

# American Association of Christian Counselors

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## *AACC Code of Ethics*

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### The Y2004 Final Code

Developed and Drafted by the  
AACC Law and Ethics Committee  
George Ohlschlager, Chairman

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## PREFACE TO THE Y2004 FINAL CODE

Welcome to the Y2004 final revision of the *AACC Christian Counseling Code of Ethics* (Code). This edition of the Code revises the 1998, 2000, 2001, and 2003 Provisional Codes, and supercedes those versions of the Code in their entirety. This is the Final Code version—the Code, with ‘Procedural Rules,’ in its completed form—which was first presented to the AACC membership at the 2003 AACC World Conference in Nashville, Tennessee.

With the publication of this Code on our web-site—[www.aacc.net](http://www.aacc.net)—we publicly present our ethics to our over 50,000 members in all 50 states and 50 other nations (as of Summer 2003). We also respectfully submit this document to the church and the helping professions, to the courts, legislatures, and licensure boards of America, to mental health and health-care organizations everywhere, and to the world-at-large.

This Code has already been adopted, in whole or in part, in nearly two dozen countries on every continent. It has been translated into Spanish, German, French, and Dutch languages. We at the AACC anticipate this Code becoming the basis of a worldwide statement of Christian counseling ethics and, as it spreads further internationally, the foundation of a 21<sup>st</sup>-century, global standard of Christian counseling care.

Work on this Code has been continuous for 10 years—since AACC created the Law and Ethics Committee in 1993. The primary mission given this group a decade ago was to construct and manage a new, Christ-centered, interdisciplinary code of ethics for Christian counseling as it matures into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This code begins to fulfill this mission.

Committee members, AACC leaders, and other colleagues who helped me develop, draft, and survive this project through 18 evolving drafts over ten years included: AACC President Tim Clinton, EdD; former president Gary Collins, PhD; Mark McMinn, PhD; Rosemarie Hughes, PhD; the late David Gatewood, MS; Peter Mosgofian, MA; W.L. Ryder, MD; Elizabeth York, MEd; Siang-Yang Tan, PhD; Chris Thurman, PhD; Ev Worthington, PhD; Tom Whiteman, PhD; Norm Wright, MA; Leigh Bishop, MD; Freda Crews, DMin, PhD; Gary Oliver, PhD; Bill Secor, PhD; Ron Hawkins, DMin, EdD; Diane Langberg, PhD; Michael Lyles, MD; and Archibald Hart, PhD.

The Holy Scriptures and the AACC Doctrinal Statement are foundational to this Code. Other ethics codes, in alphabetical order, that were consulted as we drafted this statement included 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)

Furthermore, many writings influenced this Code, especially by Alister McGrath, on “Doctrine and Ethics,” and Alan Tjeltveit, on “Psychotherapy and Christian Ethics.” Some rules for procedure, for resolution of conflicted values, and the detail in this document was suggested by the legal profession’s *Code of Professional Responsibility*, and by selected court cases, mental health license statutes, and licensure board administrative rules from California, Virginia, Texas, Colorado, Florida, Minnesota, Washington, and New York.

This Code may be downloaded from the AACC web site, or purchased in paper form from AACC at a nominal cost. We continue to invite your feedback about this code (to [George@AACC.net](mailto:George@AACC.net))—ideas and suggestions that will be considered for inclusion into future Code revisions. Also, we are developing a new section on the ethics of remote counseling—using the phone, the Internet, and doing in-home counseling—and a code specifically for lay helping ministry in the church. Your thoughts and comments here are also welcome. Thank you and may God bless your study and use of this new Code of Ethics

Sincerely,

George Ohlschlager, JD, LCSW  
Chairman, AACC Law & Ethics Committee

## APPLICABILITY OF THE CODE

All members of the AACC, the IACC (International Association of Christian Counselors), and Christian counselors everywhere are invited to fully adopt this *AACC Code of Ethics* (Code) in their work as Christian counselors, ministers, and helpers as soon as they are able. This Code may inform and enlighten all Christian counselors and ministers, but is not strictly enforceable toward non-AACC persons, nor upon AACC members in their private lives apart from professional-ministerial roles.

The Code will become a mandatory ethic for all AACC/IACC members who elect to become credential holders or members of either the American Board of Christian Counselors (ABCC) or the Christian Care Network (CCN).\*

## INTRODUCTION AND MISSION

The Code is designed to assist AACC members to better serve their clients and congregants and to improve the work of Christian counseling worldwide. It will help achieve the primary goals of the AACC—to bring honor to Jesus Christ and his church, promote excellence in Christian counseling, and bring unity to Christian counselors.

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

The Code is a comprehensive, detailed, and integrative synthesis of biblical, clinical, systemic, ethical, and legal 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 (and all mental health and ministerial professions, we believe) because of:

- (1) the mounting evidence of questionable and incompetent practices among Christian counselors, including increasing complaints of client-parishioner harm;
- (2) the largely unprotected legal status of Christian counseling, including the increasing state scrutiny, excessive litigation, and unrelenting legalization of professional ethics; and more positively
- (3) the vitality and growing maturity of Christian counseling—including its many theories and controversies—indicating the need for an overarching ethical-legal template to guide the 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. This Code shows four streams of influence. These include (1) the Bible (both Old and New Testaments) and historic orthodox Christian theology;\*\* (2) accepted standards of counseling and clinical practice from Christian counseling 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.

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\* NOTE 1. This code is adopted in its entirety by AACC affiliate organizations, the ABCC and the CCN. All ABCC and CCN members will be required to mandatory adherence to this code.

\*\* NOTE 2. Although rooted primarily in an orthodox evangelical biblical theology, this Code is also influenced (according to the paradigm offered by Richard Foster) by the social justice, charismatic-pentecostal, pietistic-holiness, liturgical, and contemplative traditions of Christian theology and church history.

### *Mission, Uses, and Limits 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 ABCC and CCN) and that can be respected by other professionals and institutions.

This Code defines biblically based values and universal behavioral standards for ethical Christian counseling. We intend this Code 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 practice, but 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 standards upon which practice diversity is acknowledged and encouraged as well as the limits beyond which practice deviance is not allowed.

The Code is aspirational throughout the AACC and enforceable in ABCC and CCN. It consists of four major parts—Introduction and Mission, Biblical-Ethical Foundations, Ethical Standards, and Procedural Rules (which are being developed). It aspires to define, in the 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 are to guide the membership of the AACC. The mission and foundations statements are to be consulted in working out the problems and dilemmas of ethics application and procedural rules interpretation.

Concerning language, we have endeavored to avoid pedantic, legalese, and sexist language, but we also avoid a radical inclusivism that de-sexes the name of God. Unless denoted, we use the term "client" to refer to clients, patients, congregants, parishioners, or helpees. "Counseling" is usually a generic reference to clinical, psychiatric, pastoral, and lay helping.

