

# **American Association of Christian Counselors**

\*\*\*\*\*

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

\*\*\*\*\*

### **Y-2023 Code of Ethics**

**Developed by the**

**AACC Law and Ethics Committee**

---

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The American Association of Christian Counselors (AACC) would like to recognize the following individuals for their time, diligence, contributions, and professional expertise given to the AACC regarding the Y-2023 *Code of Ethics for Christian Counselors*:

### ***Executive Draft Committee***

- Timothy E. Clinton, Ed.D., President, AACC
- Ronald E. Hawkins, Ed.D., Vice President for Professional Development, AACC
- Mercy Connors, Ph.D.
- David Jenkins, Psy.D.
- Jeanneane Maxon, J.D.
- Mark Camper, B.S.

### ***Executive Review Committee***

Matthew Stanford, Ph.D.

John Thomas, Ph.D., Ph.D.

Ian Jones, Ph.D.

Gregg Jantz, Ph.D.

Lynelle Buchanan, Ph.D.

David King, DSW

Shannae Anderson, Ph.D.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface to the Y-2023 Final Code .....	6
Applicability of the Code .....	7
Introduction and Mission .....	7
Biblical and Ethical Foundations of the AACC Ethics Code .....	10
I. Ethical Standards .....	11
<b>ES1-000: A Judeo-Christian Worldview – Practicing through Faith and Values</b> .....	11
ES1-010: Affirming Human Worth and Dignity .....	11
ES1-020: An Orientation of Beneficence.....	12
<b>ES1-100: Compassion in Christian Counseling – A Call to Service</b> .....	12
ES1-110: No Harm or Exploitation Allowed .....	12
ES1-120: Refusal to Participate in Potentially Harmful Actions of Clients .....	13
ES1-130: Sexual Misconduct Forbidden.....	14
ES1-140: Dual and Multiple Relationships .....	15
<b>ES1-200: Competence in Christian Counseling – A Call to Excellence</b> .....	17
ES1-210: Honoring the Call to Competent Christian Counseling .....	17
ES1-220: Responsibility to Maintain Expertise .....	17
ES1-230: Maintaining Integrity in Work, Reports, and Relationships.....	19
ES1-240: Duties to Consult and/or Refer .....	19
ES1-250: Christian Counselor Self-care .....	20
<b>ES1-300: Consent in Christian Counseling – A Call to Integrity</b> .....	21
ES1-310: Securing Informed Consent .....	21
ES1-320: Consent in the Structure and Process of Counseling.....	21
ES1-330: Consent for Biblical and Spiritual Practices in Counseling.....	22
ES1-340: Special Consent for More Difficult Interventions .....	22
ES1-350: Changes in the Counselor’s Role .....	22
<b>ES1-400: Confidentiality in Christian Counseling – A Call to Trustworthiness</b> .....	23
ES1-410: Maintaining Client Confidentiality .....	23
ES1-420: Asserting Confidentiality or Privilege Following Demands for Disclosure .....	23
ES1-430: Protecting Persons from Deadly Harm – The Rule of Mandatory Disclosure ....	24
ES1-440: Disclosure for Supervision, Consultation, Teaching, Preaching, and Publication .....	25
ES1-450: Maintaining Privacy and Preserving Client Records.....	25
ES1-460: Advocacy for Privacy Rights Against Intrusive Powers .....	25
<b>ES1-500: Cultural Regard in Christian Counseling – A Call to Dignity</b> .....	25
ES1-510: Affirming the Worth and Value of Others .....	25
ES1-520: Cultural Competency.....	25
ES1-530: Working with Persons of Different Faiths, Religions, and Values .....	26
ES1-540: Cultural Sensitivity .....	26

