefs include, but are not limited to: (1) serving Christian clients from a Judeo-Christian value base; (2) sharing Christian values as a legitimate part of counselor self-disclosure; (3) responding to spiritual needs expressed by clients from a Christian frame of reference; and (4) displaying Christian symbols and literature in an office or place of work.

### **5-130: Conflict Resolution Process with Employers and Colleagues**

Resolution of conflicts with employers or colleagues honor the following process: (1) first attempt direct negotiations; (2) then proceed to mediation; and (3) then arbitration and/or binding arbitration. Litigation (4), when considered at all, shall be only as a last resort and only in cases of gross injustice where the offending party refuses or disdains all reasonable offers of non-litigated dispute resolution.

### **5-140: Law and Ethics Violations by Employers and Colleagues**

Christian counselors with credible knowledge of legal or ethical violations by employers and colleagues shall take appropriate action to cure this problem, in the best interests of clients, and according to the requirements of applicable law, ethics and statutory or regulatory requirements. Curative action might include: (1) confidential consultations (usually the first step); (2) direct communications with the violator; (3) report to one's own or the violator's supervisor; (4) assisting violated clients to take action; (5) report/complaint to the appropriate state agency or professional association; or (6) any other action appropriate to the matter.

## **ES5-200: Resolving Professional and Organizational Conflicts**

### **5-210: The Higher Ethics of being a Christ Follower**

Christian counselors are bound to honor the ethics and rules of one's profession, church, or employing organization in every way possible. However, when these ethics and rules are in direct opposition to God, and if unable to harmonize the mandates of Scripture with these rules, Christian counselors support their right to elect nonadherence to those ethics and rules that offend the way of Christ.

### **5-220: Acting First to Resolve Conflict with Church or Profession**

Christian counselors always first seek peaceable and biblically-defensible resolution of disputes. After proper consultation with colleagues and Christian counseling leaders, they define and advocate for a new ethical standard as an alternative to the offensive rule—one that honors Christ, protects the client's interest, and attempts to fulfill the policy behind the ethical rule.

### **5-230: When Ethical Harmony Is Not Reached**

If ethical harmony is not possible, and after all attempts at resolution have been exhausted, Christian counselors may elect to violate the offending rule for the sake of Christ or the client. The violative action should be defensible biblically, logically, and clinically and, if possible, in accordance with the ethics intent. Christian counselors should: (1) define the rule that cannot be respected in the narrowest form possible; (2) declare to honor all other ethical mandates; (3) consult with other colleagues; (4) soberly count the cost of such action; and (5) be prepared to face any consequences for breach of ethics or rules.

## **ES5-300: Resolving Conflicts with the State and Its Laws**

### **5-310 The Higher Law of Being a Christ Follower**

Christian counselors are bound to honor the law in every way possible. However, when the law is in direct opposition to God, and if unable to harmonize the mandates of Scripture and the law, counselors support their right to elect nonadherence to those laws that offend the way of Christ.

### **5-320: Acting First to Resolve Legal Conflict**

Christian counselors always seek first the peaceable and biblically-defensible resolution of disputes with the state and its laws. After proper consultation, including consulting with an attorney and with Christian counseling colleagues and leaders, Christian counselors attempt to define and advocate for a new and harmonious legal standard as an alternative to the law-offending rule at issue—one that honors Christ, protects the client's best interest, and shows how the action of the new rule fulfills the intent or policy behind the law.

### **5-330: When Legal Harmony Is Not Reached**

If harmony is not possible with the state and its laws, and after all attempts to resolve the issue have been exhausted, Christian counselors may elect action that violates the law for the sake of Christ or the client. The violative action should be defensible biblically, logically, clinically and, if possible, by the law's intent or policy. Christian counselors should: (1) define the law that cannot be respected in the narrowest form possible; (2) declare to honor all other legal mandates; (3) consult with other colleagues, including lawyers; (4) soberly count the cost of such action, and (5) be prepared to face any consequences that may be imposed for violation of the law.