### *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 us to a life-long commitment to ethical and excellent service; it challenges us to encourage ethical behavior in our colleagues, churches, organizations, and communities. May God give us the grace to own it 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<sup>+</sup>

- 1<sup>st</sup> FOUNDATION: *Jesus Christ—and His revelation in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible—is the pre-eminent model for Christian counseling practice, ethics, and caregiving activities.*
- 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 and growth, geared to help others mature in Christ by the skillful synthesis of counselor-assisted spiritual, psycho-social, 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 the Biblical revelation regarding the 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 protects 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 and are dedicated to honor their commitments and obligations in all social and professional relations.*

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+ NOTE 4. 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, it is true that these seven foundation statements are implicitly rooted in the AACC doctrinal statement. Furthermore, combined with the Scriptures, the AACC doctrinal statement, and the statement of “Introduction and Mission” to this code, 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 CHRISTIAN COUNSELORS

### *ES1-100 First, Do No Harm*

Christian counselors acknowledge that the first rule of professional-ministerial ethical conduct is: *do no harm* to those served.

#### *1-101 Affirming the God-given Dignity of All Persons*

Affirmatively, Christian counselors recognize and uphold the inherent, God-given dignity of every human person, from the pre-born to those on death's bed. Human beings are God's creation—in fact, the crown of His creation—and are therefore due all the rights and respect and ordered logic that this fact of creation entails.

Therefore, regardless of how we respond to and challenge harmful attitudes and actions, Christian counselors will express a loving care to 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, socio-economic status, education, denomination, belief system, values, or political affiliation. God's love is unconditional and, at this level of concern, so must that of the Christian counselor.

#### *1-102 No Harm or Exploitation Allowed*

Prohibitively, then, Christian counselors avoid every manner of harm, exploitation, and unjust discrimination in all client-congregant relations. 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 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 payors and authorizers.

#### *1-111 Managing Client Conflicts*

Christian counselors acknowledge that client conflicts are unavoidable. In fact, conflict and resistance are often a central dynamic of the helping process. We will 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 not avoided—counselors shall terminate counseling relations and make referral in the client's best interest.

#### *1-112 Action Regarding Clients Harmed by Other Helpers*

Christian counselors take proper action against the harmful behavior of other counselors and pastors. We will act assertively to challenge or expose those who exploit others, and protect clients against harm wherever it is found, taking care to honor and support client decision-making regarding curative action against violators.

#### *1-113 Managing Problems with Managed Care*

Managed care has greatly expanded its influence in health and mental health service delivery. Widespread problems in client-provider-managed care relations are now being reported: breach of confidentiality, client abandonment, failure to maintain continuity of care, incompetent care, restriction of therapist choice and access, and even infliction of emotional distress. Christian counselors acknowledge these legal-ethical problems, and will avoid and work to correct any unethical entanglement and unintended client harm due to managed care relations.

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

Christian counselors refuse to condone, advocate for, or assist the harmful actions of clients, especially those that imperil human life from conception to death. We agree that the protection of human life is always a priority value in any professional or ministerial intervention. We will not abandon clients

who do or intend harm, will terminate helping relations only in the most compelling circumstances, and will continue to serve clients in these troubles so far as it is humanly possible.

*1-121 Application to Deadly and Threatening Behavior*

Christian counselors refuse to 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. In fact, we are under an affirmative ethical duty 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 (see Code sections 1-430ff).

*1-122 Application to Substance Abuse and Other Addictions*

Christian counselors refuse to condone, advocate for, or assist substance abuse or other addictions and addictive behaviors by clients. We recognize and accept the distinction between drug dependence and addiction, and may support or assist clients in the use of necessary drugs—even those from which dependencies may develop for limited periods of time—when medically justified and under a physician’s supervision.

*1-123 Application to Abortion*

Christian counselors refuse to condone or advocate for abortion and the abortion-related activities of clients. All counselors will consider and inform clients of alternative means to abortion and, as far as it is possible, will continue to serve clients and work compassionately with them through the abortion crisis.

*1-124 Application to Divorce*

Christian counselors refuse to assume the decision for client divorce. We may assist clients in analyzing and making the decision to divorce, insofar as it is biblically permissible, as God does allow for divorce in some cases. Therefore, we may assist clients through the divorce process without being a divorce advocate, as that divorce decision must always reside in and be owned by the client.

Christian counselors working in divorce mediation will be careful to communicate that such work is not an endorsement of divorce, but rather a decision to offer a better choice than adversarial litigation and its destructive family impact when divorce is inevitable.

*1-125 Application to Premarital and Extramarital Sexual Behavior*

Christian counselors refuse to condone or advocate for the pursuit of or active involvement in pre-marital and extra-marital sexual behavior by clients—promoting an affair is never proper counsel as a solution to marital problems. We acknowledge that sex is God’s good creation and a delightful gift when confined to one man and one woman in marriage. We may agree to and support the wish to work out issues of sexual behavior, identity, and attractions, but will encourage sexual celibacy or biblically proscribed sexual behavior while such issues are being addressed.

*1-126 Application to Homosexual and Transgendered Behavior*

Christian counselors refuse to condone or advocate for the pursuit of or active involvement in homosexual, transgendered, and cross-dressing behavior, and in the adoption gay & lesbian & transgendered lifestyles by clients. We may agree to and support the wish to work out issues of homosexual and transgendered identity and attractions, but will refuse to describe or reduce human identity and nature to sexual reference or orientation, and will encourage sexual celibacy or biblically proscribed sexual behavior while such issues are being addressed.

Christian counselors differ, on biblical, ethical, and legal grounds, with groups who abhor and condemn reparative therapy, willingly offering it to those who come into counseling with a genuine desire to be set free of homosexual attractions and leave homosexual behavior and lifestyles behind. Either goal of heterosexual relations and marriage or lifelong sexual celibacy is legitimate and a function of client choice in reparative therapy.

It is acknowledged that some persons engaged in same-sex change or reparative therapy will be able to change and become free of all homo-erotic behavior and attraction, some will change but will still struggle with homosexual attraction from time to time, and some will not change away from homosexual practices.

*1-127 Application to Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide*

Christian counselors refuse to condone or advocate for active forms of euthanasia and assisted suicide. We 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, we will not deliver, nor advocate for, nor support the use of drugs or devices to be utilized for the purpose of ending a patient's life. We recognize that the death of a patient may occur as the unintended and secondary result of aggressive action to alleviate a terminally ill patient's extreme pain and suffering.

So long as there are no other reasonable methods to alleviate such pain and suffering, the Christian counselor is free to support, advocate for, and participate in such 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*

All forms of sexual misconduct in pastoral, professional, or lay relationships are unethical. This includes every kind of sexual exploitation, deception, manipulation, abuse, harassment, relations where the sexual involvement is invited, and relations where informed consent presumably exists. Due to the inherent power imbalance of helping relationships and the immoral nature of sexual behavior outside of marriage, such apparent consent is illusory and illegitimate.

Forbidden sexual activities and deceptions include, but are not limited to, direct sexual touch or contact; seductive sexual speech or non-verbal behavior; solicitation of sexual or romantic relations; erotic contact or behavior as a response to the sexual invitation or seductive behavior of clients; unnecessary questioning and/or excessive probing into the client's sexual history and practices; inappropriate counselor disclosures of client attractiveness, sexual opinions, or sexual humor; advocacy of the healing value of counselor-client sexual relations; secretive sexual communications and anonymous virtual interaction via the Internet or other electronic and informational means; sexual harassment by comments, touch, or promises/threats of special action; and sexual misconduct as defined by all applicable laws, ethics, and church, organizational, or practice policies.