ES1-550: Action if Value Differences Interfere with Counseling.....	26
<b>ES1-600: Case Management in Christian Counseling – A Call to Soundness .....</b>	<b>26</b>
ES1-610: Treatment Planning.....	26
ES1-620: Case Notes and Proper Record-keeping .....	27
ES1-630: Working with Couples, Families, and Groups .....	27
ES1-640: Continuity of Care and Service Interruption .....	28
<b>ES1-700: Collegiality in Christian Counseling – A Call to Relationship.....</b>	<b>29</b>
ES1-710: Relationships in the Professional and Ministerial Workplace .....	29
ES1-720: Christian Counselors as Employers .....	30
ES1-730: Christian Counselors as Employees.....	30
ES1-740: Base Standards for Educators and Supervisors.....	31
ES1-750: Specific Standards for Counselor Education Programs.....	32
ES1-760: Specific Standards for Counselor Supervision Programs .....	34
<b>ES1-800: Community Presence in Christian Counseling – A Call to Humility .....</b>	<b>35</b>
ES1-810: Advertising and Public Relations.....	35
ES1-820: Statements in Public Communications .....	35
ES1-830: Communication of Association with the AACC and Other Groups .....	35
ES1-840: Communication of Work Products and Training Materials .....	35
ES1-850: Testimonials .....	36
ES1-860: Guidelines in Public Statements by Others.....	36
ES1-870: Ethical Relationships with the State and Other Social Systems.....	36
ES1-880: Writing and Publication Ethics in Christian Counseling .....	36
ES1-890: Ethical Standards for Christian Counseling Researchers.....	37
<b>II. Use of Technology and Technology-related Applications .....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>ES2-000: Additional Ethical Standards in the Use of Technology.....</b>	<b>40</b>
ES2-010: Technology Orientation.....	40
<b>ES2-100: Core Ethical Standards in the Use of Technology .....</b>	<b>40</b>
ES2-110: Compassion in Technology Applications.....	40
ES2-120: Competence in Technology Applications.....	41
ES2-130: Consent in Technology Applications .....	42
ES2-140: Confidentiality in Technology Applications.....	42
ES2-150: Cultural Regard in Technology Applications .....	43
ES2-160: Case Management in Technology Applications .....	43
ES2-170: Collegiality in Technology Applications.....	43
ES2-180: Community Presence in Technology Applications.....	43
<b>III. Additional Ethical Standards for Licensed Christian Counselors.....</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>ES3-000: Definitions and Roles of Licensed Christian Counselors .....</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>ES3-100: Fees, Client Billing, and Financial Relationships .....</b>	<b>44</b>
ES3-110: Setting Fees .....	44
<b>ES3-200: Third-party Payers and Managed Care Entities .....</b>	<b>45</b>
ES3-210: Relationship with Managed Care .....	45

<b>ES3-300: Testing, Assessment, and Clinical Evaluation</b> .....	45
ES3-310: General Parameters .....	45
<b>IV. Additional Ethical Standards for Pastors and Pastoral Counselors</b> .....	47
<b>ES4-000: Definitions and Roles of Pastors and Pastoral Counselors</b> .....	47
ES4-010: The Specialized Pastoral Counselor .....	47
ES4-020: Rules of Ethics Code Application and Exemption .....	47
ES4-030: Accepting Fees or Communicating False Roles .....	47
<b>V. Additional Ethical Standards for Life Coaches</b> .....	48
<b>ES5-000: Definitions and Roles of Life Coaches</b> .....	48
ES5:010: Rules of Ethics Code Application and Exemption .....	48
ES5:020: Life Coaches Under the Supervision of the Church.....	48
ES5:030: Accepting Fees .....	48
ES5:040: Communicating False Roles .....	49
<b>VI. Additional Ethical Standards for Lay Counselors/Peer Coaches</b> .....	50
<b>ES6-000: Definitions and Roles of Lay Counselors/Peer Coaches</b> .....	50
ES6-010: Rules of Ethics Code Application and Exemption .....	50
ES6-020: Lay Counselors/Peer Coaches Under Supervision of the Church.....	50
ES6-030: Accepting Fees or Communicating False Roles .....	50
<b>VII. Standards for Resolving Ethical-Legal Conflicts</b> .....	51
<b>ES7-000: Base Standards for Ethical Conflict Resolution</b> .....	51
ES7-010: Base Rules for Resolving Ethical-Legal Conflicts .....	51
ES7-020: Attempting First to Harmonize Conflicting Interests .....	51
ES7-030: When Conflict Cannot Be Harmonized .....	51
<b>VIII. Procedural Rules</b> .....	52
<b>PR8-000: Authority, Jurisdiction, and Operation of the AACC Law &amp; Ethics</b>	
<b>Committee (LEC)</b> .....	52
PR8-010: Mission, Authority, and Jurisdiction of the LEC .....	52
<b>PR8-100: General Orientation to Ethical Enforcement</b> .....	53
PR8-110: Attitude and Action Toward Ethical Complaints .....	53
<b>PR8-200: Credential Holder, CCN Member, and AACC Member Response to</b>	
<b>LEC Action</b> .....	53
PR8-210: Commitment to Cooperate with Ethics Process.....	53
<b>IX. Summary</b> .....	55

## Preface to the Y-2023 Final Code

Welcome to the Y-2023 I revision of the *AACC Christian Counseling Code of Ethics* (herein referred to as the **Code**). This edition of the **Code revises** 1998, 2000, 2001, 2003, and 2014 Provisional **Codes**, and **supersedes** and **replaces** those versions of the **Code** in their entirety.

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

Work on this **Code** has been continuous for nearly 30 years, since the AACC created the Law and Ethics Committee in 1993. The 2023 **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, Korean, and Dutch languages. We prayerfully believe the revised 2023 **Code** will provide a solid foundation for a worldwide statement of Christian counseling ethics and the basis of a 21<sup>st</sup> century global standard for Christian counseling care.