## VI. PROCEDURAL RULES

In order to fulfill its professional and ethical mission, the AACC adopts these procedural rules for accurate assessment and the fair hearing and resolution of ethical complaints against its duly credentialed members through the International Board of Christian Care (IBCC) and/or the AACC Christian Care Network (CCN). These rules purpose to: (1) show society, the church, related professions, and the multitude of clients and parishioners who are provided with care, that *the AACC has a serious commitment to live by and enforce these ethics*; and (2) show stakeholders that *the AACC is serious about protecting their ministries and reputations by honoring their right to justice and due process*. In any action under these rules, the AACC shall consider this **Ethics Code**, its corporate bylaws, and the mandates of Scripture in the resolution of any problems in rule interpretation.

### **PR6-000: Authority, Jurisdiction and Operation of the AACC Law & Ethics Committee (LEC)**

#### **6-010: Mission, Authority and Jurisdiction of the LEC**

##### ***6-010-a: LEC Mission***

The mission of the AACC Law and Ethics Committee is to educate, encourage, and help maintain the highest levels of ethical conduct, practice excellence, and ministerial integrity among Christian counselors. This includes protecting clients and society-at-large from unethical conduct, educating and advocating this **Code** to the AACC and the larger church and society, and to aid the AACC in its mission to bring unity and excellence to the Christian counseling field.

##### ***6-010-b: LEC Authority***

The LEC or any committee it designates is authorized as follows: (1) to formulate and promulgate ethical standards for Christian counseling that are to be available to AACC members, the CCN and IBCC Credential Holders particularly, and to the church and larger society more generally; (2) to investigate, hear, and act to justly resolve ethical complaints; (3) to have authority to adopt rules and procedures, as needed, to govern the conduct of LEC and any person or matter within its jurisdiction; and (4) to have authority to publish and publicly communicate its official actions, including disciplinary actions toward its members.

##### ***6-010-c: LEC Jurisdiction***

The LEC has personal jurisdiction with any IBCC Credential Holder and any member in the CCN, as well as subject matter jurisdiction regarding the ethical behavior and rules defined in this **Code**. The LEC may, by the AACC's direction, address any issue or matter that affects the Association's integrity and ethical achievement of its mission.

## **PR6-100: General Orientation to Ethical Enforcement**

### **6-110: Attitude and Action Toward Ethical Complaints**

Neither the LEC nor any IBCC Credential Holder nor CCN member shall refuse to hear nor uncritically accept a complaint against another member. Any LEC member, IBCC Credential Holder or CCN member hearing a complaint individually shall take whatever action deemed appropriate to address and resolve the matter. When appropriate and feasible, this shall be done by direct consultation with violators or by working through local or regional collegial networks, taking care to honor the confidential and reputational rights of all those concerned in the matter.

#### ***6-110-a: Reporting Violations to LEC***

If resolution attempts were unsuccessful by the AACC member, CCN member or IBCC Credential Holder, or if the matter is more serious, or cannot be resolved by personal intervention, the individual may direct the complainant to the LEC.

#### ***6-110-b: Respecting Fundamental Rights of All Parties Involved***

When the LEC must act against an IBCC Credential Holder or CCN member, it shall take care to maintain respect for the person's rights and reputation. The entire membership shall support the LEC in this process, both to honor its ruling and to check and warn it when it might begin to stray from these values and purposes. Whenever possible, the LEC shall balance and protect the multiple interests of client and community protection, Association integrity, and the legal and ethical rights and professional reputations of both complainants and complainees.

#### ***6-110-c: LEC Duties Toward the Complainant***

Toward the complainant, the LEC will honor his or her concerns, invite a full hearing of the complaint if needed, will seek to separate fact from rumor, and will take appropriate action to resolve the matter to the best of its ability to honor Christ and the complainant.