#### *1-131 Sexual Relations with Former Clients Forbidden*

All sexual relations as defined in 1-130 above with former clients are unethical. Furthermore, we do not terminate and refer clients or parishioners, even at first contact, in order to pursue sexual or romantic relations.

#### *1-132 Counseling with Marital/Sexual Partners*

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

#### *1-133 Marriage with Former Clients/Patients*

Since marriage is honorable before God, the lone exception to this rule against marriage to a former client, is a case anticipating marriage, so long as (1) counseling relations were properly terminated, and not for the purpose of pursuing marriage or romantic relations, (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 different relations with the counselor, and (4) the marriage takes place two years or more after the conclusion 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 is where two or more roles are mixed in a manner that can harm the counseling relationship. Examples include counseling plus personal, fraternal, business, financial, or sexual and romantic relations.

Some dual relationships are not unethical—it is client exploitation that is wrong, not the dual relationship itself. Based on an absolute application that harms membership bonds in the Body of Christ, we oppose the ethical-legal view that all dual relationships are per se harmful and therefore invalid on their face. Many dual relations are wrong and indefensible, but some dual relationships are worthwhile and defensible (per section 1-142 below).

#### *1-141 The Rule of Dual Relationships*

While in therapy, or when counseling relations are imminent, or for an appropriate time after termination of counseling, Christian counselors do not engage in dual relations with counselees. Some

dual relationships are always avoided—sexual or romantic relations, and counseling close friends, family members, employees, or supervisees. Other dual relationships should be presumed troublesome and avoided wherever possible.

*1-142 Proving an Exception to the Rule*

The Christian counselor has the burden of proving a justified dual relationship by showing (1) informed consent, including discussion of how the counseling relationship might be harmed as other relations proceed, and (2) lack of harm or exploitation to the client.

As a general rule, all close relations are unethical if they become counselor-client or formal lay helping relations. Dual relations may be allowable, requiring justification by the foregoing rule, if the client is an arms-length acquaintance—if the relationship is not a close one. This distinction is crucial in the applications below.

*1-143 Counseling with Family, Friends, and Acquaintances*

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

*1-144 Business and Economic Relations*

Christian counselors avoid partnerships, employment relations, and close business associations with clients. Barter relations are normally avoided as potentially troublesome, and require justification; therefore if done, barter is a rare and not a common occurrence. Unless justified by compelling necessity, customer relations with clients are normally avoided.

*1-145 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. We presume that dual relations with any other church members who are clients are potentially troublesome and best avoided, otherwise requiring justification. Pastors and church staff helpers will take all reasonable precautions to limit the adverse impact of any dual relationships.

*1-146 Termination to Engage in Dual Relations Prohibited*

Christian counselors do not terminate counseling to engage in dual relationships of any kind. Some counselors and their former clients will agree that any future counseling will be done by someone else if, after legitimate termination, they decide to pursue another form of relationship.

## ***ES1-200 Competence in Christian Counseling***

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

Christian counselors maintain the highest standards of competence with integrity. We know and respect the boundaries of competence in ourselves and others, especially those under our supervision. We make only truthful, realistic statements about our identity, education, experience, credentials, and about counseling goals and process, avoiding exaggerated and sensational claims. We do not offer services or work beyond the limits of our competence and do not aid or abet the work of Christian counseling by untrained, unqualified, or unethical helpers.

*1-220 Duties to Consult and/or Refer*

Christian counselors consult with and/or refer to more competent colleagues or supervisors when these limits of counseling competence are reached: (1) when facing issues not dealt with before or not experienced in handling, (2) when clients need further help outside the scope of our training and practice, (3) when either counselor or clients are feeling stuck or confused about counseling and neither is clear what to do about it, or (4) when counselees are deteriorating or making no realistic gain over a number of sessions. Christian counselors shall honor the client's goals and confidential privacy interests in all consultations and referrals.

*1-221 Consultation Practice*

When counseling help is needed, and with client consent, consultation may be attempted first, when in the client's best interest and to improve 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 ground 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.

*1-222 Referral Practice*

Referral shall be made in situations where client need is beyond the counselor's ability or scope of practice or when consultation is inappropriate, unavailable, or unsuccessful. Referrals should be done 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 or church.

*1-223 Seek Christian Help, If Available*

When consulting or referring, Christian counselors seek out the best Christian help at a higher level of knowledge, skill, and expertise. If Christian help is not available, or when professional skill is more important than the professional's beliefs, Christian counselors shall use the entire network of professional services available.

*1-224 Avoid Counsel Against Professional Treatment*

Christian counselors do not counsel or advice against professional counseling, medical or psychiatric treatment, the use of medications, legal counsel, or other forms of professional service merely because we believe such practice is per se wrong or because the provider may not be a Christian.

*1-230 Duties to Study and Maintain Expertise*

Christian counselors keep abreast of and, whenever possible, contribute to new knowledge, issues, and resources in Christian counseling and our respective fields. We maintain an active program of study, continuing education, and personal/professional growth to improve helping effectiveness and ethical practice. We seek out specialized training, supervision, and/or advanced certification if we choose to gain expertise and before we practice and advertise in recognized specialty areas of counseling and clinical practice.

*1-240 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. We delegate to employees, supervisees, and other subordinates only that work these persons can competently perform, meeting the client's best interest and done with appropriate supervision.

*1-250 Protective Action When Personal Problems Interfere*

Christian counselors acknowledge that sin, illnesses, mental disorders, interpersonal crises, distress, and self-deception still influence us personally—and that these problems can adversely affect our clients and parishioners. When personal problems flare to a level that harm to one's clients is realized or is highly likely, the Christian counselor will refrain from or reduce those particular professional-ministerial activities that are or could be harmful. During such times, the counselor will seek out and use those reparative resources that will allow for problem resolution and a return to a fully functioning ministry, if possible.

***ES1-300 Informed Consent in Christian Counseling***

*1-310 Securing Informed Consent*

Christian counselors secure client consent for all counseling and related 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.

Christian counselors take care that (1) the client has the *capacity* to give consent; (2) we have discussed counseling together and 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. Early in counseling, counselor and client should discuss and agree upon these issues: the nature of and course of therapy; client issues and goals; potential problems and reasonable alternatives to counseling; counselor status and credentials; confidentiality and its limits; fees and financial procedures; limitations about time and access to the counselor, including directions in emergency situations; and procedures for resolution of disputes and misunderstandings. If the counselor is supervised, that fact shall be disclosed and the supervisor's name and role indicated to the client.

*1-321 Consent from Parent or Client Representative*

Christian counselors obtain consent from parents or the client's legally authorized representative when clients are minors or adults who are legally incapable of giving consent.

*1-322 Documentation of Consent*

Christian counselors will document client consent in writing by professional service contract or consent form, the standard now required in most professional therapy relations, or by case note at the very least.