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

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

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

Sincerely,

Mercy Connors, Ph.D., LPC-S

## APPLICABILITY OF THE CODE

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

Ethics can be viewed as *values in action* or the practical rules and boundaries that guide our professional and ministry behavior. These values reflect a Christian faith based on the highest values, that is, love God and love others. Laws can be viewed as *codified ethics*, which are deemed so important by the state or federal government that they have attached civil and criminal penalties when these rules are violated.

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

## INTRODUCTION AND MISSION

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

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

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

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

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

- a. the mounting evidence of unprofessional and incompetent practices among Christian counselors, including increasing complaints of client-parishioner harm;
- b. the largely unprotected legal status of Christian counseling, including growing state

scrutiny, excessive litigation, and unrelenting legalization of professional ethics; and

- c. the vitality and growing maturity of Christian counseling, including its many models and approaches, indicate the need for an overarching ethical template to guide the ongoing development of biblical and empirically-sound Christian counseling models.

This **Code, beyond** defining the boundaries of ethical practice, affirmatively educates counselors in the direction of becoming helpers of ethical excellence, capable of more consistently securing the best counseling outcomes. The **Code** provides information relevant to Bible-based psychological practice and education, enables practitioners to keep pace with time-honored and historical ethical practices, incorporates relevant legal, statutory, leadership, or regulatory issues, and allows practitioners to maintain, develop, and increase competencies to improve services to the public and contributions to the profession generally. Four streams of influence are evident:

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

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

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

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

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

This **Code** defines biblically-based values and universal behavioral standards for ethical Christian counseling. The intent is for it to become a core document by which Christian counselors, clients, and the church oversee and evaluate Christian counselors and counseling values, goals, processes,



and effectiveness. Furthermore, the **Code** asserts a Christian counseling standard of care that invites respect and application by the regulatory bodies of church and state, other professions, the courts, insurance and managed care groups, and society.

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

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

Concerning language, in the **Code** the term “client” refers to clients, patients, congregants, parishioners, or helpees. “Counselor” is a generic reference to licensed professional, pastoral, coaching, and lay helpers.

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

The Y-2023 **Code** revision maintains formatting changes made in the previous edition to first define ethical standards that pertain to the entire continuum of counselors and helpers and to then break out specific individual sections that pertain first to licensed practitioners and then to ministry-based helpers (e.g., pastors, pastoral counselors, chaplains, life coaches and lay/peer helpers). This is being done due to ongoing confusion across the continuum and to better follow the logic of the IBCC’s credentialing mission and parameters.

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

- **Compassion** in Christian Counseling – A Call to **Service**
- **Competence** in Christian Counseling – A Call to **Excellence**
- **Consent** in Christian Counseling – A Call to **Integrity**
- **Confidentiality** in Christian Counseling – A Call to **Trustworthiness**
- **Cultural Regard** in Christian Counseling – A Call to **Dignity**
- **Case Management** in Christian Counseling – A Call to **Soundness**

- **Collegiality** in Christian Counseling – A Call to **Relationship**
- **Community Presence** in Christian Counseling – A Call to **Humility**

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

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

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

**1<sup>st</sup> FOUNDATION:** *Jesus Christ—and His revelation in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible as the inspired Word of God—is the pre-eminent model for Christian counseling practice, ethics, caregiving activities, and the final authority for all matters about which it speaks.*

**2<sup>nd</sup> FOUNDATION:** *Christian counseling maintains a committed, intimate, and dedicated relationship with the worldwide church and individual counselors with a local body of believers.*

**3<sup>rd</sup> FOUNDATION:** *Christian counseling, at its best, is a Spirit-led process of change, transformation, and growth, geared to help others mature in Christ by the skillful synthesis of counselor-assisted spiritual, psychosocial, familial, bio-medical, behavioral, 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 and goodwill for everyone encountered.*

**5<sup>th</sup> FOUNDATION:** *Christian counselors accord the highest respect to a biblical revelation regarding the sanctity and defense of human life, the dignity of human personhood, and the sanctity of marriage and family life.*

**6<sup>th</sup> FOUNDATION:** *The biblical and constitutional rights to Religious Freedom, Free Speech, and Free Association protect Christian counselors’ public identity and the explicit incorporation of spiritual practices into all forms of counseling and intervention.*

**7<sup>th</sup> FOUNDATION:** *Christian counselors are mindful of their representation of Christ and His church as Ambassadors of Reconciliation and are dedicated to honoring their commitments and obligations in all social and professional relationships.*

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

## **ETHICAL STANDARDS**

### **I. ETHICAL STANDARDS FOR ALL CHRISTIAN COUNSELORS**

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

This **Code**, and all who follow it, incorporates a Judeo-Christian worldview and meta-ethic, one that is derived from both special revelation (recognizing that the Bible and Jesus Christ are God’s Word) and general revelation (acknowledging that science and the great arts of humanity also speak a certain measure of truth) as revealed in the 66 books of the Holy Bible and the created order (Romans 1:20). Christian counselors are rooted in this Revelation and consider the Bible to be the final authoritative basis for faith, values, and all ethics and interventions.