#### ***6-110-d: LEC Duties Toward the Complaine***

Toward the complaine, the LEC will honor his or her right to be heard and defend against allegations, will protect the complaine's professional reputation and due process rights, will invite and give reasonable time to fairly respond to a complaint, and will narrow the issue(s) to that which is reasonably beyond dispute. The LEC will always pursue the most just result, avoiding the extremes of minimized justice or excessive sanction.

## **PR6-200: Credential Holder, CCN Member, and AACC Member Response to LEC Action**

### **6-210: Commitment to Cooperate with Ethics Process**

IBCC Credential Holders, CCN members and AACC members assist the Association to honor and help enforce these ethical standards and rules. All IBCC Credential Holders and CCN members shall cooperate fully and in a timely way with the LEC and the entire ethics mission to assure the best achievement of the core commitment to excellence and unity in Christian counseling.

#### ***6-210-a: Failure to Cooperate with Ethics Process***

Failure to cooperate with the LEC or the ethics process in any manner shall not stop the LEC from executing its duty. Failure to cooperate is itself a **Code** violation and can result in ethical sanction.

## **PR6-300: Procedures for the Adjudication of Complaints Against IBCC Credential Holders and CCN Members**

### **6-310: General Rules of LEC Operation**

#### ***6-310-a: Making and Amending Rules and Procedures***

The LEC may adopt and amend rules and procedures to govern the conduct of any matter within its jurisdiction. Any new or amended rule must be approved by a two-thirds vote of the Committee and also be ratified by a majority of the AACC Executive Board. No new or amended rule shall adversely affect the rights of an IBCC Credential Holder or CCN member under investigation by the LEC at the time of the rules adoption.

#### ***6-310-b: Choice of Procedures and Action***

Except as otherwise denoted in these ethics and rules, the LEC reserves the right to choose the appropriate procedures to resolve matters justly and efficiently, balancing the interests of the general public, affected clients, the AACC, the IBCC, the CCN and its members.

### **6-320: LEC Meetings and Officers**

#### ***6-320-a: Frequency of Meeting and Quorum***

The LEC shall meet at regular intervals, as needed. Conference calls can substitute for face-to-face meetings. A quorum shall consist of the majority of LEC members and official actions may be authorized by the LEC when its members respond in person, by phone, by fax, by letter, or any other agreed means of action.



**6-320-b: Selection of Officers and Subcommittees**

Officers and Subcommittees may be appointed by the LEC and/or AACC executive leadership action to serve terms and engage issues as are agreed among LEC members and AACC executive leadership.

**6-320-c: Duties of the Chairperson and the Vice-chair**

The Chairperson of the LEC is responsible for the executive leadership of the Committee. He or she shall direct, in person or through appropriate designees, the work and process of the LEC in all its responsibilities to the AACC. The Vice-chair shall be empowered to perform all the duties of Chair when s/he is not able to perform them, and shall perform other duties as are assigned by the Chair.

**6-320-d: Majority Rule**

Unless otherwise directed by these rules, all official actions of the LEC shall be authorized by a majority vote of its members present, or by any other authorized means of voting.

**6-320-e: Open vs. Confidential LEC Process**

LEC meetings and activities shall be either open to the AACC membership, CCN members and IBCC Credential Holders or closed and confidential, with access in closed meetings given only to those designated parties with an interest in the particular matter. Closed meetings shall be done in ethical adjudications where the privacy interests of AACC members, CCN members and IBCC Credential Holders or others deserve confidential process. All other LEC meetings may be open to any interested member at the discretion of the LEC.

**6-320-f: Access to Closed Meetings**

The LEC and the AACC reserve the right to invite AACC executives or other desired personnel, experts, or consultants into confidential meetings, as may be necessary or desired to assist the adjudicatory process.

**6-320-g: Open vs. Confidential Records**

Except to inform the AACC membership, CCN members or IBCC Credential Holders of final official disposition of a formal case and to assist the information/disclosure needs of the Association and the parties to the matter, all information and records of ethical adjudication against a member shall be held in confidence by the LEC. This may be further accepted in cases where client-parishioner risk or risk to the public welfare is judged by the LEC to be significant.