*1-330 Consent for Biblical-Spiritual Practices in Counseling*

Christian counselors do not presume that all clients want or will be receptive to explicit spiritual interventions in counseling. We obtain consent that honors client choice, receptivity to these practices, and the timing and manner in which these things are introduced: prayer for and with clients, Bible reading and reference, spiritual meditation, the use of biblical and religious imagery, assistance with spiritual formation and discipline, and other common spiritual practices.

*1-331 Special Consent for More Difficult Interventions*

Close or special consent is obtained for more difficult and controversial practices. These include, but are not limited to: deliverance and spiritual warfare activities; cult de-programming work; recovering memories and treatment of past abuse or trauma; use of hypnosis and any kind of induction of altered states; authorizing (by MDs) medications, electro-convulsive therapy, or patient restraints; use of aversive, involuntary, or experimental therapies; engaging in reparative therapy with homosexual persons; and counseling around abortion and end-of-life issues. These interventions require a more detailed discussion with patient-clients or client representatives of the procedures, risks, and treatment alternatives, and we secure detailed written agreement for the procedure.

***ES1-400 Confidentiality, Privacy, and Privileged Communication****1-410 Maintaining Client Confidentiality*

Christian counselors maintain client confidentiality to the fullest extent allowed by law, professional ethics, and church or organizational rules. Confidential client communications include all verbal, written, telephonic, audio or videotaped, or electronic communications arising within the helping relationship. Apart from the exceptions below, Christian counselors shall not disclose confidential client communications without first discussing the intended disclosure and securing written consent from the client or client representative.

*1-411 Discussing the Limits of Confidentiality and Privilege*

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. We will discuss the limits of confidentiality and privacy with clients at the outset 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 demands, shall be the first response of counselors to demands or requests for client communications and records.

#### *1-421 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. The counselor shall maintain confidentiality of client information outside the bounds of that narrowly required to fulfill the disclosure and shall limit disclosures only to those people having a direct professional interest in the case. In the face of a subpoena, counselors shall neither deny nor immediately comply with disclosure demands, but will assert privilege in order to give the client time to consult with a lawyer 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. We will take appropriate action, including necessary disclosures of confidential information, to protect life in the face of client threats of suicide, homicide, and/or the abuse of children, elders, and dependent persons.

#### *1-431 The Duty to Protect Others*

The duty to take protective action is triggered when the counselor (1) has reasonable suspicion, as stated in your state 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 (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.

#### *1-432 Guidelines to Ethical Disclosure and Protective Action*

Action to protect life, whether you're 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.

#### *1-433 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 or 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. We 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, the Christian counselor 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 Christian counselor shall take preventive clinical action that seeks to forestall any further escalation of threat toward violent behavior.

#### *1-440 Disclosures in Cases of Third-party Payment and Managed Care*

Christian counselors are diligent to protect client confidences in relations with insurance and third party payors, employee assistance programs, and managed care groups. We are cautious about demands for confidential client information that exceed the need for validation of services rendered or continued care. We do not disclose or submit session notes and details of client admissions solely on demand of third-party payors. We will narrowly disclose information that the client has given written authorization only after we have discussed and are assured that the client understands the full implications of authorizations signed or contemplated to sign.

#### *1-450 Disclosures for Supervision, Consultation, Teaching, Preaching, and Publication*

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 under supervision will disclose that fact to their clients. We will

adequately disguise client identifiers by various means when presenting cases in group or in public forums. We will not presume that disguise alone is sufficient client protection, but will consider seeking client authorization when client identity is hard to conceal.

*1-460 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. This requires, at minimum, keeping records files in locked storage with access given only to those persons with a direct professional interest in the materials.

*1-461 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. Client information transferred electronically—FAX, E-mail, 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.

*1-470 Advocacy for Privacy Rights Against Intrusive Powers*

Christian counselors hear the most private and sensitive details of client lives—information that must be zealously guarded from public disclosure. Rapidly expanding and interlocking electronic information networks are increasingly threatening client privacy rights. Though federal and state laws exist to protect client privacy, these laws are weak, are routinely violated at many levels, and the record of privacy right enforcement is dismal. Accordingly, Christian counselors are called to wisely protect and assertively advocate for privacy protection on behalf of our clients against the pervasive intrusion of personal, corporate, governmental, even religious powers.

***ES1-500 Ethical Practice in Christian Counseling and Evaluation***

*1-510 Fees and Financial Relationships in Christian Counseling*

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

*1-511 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. We will provide clients or their representatives with a full and accurate account of previous and current charges upon request.

*1-512 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 use sliding fee schedules, scaled to client's ability to pay, and other reduced payment methods to increase counseling accessibility to those of lesser financial means.

*1-513 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.

*1-514 Avoiding Self-serving Financial Relations*

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

*1-515 Financial Integrity with Insurance and Third-party Payors*

Christian counselors maintain financial integrity with client insurers and other third-party payors. We do not charge third-party payors for services not rendered, nor for missed or cancelled appointments, unless specially authorized to do so. We do not distort or change diagnoses to fit restricted reimbursement categories. Any special benefits or reductions in client fees must also be extended in full to third-party payors.

*1-520 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.

*1-521 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, especially maintaining client confidentiality. Ordinarily, client records belong to the employing organization or to the therapist in a private or group practice. However, in view of the expanding right of client record access and the ethic of continuity of care, clients' records should follow the client. Therefore, in any dispute about record access or ownership at the termination of professional employment, the records will stay with the employer if the therapist is leaving the area and his or her clients, or they should go with the therapist if he or she is staying in the area and the clients are staying with the therapist.

*1-530 Ethics in Testing, Assessment, and Clinical Evaluation*

Christian counselors do clinical evaluations of clients 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.

*1-531 Use of Appropriate Assessments*

Christian counselors use tests and assessment techniques that are appropriate to the needs, resources, capabilities, and understanding of the client. We apply tests skillfully and administer tests properly and safely. We substantiate our findings, with knowledge of the reliability, validity, outcome results, and limits of the tests used. We avoid both the misuse of testing procedures and the creation of confusion or misunderstanding by clients about testing purposes, procedures, and findings.

*1-532 Reporting and Interpreting Assessment Results*

Christian counselors report testing results in a fair, understandable, and objective manner. We avoid undue testing bias and honor the limits of test results, ensuring verifiable means to substantiate conclusions and recommendations. We 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. Christian counselors will state any and all reservations about the validity of test results and present reports and recommendations in tentative language and with alternative possibilities.

*1-540 Working with Couples, Families, and Groups*

Christian counselors often work with multiple persons in session—marriage couples, families or parts of families, 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 we will identify a primary client—the group as a unit or the individual members—and will discuss with our client(s) how our differing roles, counseling goals, and confidentiality and consent issues are affected by these dynamics.

*1-541 Safety and Integrity in Family and Group Counseling*

Christian counselors will maintain their role as fair, unbiased, and effective helpers in all marital, family, and group work. We will remain accessible to all persons, avoiding enmeshed alliances and

taking sides unjustly. As group or family counseling leaders, Christian counselors respect the boundary between constructive confrontation and verbal abuse, and will take reasonable precautions to protect client members from any physical, psychological, or verbal abuse from other members of a family or group.