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

Christian counselors recognize and uphold the inherent, God-given worth and dignity of every human person, from the preborn to those on death’s bed. Human beings are God’s creation and, consequently, are due all the God-given rights, respect, and ordered logic that this fact of creation entails. We believe that all matters of faith and conduct must be evaluated on the basis of Holy Scripture, which is our infallible guide (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Since the Holy Bible speaks to the nature of human beings, it is imperative that we correctly abide by what the Bible teaches on these matters.

Therefore, Christian counselors express respectful, professional care toward any consenting client under the direct care of the Christian counselor, the service-inquiring person seeking care from the Christian counselor, or anyone encountered in the course of practice or ministry, without regard to race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status, age, disability, marital status, education, occupation, denomination, belief system, values, or political affiliation. God’s love is unconditional and His grace boundless. At this level of concern, so must the Christian practitioner provide care informed by the teachings of the Bible and Jesus Christ’s example of care toward others.

In this manner, Christian counselors will continue to help individuals to the best of their ability while in their care. A Christian counselor will not abandon a client for any reason but will make all efforts to provide counseling, care, and help to an individual at the level of competency that the counselor is able until that individual is in the position to be in the care of another counselor.

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

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

In this regard, Christian counselors will continue “to do good” throughout all stages of the counseling process from initiation to termination. The Christian counselor shall make every effort to complete the stages of counseling to the best of their ability and aid the helpee in making informed decisions about their own care. The counselor is never to abandon a helpee in any stage of the counseling process but to do their best to complete the stages of counseling through the most competent and ethical means possible.

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

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

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

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

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

Christian counselors strictly avoid all behavior or suggestion of practice that harms or reasonably could harm clients, client families, client social systems and representatives, students, trainees, supervisees, employees, colleagues, and third-party payers and authorizers. In this regard, Christian counselors’ behavior should remain above reproach and Christ-like in the way that the client’s needs are above the wants and desires of the counselor.

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

Christian counselors acknowledge that client conflicts are unavoidable and attempt to resolve all counseling conflicts in the client’s best interest. Counselors tempted to do something that could hurt someone as a secondary result from their choice of words, shall seek out consultative and restorative help. If a counselor is unable to maintain self-control and client harm is unavoidable, counselors shall consider making an appropriate referral in the client’s best interest.

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

Christian counselors take appropriate action against the harmful behavior of other counselors and pastors. They will act assertively to challenge or expose those who

exploit others, especially those who are most vulnerable and/or at risk, and protect clients against harm wherever it is found, taking care to honor and support client decision-making regarding curative action against violators.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

***1-120-f: Application to Sexuality and Sexual Behavior***

Christian counselors do not condone or advocate for the pursuit of or active involvement in lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBTQ+) behaviors, identities, and lifestyles. Counselors may agree to and support client autonomy to work through issues of LGBTQ+ identity and attractions, but will not describe or reduce human identity to primarily or only the sexual self and will encourage sexual celibacy or biblically-prescribed sexual behavior while such issues are being addressed. Counselors acknowledge the client's fundamental right to self-determination and further understand that clients' deeply held religious values and beliefs may conflict with same-sex attraction and/or behavior. Counselors must not abandon their clients should they decide to live by and live out LGBTQ+ identities and lifestyles. Before making a values-based referral, Counselors must first consider the type of counseling requested, competence, scope of practice, informed consent, and any other relevant ethical factors.

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

Christian counselors do not condone or advocate for active forms of euthanasia and assisted suicide, but may agree to and support the wish not to prolong life by artificial means and will often advocate for hospice care, more effective application of medicine, and other reasonable means to reduce pain and suffering. Regarding patients or clients who wish to die, counselors will not deliver, advocate for, or support the use of medications or devices to be utilized for the purpose of ending a client's life. The counselor is free to support, collaborate, and advocate for medical intervention(s) and with medical professionals for pain management in accordance with sound medical practice, and with the informed consent of the patient or the patient's authorized representative.