**6-330: Ethical Complaint Procedures**

**6-330-a: Reception of a Complaint.**

Proceedings against an IBCC Credential Holder or CCN member are initiated by the reception of a formal complaint, in verbal and written form, by the LEC. Complaints may be received from members or nonmembers of the AACC, the CCN or the IBCC.

**6-330-b: LEC (Sua Sponte) Action**

The LEC may initiate proceedings on its own when it has sufficient evidence to do so, or as a response against an IBCC Credential Holder or CCN member who files a frivolous complaint, or if the complainant has a primary intention to willfully or maliciously harm another.

**6-330-c: Procedure for Making a Complaint**

AACC members, CCN members and IBCC Credential Holders shall contact the LEC or Association offices to present their complaint. The complaint should be outlined in writing, in no more than one page initially, and note both the alleged violation of AACC ethics or rules, and any direct and other evidence the complainant has to support it.

**6-330-d: Unacceptable Complaints**

The LEC will not initiate proceedings in situations of anonymous complaints, complaints against nonmembers, non-CCN members, or non-IBCC Credential Holders, or in counter complaints. In the latter case, the LEC may consider whether a counter complaint has cause to proceed further only after the initial complaint is fully resolved.

**6-330-e: Multiple Complaints**

When numerous complaints against an IBCC Credential Holder or CCN member are received simultaneously, the LEC may elect to combine them into one action or deal with them separately. When consecutive complaints are heard, the LEC may elect to consider the disposition of any previous case against the IBCC Credential Holder or CCN member in its resolution of a current complaint.

**6-330-f: Warning Against Frivolous and Vindictive Complaints**

AACC members, CCN members and IBCC Credential Holders shall not make frivolous reports, without substantiation, or that are primarily motivated by anger or vindictiveness, or with an intent to harm the alleged violator. The primary motivations in reporting ethical misconduct are to protect clients and parishioners, to maintain the honor of Christ and the church, the honor of our professions, and to assist the cure and restoration of violators to ethical and effective ministry, if possible.

**6-340: Complaint Assessment and Initial Action by the LEC**

**6-340-a: Inability to Take Further Action**

Failure of any one of the following standards (**6-340-b, c & d**) shall render the LEC unable to take further action against an IBCC Credential Holder or CCN member. If it is dismissed, the LEC shall so rule, the complainant notified of the LEC's decision, and the matter closed.

**6-340-b: Lack of Jurisdiction**

The LEC shall first determine whether it has jurisdiction. Personal jurisdiction is met if the complaint is directed toward an IBCC Credential Holder or CCN member in good standing. Subject matter jurisdiction is met when the alleged wrongdoing of the individual in question, acting in a professional-ministerial capacity, intersects the standards of this code.

**6-340-c: Insufficient Information to Act Further**

The LEC shall then determine whether it has sufficient information to take further action. There must be: (a) a clear violation of the Association's ethics, policies, or procedural rules; and (b) the information supporting the violation must be of sufficient weight and quality that, in the LEC's judgment, it cannot be dismissed.

**6-340-d: Failure of Procedure or Time Limits**

Finally, the LEC shall determine that proper procedures and time limits have been honored in the complaint process, as defined by this **Code**.

**6-350: Cause for Further Action**

If, in the LEC's judgment, the standards of filing a complaint are satisfied, then it shall rule that cause for further action exists. It shall then review and decide the steps necessary to seek the most just, restorative, and least costly resolution. It shall gather the most reputable evidence that applies to the matter at hand, rejecting evidence that is speculative, incredible, and unsupportable.

**6-350-a: LEC May Seek Informal Resolution of the Matter**

The LEC may empower the Chair or a committee to address the matter directly with the complainee to seek a just resolution. The intervener may then recommend to the LEC whether or not to close the matter at this stage and the reasons for its recommendation, and LEC may elect whether or not to accept the recommendation of the committee or pursue further action.