*1-542 Confidentiality in Family and Group Counseling (see also ESI-400)*

Christian counselors do not promise or guarantee confidentiality in family and group counseling, but rather explain the problems and limits of keeping confidences in these modes of therapy. We communicate the importance of confidentiality and encourage family or group members to honor it, including discussion of consequences for its breach. Christian counselors 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.

*1-543 Avoiding and Resolving Role Conflicts*

If/when Christian counselors are asked to perform conflicting roles with possible unethical consequences (i.e.: pressure to keep "secrets" or called to testify as an adverse witness in a client's divorce), we will clarify our therapeutic, neutral, and mediative role and/or decline to serve in a conflicted capacity, if possible. Some counselors will contract for professional neutrality at the beginning of professional relations, securing client agreement not to have oneself or one's records subpoenaed or deposed in any legal proceeding.

*1-550 Working with Persons of Different Faiths, Religions, and Values*

Christian counselors do not withhold services to anyone of a different faith, religion, denomination, or value system. We work to understand the client's belief system and always maintain respect for the client. We strive to understand when faith and values issues are important to the client and foster values-informed client decision-making in counseling. We share our own faith only as a function of legitimate self-disclosure and when appropriate to client need, always maintaining a humility that exposes and never imposes the way of Christ.

*1-551 Action if Value Differences Interfere with Counseling*

Christian counselor work to resolve problems—always in the client's best interest—when differences between counselor and client values becomes too great, adversely affecting counseling. This may include discussion of the issue as a therapeutic matter, renegotiation of the counseling agreement, consultation with a supervisor or trusted colleague or, as a last resort, referral to another counselor if the differences cannot be reduced or bridged.

*1-560 Continuity of Care and Service Interruption*

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

*1-570 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 notice and adequately preparing the client for termination or referral.

*1-571 Ethical 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; or (4) when counseling is harmful to the client. Christian counselors shall 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, even end counseling prematurely the counselor, if it is safe and proper, should follow-through with the client to ensure proper termination and referral.

## ***ES1-600 Ethical Relations in the Professional Workplace***

### *1-610 Honorable Relations Between Professional and Ministerial Colleagues*

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

#### *1-611 Solicitation of Clients Under Another's Care*

Christian counselors do not solicit clients nor do we knowingly offer professional services to those under the care of another mental health professional or pastor, except with that provider's knowledge, or when someone is in crisis. When approached by clients being served by other counselors, due regard will be given that relationship with a commitment to encourage client resolution with the other counselor before starting professional relations.

#### *1-612 Maintaining Honor Toward Others When in Conflict*

If a counselor learns that a current client is receiving therapy from another pastor or mental health professional, reasonable steps will be taken to inform the other helper 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, will be strictly avoided.

### *1-620 Maintaining Honorable Professional and Employment Relations*

Christian counselors create and preserve honorable relations in the professional workplace, whether church, counseling agency, or other setting. We maintain the utmost honesty, respect, and integrity in all employment and collegial relations. We shall contract relations that balance the best interests of clients, colleagues, and our organizations, and will honor all contractual obligations, even if it is costly for us to do so. We will avoid all actions and appearances of greed, fraud, manipulation, and self-serving action in all collegial and employment relations, and will disclose and discuss all reasonably foreseen problems to our colleagues before they enter into relations with us.

#### *1-621 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, Christian counselors encourage development of sound collegial and employer-employee rules and relations.

### *1-630 Christian Counselors as Employers*

Employers of Christian counselors shall provide a personnel program that honors the dignity and promotes the welfare of employees. Information will 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.

#### *1-631 Employers Avoid Discrimination and Promote Meritoriously*

Employers hire, evaluate, and promote staff meritoriously—based on staff training, experience, credentials, competence, responsibility, integrity, and ethical excellence. We 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.

### *1-640 Christian Counselors as Employees*

Counselors accept employment only when they are qualified for the position—by education, supervised training, credentials, skill, and experience. We will honor and advance the mission, goals,

and policies of employing organizations. Employees have duties to both employers and clients and, in the event of conflict between these duties, shall strive to resolve them in ways that harmonize the best interests of both.

*1-641 Employees Serve with Integrity and Dedication*

Employees serve with dedication, diligence, and honesty, maintaining high professional and ethical standards. We do not abuse our employment positions, nor presume excessive demands or rights against an employer.

*1-642 Moving From An Agency to Private Practice*

While employed in a counseling agency, and for a reasonable time after employment, we 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 we develop a full-time private practice with intent to resign employment and take current clients, each client shall be apprised of their right to choose to stay with the employing organization or go with the therapist.

***ES1-700 Ethics in 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.

*1-710 Unethical 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 other's fears or distressing emotions; (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.

*1-720 Communication of Association with the AACC and Other Groups*

Public communication of 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.

*1-721 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 represent. Advanced credentials shall be communicated with accuracy and humility, adhering to the guidelines of the credential itself.

*1-722 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 state, regional, or national authorities, or that (3) are not substantially related to counseling, pastoral counseling, or mental health services. Holders of a religious license or credential for church ministry only shall not state or imply that they are counseling professionals, or that they hold a mental health practice license.

*1-730 Communication of Work Products and Training Materials*

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

*1-740 Ethical Guidelines in Public Statements by Others*

Christian counselors ensure adherence to these ethics by third parties we engage to create and make public statements about our work—employers, publishers, producers, sponsors, marketers,

organizational clients, and representatives of the media. We do not pay for or compensate the news media for news items about our work. We are responsible to correct, in timely fashion, any misinformation by third parties regarding our work.

### ***ES1-800 Ethical Relations with the State and Other Social Systems***

Christian counselors, as individual members and as an Association, will strive to maintain ethical relations with the world-wide and the local church, with the state in its various forms, with the mental health professions and associations to which some of us belong, with other professions and organizations, and with society-at-large.

#### *1-810 Ethical Relations to Other Professions and Institutions*

Christian counselors recognize and respect that we are part of larger networks of Christian ministry and of mental health care. To borrow a metaphor, we envision church-based ministry and professional mental health care as the two tracks on which runs the Christian counseling train—tracks with different rather than opposing objectives.

Within the AACC are representatives of many different mental health and ministerial disciplines—we invite and welcome them all in the name of Christ. We will honor and preserve these relations, will challenge value differences with respect, and will build the best relations we can with all these professions and institutions that intersect with us as Christian counselors.

#### *1-820 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. We will honor the laws and customs of our culture, and will challenge them when they threaten or abuse our freedoms, dishonor our God, or deny the rights of those most powerless. When critical, we will strive to offer a better alternative—model programs to govern our ecclesiastical, socio-cultural, and governmental life.

We will support the cause of Christ and advocate for Christian counseling in the church, in our ministries and professions, and in society. We will work to shape laws and policies that encourage the acceptance and growth of Christian ministry generally and Christian counseling in particular. We will facilitate harmonious relations between church and state and will serve and advocate the best interests of our clients in church, community, and governmental relations.