**1-130: Sexual Misconduct Forbidden**

Christian counselors refrain from all forms of sexual misconduct with clients in professional, pastoral, coaches, or lay relationships and view such behavior as unethical and forbidden. This includes any kind of sexual exploitation, abuse, deception, manipulation, harassment, relationships where sexual involvement is invited, and relationships where informed consent presumably exists. Due to the inherent power imbalance of helping relationships, as well as biblical principles related to sexual behavior outside of marriage, such apparent consent is considered illusory and illegitimate. Forbidden sexual activities and deceptions include, but are not limited to: (1) direct sexual touch or contact; (2) seductive sexual speech or non-verbal behavior; (3) solicitation of sexual or romantic relations; (4) erotic contact or behavior as a response to the

sexual invitation or seductive behavior of clients; (5) unnecessary questioning and/or excessive probing into the client's sexual history and practices; (6) inappropriate counselor disclosures of client attractiveness, sexual opinions, or sexual humor; (7) advocacy of counselor-client sexual relations; (8) secretive sexual communications and anonymous virtual interaction via the Internet, sexting or other electronic and informational means; (9) sexual harassment by comments, touch, or promises/threats of special action; and (10) sexual misconduct as defined by all applicable laws, ethics, and church, organizational, or practice policies.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

wherever possible. More information can be found in the Guidance Documents.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Christian counselors avoid providing counseling to fellow church members with whom they have close personal, business, or shared ministry relations. Dual relationships with any other church members who are clients are potentially troublesome and best avoided, otherwise requiring justification. Pastors and church staff helpers should take all reasonable precautions to limit the adverse impact of any dual relationships. More information on this may be found in the Guidance Documents.

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

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



pursue another form of relationship.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Christian counselors do not offer services or work beyond the limits of their competence or scope of practice (i.e., education, knowledge, training, and professional/ministerial experience) and do not aid or abet the work of Christian counseling by untrained, unqualified or unethical practitioners or helpers. Christian counselors should seek out training in the area in which they wish to minister or help.

### **1-220: Responsibility to Maintain Expertise**

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

#### ***1-220-a: Competency***

Christian counseling competency levels and expectations will be subject to each individual based on their specific designation, which are: licensed counselor, pastor or pastoral counselor, life coach, or lay counselor/ peer coach. Licensed counselors remain competent in the areas required by the state licensing board by which the license is held. Each board has specific competency requirements that are subject to change, so counselors must review state licensing board requirements for these competency areas on a regular basis. Pastors and pastoral counselors must remain competent in pastoral ministry. For life coaches, each individual should continue to stay informed of advancements in the area of life coaching. Lay counselors/ peer

coaches should continue to advance their skills in counseling and coaching.

For every Christian counselor, it is important to remain competent in the areas of addictions, diversity, multicultural issues, trauma-informed care, integration of psychology and theology, abuse and domestic violence, health and wellness, neuroscience, mental health and the church, and spiritual formation. Remaining current on these subjects can be done through continuing education.

### ***1-220-b: Continuing Education***

Continuing education for all Christian counseling designations will differ depending on the individual's credentials. For Licensed counselors, state boards determine which continuing education units count toward licensure renewal. It is imperative that licensed counselors continuously check with their specific state boards to determine how to attain the correct continuing education for their specific license. If a licensed counselor, pastor, pastoral counselor, life coach, or lay counseling/peer coach holds any type of credential or license, this individual is required to maintain that credential through continuing education as stated by the credentialing body. Please review the credentialing board's requirements on a regular basis.

Additionally, as a Christian counselor, continuing education in the areas referred to in the previous section can be attained through multiple avenues, such as books, Webinars, conferences, and other such methods of study, but may not adhere to state licensing board standards or other credentials standards. This Christian counselor may determine it necessary to engage in these continuing education activities without the board's consent but to further their own therapeutic repertoire. Advancements in the field of Christian counseling are happening rapidly, and all Christian counselors must stay up to date on the latest techniques, skills, research, and empirically-based treatment modalities.

### ***1-220-c: Credentials***

Each Christian counselor who has credentials from any credentialing body must maintain that credential through renewal and adhere to the rules and regulations of that credential while it is held. For licensed counselors, their state board credential is governed by that state board and not another entity. Licensed counselors must continue to adhere to rules and regulations adopted by the state board as long as they continue to hold their licenses. If a licensed counselor allows their state credential to lapse or remain inactive, it is imperative that the counselor announce this to their clients since the counselor is no longer legally able to practice under the license. Furthermore, the counselor must remove any mention of the credential from all advertisements, social media accounts, websites, or other forms of explanation of the counselor's work.

If a Christian counselor has other credentials, such as with the IBCC, the counselor must maintain that credential through renewal and adhere to the rules and regulations of that credential while it is held. Information for this credential can be found at <https://ibccglobal.com>. If a counselor allows the credential to lapse or remain inactive, they must inform their clients of this change since the counselor is no longer practicing under the credential. Furthermore, the counselor must remove any mention of the credential from all advertisements, social media accounts,

websites, or other forms of explanation of the counselor's work.

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

Christian counselors maintain the highest standards of integrity in all their work, in professional reports, and all professional relationships. Counselors delegate to employees, supervisees, and other subordinates only work they can competently perform to meet the client's best interests, and this work is performed with appropriate supervision.