**6-360: Initial Notification to Complainee**

If informal resolution is not elected or does not work, the violations and evidence supporting it shall be simply and clearly outlined in a query letter signed by the Chair and Vice-chair of the LEC. This letter and a copy of the applicable ethics and rules shall be delivered to the complainee by mail, electronic notification or in person by the LEC.

**6-360-a: Requests for Additional Information**

The LEC may request additional information from the complainant, the complainee, or any appropriate source to assist resolution of the matter.

**6-360-b: Time for and Response from Complainee—Complaint Stage**

Within 30 days of reception of the letter, the complainee may respond in writing to the allegations. The complainee must respond personally and not through a third-party. The LEC Chairman may waive or adjust the time requirement if good cause is shown.

### **6-370: Case Closure for Insufficient Evidence**

If it becomes clear that insufficient or competing evidence raises substantial doubt about the occurrence of ethical violation, then the LEC will close the case. If this action is taken, the LEC shall promptly notify both complainant and complainee of its decision and reasoning.

#### ***6-370-a: Reopening a Closed Case***

A case closed for insufficient evidence may be reopened upon the receipt of new evidence significant enough to justify reopening the matter within a reasonable time from the reception of the original complaint.

#### ***6-370-b: Alternative/Supplementary Action May Be Recommended***

The LEC reserves the right, whether a case is closed or stays open, to recommend alternative or supplementary action—referral to any relevant professional association, denomination, state licensure board, administrative agency, or any other appropriate body to hear the complaint.

### **6-380: Case Resolution by Mutual Agreement**

The LEC may pursue case closure through a pre-formal agreement with the complainee that is restorative and corrective. By discussion, prayer, reasoning together, and negotiation, the LEC will seek to resolve the matter in a way that serves the best interests of the AACC, the CCN and its IBCC Credential Holders.

#### ***6-380-a: Structure of Agreement***

Such agreement will usually clarify misunderstandings, direct corrective action, establish a time-frame for renewal of ethical relations and proper trust, define a fair assessment of these objectives, or any combination of these things. This agreement shall be signed by the LEC Chair and the complainee and shall be disclosed to the complainant, the complainee, and anyone else agreed to by the signatories.

### **6-390: Cause for Formal Case Review**

If the matter cannot be closed or resolved as defined above and in the judgment of the LEC, sufficient cause exists to pursue the matter further, the LEC shall then decide that “cause for formal case review” exists, so shall rule, will notify the applicable parties, and then move prayerfully to the next level of adjudication.

## **PR6-400: Formal Case Review Procedures**

### **6-410: Selection and Operation of Case Review Subcommittee**

The LEC shall form a three-person subcommittee (sub-com), chaired by the Chair or Vice-chair, to hear and resolve a formal ethics complaint. This subcommittee shall be given sufficient authority and the necessary resources to resolve the matter, consistent with these ethics and rules, in a just and timely manner. Subcommittee recommendations shall be forwarded to and accepted by the LEC when two votes of the subcommittee exist.

**6-410-a: Presentation of a Charge Letter**

The complainee shall receive a formal charge letter from the LEC, detailing the alleged wrongdoing, the specific code sections implicated, and the supporting evidence. The letter shall instruct the complainee as to the manner and time for response to allegations. Any supporting materials that the LEC will use to assist its review shall be copied and sent with the letter.

**6-410-b: Time for and Response from Complainee—Review Stage**

The complainee has 30 days from the letter date to respond to the allegations, either in person or in writing. The complainee must follow all charge letter instructions and rules. Any waiver of time and action requirements must be made, in person or in writing, within the 30-day timeframe. Legal counsel or other help may be consulted and can attend the case hearing for consultation, but cannot speak directly for his or her client at the hearing—this representation must be done directly by the complainee.

**6-420: Documentation, Review of the Evidence and Recommendations**

Additional documentation may be sent to the LEC by the complainee within the 30-day period. The LEC will, within this 30-day period, forward any additional information it receives to the complainee. The LEC will review the case and render a judgment no later than 120 days from the date of the charge letter. One of four recommendations will be made to the LEC by the subcommittee and the appropriate parties notified of this decision.