#### *1-830 Being Salt and Light in a Post-Christian Culture*

Christian counselors acknowledge that we live in a post-Christian and pluralistic culture that no longer shares a common Judeo-Christian value base. We are called by Christ to be "salt and light" throughout our culture, a call of engagement with our culture and the world-at-large. Hence, the AACC will be and our members are encouraged to engage in active and honorable relations with the world around us—relations in which the world can see the light and taste the salt of Christ.

##### *1-831 Christ and Culture: Diversity over Conformity*

We accept that there are differing views within our Association on the proper relationship of the Christian life to a modern culture that no longer substantially honors Christ. Our association includes those who are largely apolitical—acknowledging a receding religious-cultural status as Christians but dedicated to building up the church and our profession. There are also those who believe it is necessary to retain a vibrant Christian value base in society and seek to return our culture to these roots, including by political and legal action. We wish to support this diversity and encourage this ongoing debate, respecting the validity of these different views as the healthy evidence of a living church and a vibrant and growing profession.

## II. ETHICAL STANDARDS FOR SUPERVISORS, EDUCATORS, RESEARCHERS, AND WRITERS

### *The Ministry of Christian Counseling Leaders*

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 and the ministry or profession to which they belong, and for their exemplary ethics. These leaders are responsible for the development and maturation of the Christian counseling profession, for serving as active and ethical role models, and for raising up the next generation of Christian counselors and leaders.

### **ES2-100 Base Standards for Supervisors and Educators**

#### *2-110 Ethics and Excellence in Supervision and Teaching*

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

#### *2-111 Preparation for Teaching and Supervision*

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

#### *2-120 Supervisors and Educators Do Not Exploit Students and Trainees*

Christian counseling supervisors and educators 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.

#### *2-121 Sexual and Romantic Relations Forbidden with Students and Supervisees*

Christian counseling supervisors and educators (1) shall not engage in any form of sexual or romantic relations with their students and trainees, (2) nor subject them, by relations with others, to any form of sexual exploitation, abuse, or harassment, (3) nor pressure them to engage in any questionable social relationships. The standards of sections 1-130ff, "Sexual Misconduct Forbidden," shall apply fully here.

#### *2-122 Dual Relationships Cautioned*

Integrity and caution shall be the hallmark of dual relationships between supervisors and supervisees and between teacher and student. 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 1-140ff, "Dual and Multiple Relationships," and those stated below shall apply here.

#### *2-123 Supervisors and Educators Do Not Provide Psychotherapy*

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

#### *2-124 Acknowledgement of Professional Contributions*

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

## ***ES2-200 Ethical Standards for Christian Counseling Supervisors***

### *2-210 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 these ethics, to those of other applicable professional groups, and to all applicable state and federal laws.

#### *2-211 Baseline Program Standards*

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.

### *2-220 Supervisors to Provide a Varied Experience*

Christian counseling supervisors will 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.

#### *2-221 Supervisors Are Responsible for Services to Clients*

Christian counselor supervisors ensure that supervisee 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 responsibility for all supervisee cases.

### *2-230 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.

#### *2-231 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.

## ***ES2-300 Ethical Standards for Christian Counseling Educators***

### *2-310 Counselor Education and Training Programs*

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

#### *2-311 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.

#### *2-312 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.

#### *2-320 Student and Trainee Evaluation*

Christian counseling educators provide students and trainees with periodic and ongoing evaluation of their progress in classroom, practice, and experimental 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.

#### *2-321 Overcoming Student Limitations*

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.

#### *2-322 Student-Trainee Endorsement*

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.

#### *2-330 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.

#### *2-331 Exposure to Various Counseling Theories Encouraged*

Educators develop programs that expose students to various accepted theoretical models for counseling, 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.

#### *2-332 Teaching Law, Ethics, and the Business of Practice*

Training programs should give teach students about the legal, ethical, and business dimensions of Christian counseling. 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.

#### *2-340 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.

*2-341 Clients of Student-Trainees*

Academic and field supervisors ensure that clients of student-trainees are fully informed of trainee status, and the trainees' 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.

***ES2-400 Ethical Standards for Christian Counseling Researchers***

*2-410 Respecting Standards of Science and Research*

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

*2-420 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.

*2-421 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, we will obtain appropriate consultation that apprises participants of these risks and secures informed consent.

*2-422 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.

*2-430 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.

*2-431 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.

*2-432 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, we do not use methods of deception and concealment when alternative research procedures are available to accomplish the project objectives.

*2-433 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.

#### *2-440 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.

#### *2-441 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.

#### *2-442 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.

### ***ES2-500 Writing and Publication Ethics in Christian Counseling***

#### *2-510 Integrity in Writing and Publication*

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 other'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.

#### *2-520 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.

#### *2-521 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.

#### *2-522 Encouragement to New Authors*

Christian counseling editors and publishers will be diligent to call forth, encourage, and help develop new writers and materials from among the growing community of Christian counselors.

#### *2-530 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. Instead, in accordance with section 2-510 above, Christian counseling authors will give due authorship credit to anyone who has substantially contributed to the published text. Order of authorship should reflect the level of substantive contribution to a work.

### **III. STANDARDS & EXEMPTIONS FOR ORDAINED PASTORS AND PASTORAL COUNSELORS**

#### ***ES3-100 Definitions and Roles of Pastors and Pastoral Counselor***

##### *3-110 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 requires for that ministry.

##### *3-111 The Specialized Pastoral Counselor*

Pastoral counselors and psychotherapists have received advanced training in counseling and psychotherapy and often 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.

#### ***ES3-200 Rules of Ethics Code Application and Exemption***

##### *3-210 General Rule of Ethical Code Application and Exemption*

Pastors and pastoral counselors shall 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. Anyone claiming exemption to the Code has the burden of proving it, and the duty to draw that exemption as narrowly as possible, honoring all other Code requirements.

##### *3-220 The Call of Christian Counseling to Gospel Fidelity*

Pastors and pastoral counselors have a special call as intermediaries between Christian counseling and the church. They can challenge Christian counselors to hold faith to the Gospel and to apply counseling ministry to the mission and work of the church. They can mediate, explain, and refer parishioners to Christian counselors. They can also encourage involvement for those who need help, and communicate and explain the guidelines of the Code so that parishioners can better judge the value and safety of the Christian counseling work.

### **IV. STANDARDS & EXEMPTIONS FOR LAY HELPERS AND OTHER MINISTERS**

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

Lay helpers or 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 helpers often function in one-to-one helping roles and are increasingly involved in developing and leading the many small support and recovery group ministries of the contemporary church.

#### ***ES4-200 Rules of Ethics Code Application and Exemption***

##### *4-210 General Rule of Ethical Code Application and Exemption*

Lay helpers and non-ordained ministers shall honor the Code in its entirety, except for those code sections (1) not applicable due to their manifestly professional or pastoral nature, or (2) because a higher duty to church or ministry rules require a narrow exemption. Anyone claiming exemption to the Code

has the burden of proving it, and the duty to draw that exemption as narrowly as possible, honoring all other Code requirements.

*4-220 Lay Helping Under Supervision of the Church*

Lay helpers minister only under the supervision of the church or a Christian counseling organization. Lay helpers 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 helpers and non-ordained staff shall be avoided due to its excessive risk for legal, ethical, spiritual, interpersonal, and ecclesiastical trouble.