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

Christian counselors consult with and/or refer to competent colleagues, supervisors and other resources when their limits of counseling competence or effectiveness are reached as described by the following: (1) when facing issues not dealt with before or not experienced in handling; (2) when clients need further help outside the scope of one's training, practice and expertise; (3) when either counselor or clients are feeling stuck in the therapeutic process or confused about counseling goals and neither party is clear about how to proceed; (4) when clients are deteriorating or making no realistic gain over a number of sessions; (5) when clients present an actual or imminent danger to harm themselves (e.g., severe depression, suicidal intent/behaviors, running away, excessive substance abuse, severe eating disorders, etc.); (6) when clients present an actual or imminent danger to others (e.g., extreme hostility, aggression, violence or threats thereof); (7) when clients experience a marked decline in the ability to care for themselves and function in day-to-day life, whether at home, school or in the workplace setting; (8) when the client's excessive alcohol or substance abuse/dependence will require detoxification; (9) when the client's reality testing is severely impaired to the extent that judgment, orientation, emotions, and/or memory is disordered (e.g., delusions, visual/auditory hallucinations, dissociation, severe bipolar cycles, etc.); (10) when there is a strong transference or countertransference dynamic that seems at an impasse despite attempts to address the issue; (11) when the possibility of a dual relationship exists or arises; and (12) when the client asks for a referral to another counselor or caregiver.

***1-240-a: Consultation Practice***

Christian counselors seek consultation when counseling help is needed, and secondly, to improve the helper's knowledge and skill where some competence already exists. Counselors shall take all reasonable action to apply consultative help to the case to gain/maintain reasonable progress toward client objectives. The consultant shall maintain a balanced concern for the client discussed and the practice/education needs of the consultee, directing the counselor-consultee to further training or special resources, if needed.

***1-240-b: Referral Practice***

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

**1-240-c: Seeking Christian Help, If Available**

When consultation and referral services that advocate and support a Judeo-Christian worldview are requested by the client, Christian counselors first seek out the best faith-based help available at a higher level of knowledge, skill, and expertise. If Christian-oriented help is unavailable, or when professional skill is more important than the practitioner's religious beliefs and values, counselors shall use the entire network of professional services.

**1-240-d: Procedures for Referrals based on Counselor Values and Beliefs**

Christian counselors are aware of their deeply held religious beliefs and values and how to competently use them when providing client services. Christian counselors are also aware of their limits of competence and scope of practice. When counselors learn that clients' goals for counseling conflict with counselors' values and beliefs, but are within counselors' competence and scope of practice, Christian counselors consider steps to resolve the conflict so that competent counseling can continue. Such steps may include, but are not limited to, bracketing, reaching consensus with clients, seeking consultation/supervision, or personal growth. However, if the conflict also involves counselor competence and/or scope of practice and alternatives to resolve that conflict are unsuccessful or unworkable, Christian counselors may then make an ethical referral to another practitioner.

**1-240-e: Avoid Counsel against Professional Treatment**

Christian counselors view clients holistically, including biological, psychological, sociological, and spiritual dimensions, and help clients utilize the best care available. Thus, they do not counsel or advise against professional counseling, medical or psychiatric treatment, the use of medications, legal counsel, or other forms of professional service merely because they believe such practice is wrong or because the provider may not have a Christian orientation.

**1-240-f: Aiding and Abetting Unauthorized Practice**

Licensed counselors, pastoral counselors, life coaches, and lay counselors/peer coaches do not aid and abet the practice of unlicensed, untrained, unqualified, or unethical counseling or lay helping by anyone. In counseling situations requiring help clearly beyond the scope, training, experience, or license required of the helper, appropriate consultation and/or referral should be pursued. For more information on the referral process, please see section ES1-100: Compassion in Christian Counseling – A Call to Service.

**1-250: Christian Counselor Self-care**

Christian counselors strive to maintain optimal spiritual, psychological, relational, and physical health through biblically, professionally, and personally appropriate means of self-care as part of their service to clients. Christian counselors acknowledge that sin, illnesses, mental disorders, interpersonal crises, distress, and self-deception influence personal well-being and practice and that these problems can adversely affect clients and parishioners. When the personal problems of the counselor have the potential to harm their clients, Christian counselors will seek redemptive and restorative self-care until they are able to offer competent, ethical service to

others. They refrain from or reduce those particular professional-ministerial activities that are, or could be, harmful.

**1-250-a: Accountability**

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

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

The fundamental right of client self-determination based on the principle of autonomy is a foundational pillar for counselors and their clients. Consent allows the counselor to operate transparently and with integrity and for the client to make an informed and voluntary decision to engage in the helping process. More information is given in the Client's Rights document, which is a part of the Guidance Documents.