**6-420-a: Recommendation to Dismiss Charges**

If the subcommittee finds: (1) no evidence or very weak evidence of violation; or (2) has insufficient evidence to render an informed judgment; or (3) finds a slight violation that has been or is in process of being corrected, it shall recommend that the LEC dismiss the charge(s).

**6-420-b: Recommendation to Educate and Repair**

If the subcommittee finds a more weighty violation, or a pattern of violation that is not too serious, and there is evidence of some correction, it may elect to recommend the complainee educate him or herself and repair the violation. Notification of such action will be communicated to the complainee and complainant only.

**6-420-c: Recommendation to Reprimand and Suspend**

If the subcommittee finds a more serious violation, or a pattern of continuing violations with no repair started, but the likelihood of correction and restored practice is significant, it may recommend that the LEC reprimand and suspend the IBCC Credential Holder or CCN member, with instructions for possible reinstatement. Such action, and the violations related to it, may be communicated to AACC members, IBCC Credential Holders and CCN members in official publications at the discretion of the AACC executive leadership.

**6-420-d: Recommendation to Terminate Membership**

If the subcommittee finds a very serious violation, or a pattern of continuing serious violations, especially after being challenged to change, and the likelihood of correction or value of it is slight (compared to the harm done), it may recommend to the LEC that credentialing in the IBCC be terminated. Such action, and the violations related to it, will be communicated to AACC members, IBCC Credential Holders and CCN members in official publications at the discretion of the AACC executive leadership.

**6-420-e: Agreed Resignation of Member**

An IBCC Credential Holder or CCN member may elect to resign his or her credential, or the LEC may elect to offer such resignation to the IBCC Credential Holder prior to termination of credentialing. Such action, and the violations related to it, may be communicated to AACC members, IBCC Credential Holders and CCN members in official publications at the discretion of the AACC executive leadership.

**6-430: Final Ruling of the Law and Ethics Committee**

Recommendations for case disposition from the subcommittee shall be heard and accepted by the LEC. LEC rulings, tracking the recommendations of the subcommittee, shall include sufficient information and instruction to satisfactorily achieve the stated objectives of the LEC ruling. Except in the case of termination of credential status, all rulings by the LEC at this stage shall be final, with no consequent appeal.

**6-430-a: Limited Discretion to Modify Subcommittee Recommendations**

The LEC shall retain limited discretion to modify the recommendations of the subcommittee if there is good reason to find that such change will yield a more just and restorative outcome. This discretion shall be used sparingly, and only in cases where there is a general consensus for such change among LEC members.

**PR6-500: Formal Appeal Hearing Procedures**

**6-510: Complainee Election of Formal Appeal—Termination Cases Only**

Appeal of rulings by the LEC shall be allowed only in case of termination of IBCC credential status or CCN membership.

**6-510-a: Time and Documentation**

Both the LEC and the complainee shall receive and argue from the same materials that formed the original judgment, plus any additional materials that are deemed necessary to support the appellate challenge. No hearing will take place within 30 days of the receipt of all relevant documents by both the LEC and the complainee.

**6-510-b: LEC Represented by the Chair or Vice-chair**

The LEC shall be represented by the Chair or Vice-chair of the LEC (the other will sit on the appeals panel). They shall be responsible for arguing the case to the appeals panel to support the LEC ruling.

**6-520: Standards and Conduct of the Formal Appeal Hearing**

There shall be one appeals hearing only, on a date and at a place that is most convenient for the appeals panel, whose ruling shall be final as to all matters concerning the case. The appeals panel will review the appeal and render a judgment no later than 30 days from the date of the appeals hearing.

**6-520-a: The Appeals Panel**

Appeals shall be heard by a five-person panel, consisting of the LEC Chair or Vice-chair (whoever is not representing the LEC in the appeal) and at least two other LEC members (not those hearing the original action). Other panel members, if needed, shall be invited by the AACC executive Leadership.