*4-221 Lay Helpers Do Not Accept Fees or Communicate False Roles*

Lay helpers shall not seek or accept fees or other remuneration for ministry. Lay helpers do not state or allow helpes to believe that they are professional or pastoral counselors. Some lay or non-ordained helpers may receive a salary as a church or ministry employee, income that should not be confused with fees for services.

*4-222 Aiding and Abetting Unauthorized Practice.*

Pastors and professional Christian 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, supervising pastors and clinicians will require and assist appropriate consultation and/or referral.

## V. STANDARDS FOR RESOLVING ETHICAL-LEGAL CONFLICTS

### ***ES5-100 Base Standards for Ethical Conflict Resolution***

*5-110 Base Rule for Resolving Ethical-Legal Conflicts*

Christian counselors acknowledge the 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, we will act peaceably and humbly in its outworking, in a way that honors God and our role as Christian counselors.

*5-111 First, Attempt to Harmonize Conflicting Interests*

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

*5-112 When Conflicts Cannot Be Harmonized*

Christian counselors' fidelity to Christ sometimes calls us to respectfully decline adherence to non-Christian values and behavior. When such conflicts cannot be harmonized, some counselors will 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. 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 pay any adverse consequences. Such action must never be done to hide wrongdoing or to justify an obscure or self-promoting position.

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

### ***ES5-200 Resolving Conflicts with Employers and Colleagues***

#### *5-210 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 shall take appropriate action to resolve these problems in a way that honors Christ while also serving the client's best interest.

#### *5-211 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, we may also challenge unjust prohibitions against the free expression of our beliefs, grounded in our 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 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 our office or place of work.

#### *5-212 Conflict Resolution Process with Employers and Colleagues*

Resolution of conflicts with employers or colleagues shall honor this process: (1) first attempt direct negotiations, (2) then 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.

#### *5-220 Law and Ethics Violations by Colleagues and Employers*

Christian counselors with credible knowledge of legal or ethical violations by colleagues and employers shall take appropriate action to cure this problem, in the best interests of clients, and according to the requirements of applicable law-ethics. 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.

### ***ES5-300 Resolving Professional and Organizational Conflicts***

#### *5-310 The Higher Ethics of Jesus Christ*

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, we declare and support the right of Christian counselors to elect nonadherence to those ethics and rules that offend the way of Christ.

#### *5-311 First, Act 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, we will 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 fulfill the policy behind the ethical rule.

#### *5-312 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.

Counselors shall (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 and soberly count the cost of such action and (4) be prepared to face any consequences for breach of ethics or rules.

### ***ES5-400 Resolving Conflicts with the State and Its Laws***

#### ***5-410 The Higher Law of Jesus Christ***

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, we declare and support the right of Christian counselors to elect nonadherence to those laws that offend the way of Christ.

#### ***5-411 First, Act 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, we will attempt to define and advocate for a new and harmonious legal standard as an alternative to the law-offending rule at issue. This newly proposed standard will honor Christ, protects the client's best interest, and shows how the action of the new rule fulfills the intent or policy behind the law.

#### ***5-412 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 counselor 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.

Counselors shall (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, and soberly count the cost of such action, and (4) be prepared to face any consequences that may be imposed for violation of the law.

## **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 members. These rules purpose to (1) show society, the church, our related professions, and our multitude of clients and parishioners that *the AACC has a serious commitment to live by and enforce these ethics*, and (2) show our members that *we are 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.

### **VI. AUTHORITY, JURISDICTION, AND OPERATION OF THE AACC LAW AND ETHICS COMMITTEE (LEC)**

#### ***PR6-100 Mission, Authority, and Jurisdiction of LEC***

##### ***6-110 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.

*6-120 LEC Authority*

LEC is authorized to formulate and promulgate ethical standards for Christian counseling that are to be honored by AACC members particularly, and the church and larger society more generally. LEC, or any committee it shall designate, shall investigate, hear, and act to justly resolve ethical complaints against AACC members. LEC shall also have authority to adopt rules and procedures, as needed, to govern the conduct of LEC and any person or matter within its jurisdiction. LEC shall also have authority to publish and publicly communicate its official actions, including disciplinary actions toward its members.

*6-130 LEC Jurisdiction*

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

**6-200 General Orientation to Ethical Enforcement***6-210 Attitude and Action Toward Ethical Complaints*

Neither LEC nor any member of the AACC shall refuse to hear nor uncritically accept a complaint against another member of the Association. Any LEC or Association 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.

*6-211 Reporting Violations to LEC*

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

*6-220 Respecting Fundamental Rights of All Parties Involved*

When LEC must act against an AACC member, it shall take care to maintain respect for the member's rights and reputation. The entire membership shall support 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, 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.

*6-230 LEC Duties Toward the Complainant*

Toward the complainant, 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.

*6-240 LEC Duties Toward the Complainees*

Toward the complainees, LEC will honor his or her right to be heard and defend against allegations, will protect the complainees' 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. LEC will always pursue the most just result, avoiding the extremes of minimized justice or excessive sanction.

**PR6-300 Membership Response to LEC Action***6-310 Commitment to Cooperate with Ethics Process*

AACC members assist the Association to honor and help enforce these ethical standards and rules. All members of the AACC shall cooperate fully and in a timely way with LEC and the entire

ethics mission to assure the best achievement of our core commitment to excellence and unity in Christian counseling.

*6-311 Failure to Cooperate with Ethics Process*

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

**VII. PROCEDURES FOR THE ADJUDICATION OF COMPLAINTS  
AGAINST AACC MEMBERS**

***PR7-100 General Rules of LEC Operation***

*7-110 Making and Amending Rules and Procedures*

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 National Advisory Board. No new or amended rule shall adversely affect the rights of a member under investigation by LEC at the time of the rules adoption.

*7-111 Choice of Procedures and Action*

Except as otherwise denoted in these ethics and rules, 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, and its members.

*7-120 LEC Meetings and Officers*

*7-121 Frequency of Meeting and Quorum*

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 LEC when its members respond in person, by phone, by fax, by letter, or any other agreed means of action.

*7-122 Selection of Officers and Sub-committees*

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

*7-123 Duties of the Chairperson and the Vice-chair*

The Chairperson of 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 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.

*7-124 Majority Rule*

Unless otherwise directed by these rules (see section 7-110 above), all official actions of LEC shall be authorized by a majority vote of its members present, or by any other authorized means of voting (see 7-121).

*7-130 Open vs. Confidential LEC Process*

LEC meetings and activities shall be either open to the membership 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 members or others deserve confidential process. All other LEC meetings may be open to any interested member.

*7-131 Access to Closed Meetings*

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.

*7-132 Open vs. Confidential Records*

Except to inform the membership 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 LEC. This may be further accepted in cases where client-parishioner risk or risk to the public welfare is judged by LEC to be significant. All other proceedings and records of LEC action shall be open to the membership.

***PR7-200 Ethical Complaint Procedures***

*7-210 Reception of a Complaint.*

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

*7-211 LEC (Sua Sponte) Action.*

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

*7-220 Procedure for Making a Complaint*

Members shall contact 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.