**1-310: Securing Informed Consent**

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

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

Christian counselors respect the need for informed consent regarding the structure and process of counseling. At the onset of counseling, counselors and clients should discuss and agree upon the following: (1) the nature and course of counseling, including expectations; (2) client issues and goals; (3) potential problems and risks, as well as reasonable alternatives to counseling; (4) reasons for referral when in the best interest of the client; (5) counselor status and credentials (if the counselor is under supervision, that fact shall be disclosed and the supervisor's name and role indicated to the client); (5) confidentiality and its limits; (6) fees and financial procedures; (8) limitations about time and access to the counselor, including directions in emergency situations; and (9) procedures for resolution of disputes and misunderstandings.

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

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

consent is required, Christian counselors are clear regarding the boundaries of client confidentiality with clients and guardians.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Christian counselors obtain close or special consent for more difficult and potentially controversial practices. These include, but are not limited to: (1) deliverance and spiritual warfare activities; (2) cult deprogramming work; (3) recovering memories and the treatment of past abuse or trauma; (4) the use of hypnosis and any kind of induction of altered states; (5) prescribing by medical doctors) medications, electro-convulsive therapy, or patient restraints; and (6) the use of aversive, involuntary, or experimental therapies. The previously listed interventions require a more detailed discussion with clients and/or client representatives regarding specific procedures, risks, and treatment alternatives, and a detailed written consent agreement for the procedure should be obtained.

**1-340-a: Faith-based Values and Beliefs**

Christian counselors honor the autonomy of clients and foster self-determination. They also value the necessity of counselor authenticity and congruence as vital aspects of the counseling relationship. When differences in faith-based values and beliefs of the counselor and client occur, Christian counselors should consider clarifying these in issues involving sexuality and gender identity, unexpected pregnancy/abortion decision-making, and end-of-life considerations, especially when these issues also involve counselor competency and scope of practice. Christian counselors actively seek resolution of client-counselor values conflict so counseling can proceed consistent with principles of autonomy, beneficence, and nonmaleficence. However, if a resolution is not reached or if a resolution is unworkable, an appropriate values-based referral may occur.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**1-420-c: Subpoenas**

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

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

Christian counselors accept the limits of confidentiality when human life is imperiled or abused. Counselors take appropriate action, including necessary disclosures of confidential information, to protect life in the face of client threats (e.g., suicide, homicide, serious bodily harm to others, life-threatening disease, and/or the abuse of children, elders, and dependent persons).

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

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

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

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

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

Action to protect third persons from client violence may involve or—in states that have a third-person protection (*Tarasoff*) duty—require disclosure of imminent harm to the intended victim, to their family or close friends, and to law enforcement. When child abuse, elder abuse or abuse of dependent adults exists, as defined by state law, Christian counselors shall report to child or elder protective services or any designated agency established for protective services as required by applicable law and regulatory requirements. Counselors shall also attempt to defuse the situation and/or take preventive action by whatever means are available and appropriate. When clients threaten serious and imminent homicide or violence against an identifiable third person, counselors shall inform appropriate law enforcement and/or medical crisis personnel and the at-risk person or close family



member of the threat, except when precluded by compelling circumstances or by state law. When the client threat is serious but not imminent, the counselor shall take preventive clinical action that seeks to forestall any further escalation of threat toward violent behavior.

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

Counselors under supervision will disclose that fact to their clients and adequately disguise client identifiers by various means when presenting cases in group or public forums. Christian counselors do not disclose confidential client communications in any supervisory, consultation, teaching, preaching, publishing, or other activity without the client's written or other legal authorization. Counselors do not presume that disguise alone is sufficient client protection but will consider seeking client authorization when the client's identity is hard to conceal.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**1-520: Cultural Competency**

Christian counselors earnestly strive to develop and maintain culturally competent awareness and practices such as, but not limited to: (1) awareness of one's personal worldview and

its impact on the counseling process; (2) knowledge of various cultural practices and worldviews, including those that may conflict with a Judeo-Christian worldview; and (3) cross-cultural sensitivity and skills that enhance the helping process.

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

Counselors work to understand the client's belief system, always maintain respect for the client, strive to understand when faith and values issues are important to the client, and foster values-informed client decision-making in counseling. Counselors share their own faith orientation only as a function of legitimate self-disclosure and when appropriate to client need, always maintaining a posture of humility.

### **1-540: Cultural Sensitivity**

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

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

Christian counselors work to resolve values conflicts with clients—always in the client's best interest—when differences between counselor and client values become too great and hinder or adversely affect the counseling process. This may include: (1) discussion of the issue as a therapeutic matter; (2) renegotiation of the counseling agreement; (3) consultation with a supervisor or trusted colleague or, as a last resort; (4) referral to another counselor if the differences are unworkable or cannot be reduced or bridged,.