**6-520-b: The Appeals Standard—Unjust Result**

The appellate panel must rule against the termination of credentialing status if the complainee can show substantial evidence that: (1) the subcommittee panel or a member of it showed a clear intent to harm the complainee; or (2) that findings of fact or application of the ethics code were clearly erroneous; or (3) the application of termination was a clearly excessive and punitive sanction.

**6-520-c: Representation by Self or with Legal Counsel**

The complainee shall represent and speak for him or herself in all appellate actions, though he/she may choose to retain legal or other counsel who may help the complainee before and during the hearing.

**6-520-d: Retention of Legal Counsel by the AACC**

The LEC may elect to retain legal counsel, or any other expert help it deems necessary.

**6-530: Final Order of the Appeals Panel**

The appeals panel shall rule, by at least three votes, either to uphold the prior LEC ruling or to reverse it. Upholding the rule will end the matter for the AACC, the IBCC and the CCN. A reversal will lead to a dismissal of the prior ruling and an order for a new case review hearing with at least two new panel members on the subcommittee.

**PR6-600: Procedures Following Action by Churches, Courts, and Other Bodies**

**6-610: LEC Authorized to Act Independently or With Others**

**6-610-a: Litigation, License Revocation, or Other Disciplinary Action Not a Bar to Action by LEC**

The LEC reserves the right to proceed with an ethics action even if the IBCC Credential Holder or CCN member is engaged in litigation, license revocation, or other disciplinary action for the same or similar issues.

***6-610-b: LEC Election to Stay Process Pending Resolution***

The LEC reserves the right to suspend an ethics action until case disposition in another legal or disciplinary forum is completed. Any delay in action by the LEC shall not waive jurisdiction and any time constraints shall be suspended until the action is begun or resumed.

***6-610-c: Retention and Referral of Jurisdiction to Other Bodies***

The LEC reserves the right to refer a case to another recognized body for action, and to cooperate or work jointly with another tribunal. Any referral to another body shall not constitute waiver of jurisdiction by the LEC, nor shall the LEC be barred from acting on its own following referral.

**6-620: Basis for and Procedure of a Show Cause Hearing**

***6-620-a: Five Bases for a Show Cause Hearing***

An IBCC Credential Holder or CCN member may be directed by the LEC to show cause why official action by the LEC should not be taken if the member is sanctioned for misbehavior substantially related to his or her professional or ministerial tasks, in the form of: (1) conviction of a criminal offense; (2) a malpractice judgment; (3) a malpractice settlement of \$25,000 or more; (4) a license revocation or suspension action; or (5) any church, denominational, or any other official organizational act of expulsion, suspension, or de-ordination.

***6-620-b: Notice by LEC and Response of Member***

Upon receipt from the LEC of a show cause letter, the IBCC Credential Holder or CCN member will have 30 days from the letter date in which to respond. The IBCC Credential Holder or CCN member may show cause based on either the unjust result standard, or the lack of due process in the other proceeding.

***6-620-c: Review of Prior Action and Recommendation***

The LEC Chair or Vice-chair will review the evidence and prior proceeding and determine whether just cause exists to challenge its rule. If so, a recommendation will be made to start a formal case review on the merits according to the procedures of this code. If cause is not shown, a recommendation of termination of credential status will be made based of the finding of the prior proceeding.

***6-620-d: Stipulated Resignations***

The AACC, the IBCC Credential Holder or the CCN member may stipulate and agree on the resignation of the IBCC Credential Holder or CCN member. Whether termination or resignation, the result will be published in official AACC and IBCC publications at the discretion of the AACC executive leadership.



***6-620-e: Final Order of the Law and Ethics Committee***

Recommendations for case disposition shall be heard and accepted by the LEC. LEC rulings, tracking these recommendations, shall include sufficient information and instruction to satisfactorily achieve the stated objectives of the LEC ruling. All rulings by the LEC in a show cause hearing shall be final, with no consequent appeal.