*7-221 Unacceptable Complaints.*

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

*7-222 Multiple Complaints*

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

*7-230 Warning Against Frivolous and Vindictive Complaints*

AACC members 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.

***PR7-300 Complaint Assessment and Initial Action by LEC***

*7-310 Inability to Take Further Action*

Failure of any one of the following standards shall render LEC unable to take further action against an AACC member. If it is dismissed, LEC shall so rule, the complainant notified of LEC's decision, and the matter closed.

*7-311 Lack of Jurisdiction*

LEC shall first determine whether it has jurisdiction. Personal jurisdiction is met if the complaint is directed toward a member in good standing of the AACC. Subject matter jurisdiction is met when the alleged wrongdoing of a member, acting in a professional-ministerial capacity, intersects the standards of this code.

*7-312 Insufficient Information to Act Further*

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 LEC's judgment, it cannot be dismissed.

*7-313 Failure of Procedure or Time Limits*

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

*7-320 Cause for Further Action.*

If, in LEC's judgment, the standard of section 7-310 and following 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.

*7-321 LEC May Seek Informal Resolution of the Matter.*

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 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.

*7-330 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 LEC. This letter and a copy of the applicable ethics and rules shall be delivered to the complainee by mail or in person by LEC.

*7-331 Requests for Additional Information.*

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

*7-332 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.

*7-340 Case Closure for Insufficient Evidence.*

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

*7-341 Reopening a Closed Case*

A case closed for insufficient evidence may be reopened upon the receipt of new evidence significant enough (as defined by section 7-310 ff. above) to justify reopening the matter within a reasonable time from the reception of the original complaint.

*7-342 Alternative/Supplementary Action May Be Recommended*

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.

*7-350 Case Resolution by Mutual Agreement.*

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, LEC will seek to resolve the matter in a way that serves the best interests of both the AACC and its members.

*7-351 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.

### *7-360 Cause for Formal Case Review*

If the matter cannot be closed or resolved as defined above and in the judgment of LEC sufficient cause exists to pursue the matter further, 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.

## ***PR7-400 Formal Case Review Procedures***

### *7-410 Selection and Operation of Case Review Sub-committee*

LEC shall form a three-person sub-committee (sub-com), chaired by the Chair or Vice-chair, to hear and resolve a formal ethics complaint. This sub-com 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. Sub-com recommendations shall be forwarded to and accepted by LEC when 2 votes of the sub-com exist.

#### *7-411 Presentation of a Charge Letter*

The complainee shall receive a formal charge letter from 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 LEC will use to assist its review shall be copied and sent with the letter.

#### *7-412 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 time frame. 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.

### *7-420 Documentation, Review of the Evidence, and Recommendations*

Additional documentation may be sent to LEC by the complainee within the 30-day period. LEC will, within this 30-day period, forward any additional information it receives to the complainee. 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 LEC by the sub-com and the appropriate parties notified of this decision.

#### *7-421 Recommendation to Dismiss Charges*

If the sub-com 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 LEC dismiss the charge(s).

#### *7-422 Recommendation to Educate and Repair*

If the sub-com 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.

#### *7-423 Recommendation to Reprimand and Suspend*

If the sub-com 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 LEC reprimand and suspend the member, with instructions for possible reinstatement. Such action, and the violations related to it, will be communicated to AACC members in official publications.

#### *7-424 Recommendation to Terminate Membership*

If the sub-com 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 LEC that membership in the AACC be terminated. Such action, and the violations related to it, will be communicated to AACC members in official publications.

*7-425 Agreed Resignation of Member*

A member of the AACC may elect to resign his or her membership, or LEC may elect to offer such resignation to the member prior to termination of membership. Such action, and the violations related to it, will be communicated to AACC members in official publications.

*7-430 Final Ruling of the Law and Ethics Committee*

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

*7-431 Limited Discretion to Modify Sub-committee Recommendations*

LEC shall retain limited discretion to modify the recommendations of the sub-com 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.

***PR7-500 Formal Appeal Hearing Procedures***

*7-510 Complainee Election of Formal Appeal—Termination Cases Only*

Appeal of rulings by LEC shall be allowed only in case of termination of AACC membership.

*7-511 Time and Documentation*

Both 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 LEC and the complainee.

*7-512 LEC Represented by the Chair or Vice-chair*

LEC shall be represented by the Chair or Vice-chair of 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.

*7-520 Standards and Conduct of the Formal Appeal Hearing*

There shall 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.

*7-521 The Appeals Panel*

Appeals shall be heard by a five-person panel, consisting of the LEC Chair or Vice-chair (whoever is not representing 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 from the National Advisory Board.

*7-522 The Appeals Standard—Unjust Result*

The appellate panel must rule against the termination of membership if the complainee can show substantial evidence that (1) the sub-com 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.

*7-523 Representation by Self or with Legal Counsel*

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

*7-524 Retention of Legal Counsel by the AACC*

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

*7-530 Final Order of the Appeals Panel*

The appeals panel shall rule, by at least 3 votes, either to uphold the prior LEC ruling or to reverse it. Upholding the rule will end the matter for the AACC. A reversal will lead to a dismissal of the prior ruling and an order for a new case review hearing with at least 2 new panel members on the sub-committee.

## **VIII. PROCEDURES FOLLOWING ACTION BY CHURCHES, COURTS, AND OTHER BODIES**

### ***PR8-100 LEC Authorized to Act Independently or With Others***

#### *8-110 Litigation, License Revocation, or Other Disciplinary Action Not a Bar to Action by LEC*

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

#### *8-111 LEC Election to Stay Process Pending Resolution*

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 LEC shall not waive jurisdiction and any time constraints shall be suspended until the action is begun or resumed.

#### *8-112 Retention and Referral of Jurisdiction to Other Bodies*

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 LEC, nor shall LEC be barred from acting on its own following referral.

### ***PR8-200 Bases for and Procedure of a Show Cause Hearing***

#### *8-210 Five Bases for a Show Cause Hearing*

An AACC member may be directed by LEC to show cause why official action by 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.

#### *8-220 Notice by LEC and Response of Member*

Upon receipt from LEC of a show cause letter, the member will have 30 days from the letter date in which to respond. The member may show cause based on either the unjust result standard (see section 7-522 above), or the lack of due process in the other proceeding.

#### *8-230 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 membership will be made based on the finding of the prior proceeding.

#### *8-231 Stipulated Resignations*

The AACC and the member may stipulate and agree on the resignation of the member. Whether termination or resignation, the result will be published in official AACC publications.

#### *8-240 Final Order of the Law and Ethics Committee*

Recommendations for case disposition shall be heard and accepted by 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 LEC in a show cause hearing shall be final, with no consequent appeal.

## **FINAL ENCOURAGEMENT**

May God be exalted, the Holy Spirit invited, and Jesus Christ be seen in all of our counseling and helping endeavors. If done, our clients and parishioners will be blessed and not harmed, their wounds will be healed, their sins forgiven, and they will be given hope for the future. If done, we will participate in a wonderful adventure—one that will likely never grow old or stale—and we will fulfill our call to excellence and ethical integrity in Christian counseling.

*End of the 2004 Final Code*