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

Comprehensive and thorough case management always considers the whole person—biologically, psychologically, emotionally, cognitively, socially, culturally, relationally, and spiritually. It requires thoughtful and systematic coordination of needed services in the client's best interests, including assessment, diagnosis, treatment planning, care implementation, ongoing therapeutic review, and discharge and aftercare coordination. Soundness for Christian counselors implies the use of evidence-based approaches that also integrate biblical principles across lay/recovery, coaching, pastoral, and licensed counselor levels of care.

### **1-610: Treatment Planning**

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

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

Treatment plans are developed utilizing the following principles: (1) based on the client's presenting problem(s) and/or issue(s); (2) promote a sense of client ownership; (3) incorporate the results of any assessment and diagnostic work; (4) based on client strengths; (5) identify clear treatment goals and parameters with specific objectives; (6) ensure that whenever possible, treatment goals and

objectives are attainable, behavioral, and measurable; (7) are sensitive to sociocultural factors and seek to treat clients within the confines of their worldview; and (8) provide ongoing case review and adjustments as needed.

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

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

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

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

#### ***1-620-b: Records Maintenance and Ownership***

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

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

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

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

Christian counselors maintain their role as fair, unbiased, and effective helpers in all marital, family, partner, and group work, and should remain accessible to all persons, avoiding enmeshed alliances and taking sides unjustly. Counselors also respect the boundary between constructive confrontation and verbal abuse within group, marital/partner, and family relationships, and will take reasonable precautions to protect client members from any physical, psychological, emotional or verbal abuse from other members, which shall be stated in the intake session.

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

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

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

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

In a setting where a Christian counselor can hold multiple distinctions or roles within a church, it is important that the counselor communicates with the client in which capacity they are working. For example, a pastoral counselor may hold a state license but is working in the capacity of a pastoral counselor. This distinction must be communicated to the client before counseling can begin.

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

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

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

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

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

Christian counselors value the principle of fidelity in counseling and do not abandon clients. This includes counseling situations involving religious and values-based conflicts. To the extent the counselor is able, client services are never abruptly cut off or ended without giving appropriate notice and adequately preparing the client for termination and/or referral.

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

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

counseling; (4) when counseling is harmful to the client; (5) when the client asks for a referral; or (6) when values-based differences between the client and the counselor are unworkable or cannot be reduced or bridged. Christian counselors discuss termination and/or referral with clients, offer referral if wanted or appropriate, and facilitate termination in the client's best interest. If crisis events alter or end counseling prematurely, the counselor (if it is safe and proper) should follow through with the client to ensure proper termination and referral.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**1-720-b: *Toward Clear Role Boundaries and Work Definitions***

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

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

Counselors accept employment only when they are qualified for the position by education, supervised training, credentials, skill, and/or experience. They honor and advance the mission, goals, and policies of employing organizations. Since employees have duties to both employers and clients, in the event of a conflict between these duties, they strive to resolve those conflicts in ways that harmonize the best interests of both parties.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Christian counseling educators and supervisors do not engage in counseling

relationships with students or supervisees. Personal issues can be addressed in teaching and supervision only insofar as they adversely impact counselor training and supervision. Students and supervisees needing or wanting counseling or psychotherapy shall be referred to appropriate resources.

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

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

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

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

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

Christian counseling educators accept students based on 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) the program's relationship to national accreditation and credentialing organizations; (3) the kinds and level of counseling skills necessary to learn; (4) personal and professional growth requirements and opportunities; (5) the requirements and kinds of supervised clinical practicums and field placements offered; (6) the kinds and quality of research opportunities, including thesis/dissertation possibilities and requirements; (7) the basis for student evaluation, including appeal and dismissal policies and procedures; and (8) the latest employment prospects and program placement figures.

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

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

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

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

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

Christian counseling educators help students overcome limitations and deficiencies



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Christian counseling supervisors ensure that supervision programs integrate theory and practice and train counselors to respect client rights, promote client welfare, and assist clients in the acquisition of mutually agreed goals in the counseling process. Supervision programs in Christian counseling shall adhere to the **Code**, those of other applicable professional groups, and all applicable state and federal laws. Counseling programs shall only accept supervisees who are capable of professional practice, are fully informed about the program, and are committed to engaging 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 the program relationship to national accreditation and credentialing organizations; (4) understanding of the standards, procedures, and time of evaluations of supervisee skill, professional-ethical awareness, and clinical effectiveness; and (5) disclosure of the manner and expectations regarding remediation of professional deficiencies and substandard performance.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

issues of counselor training.

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

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

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

Christian counselors are aware of the larger role they play in their communities, as well as society in general. Christian counselors further acknowledge they may live in a post-Christian, post-modern and pluralistic culture that no longer shares a common Judeo-Christian value base. Therefore, Christian counselors are mindful to present themselves at all times as “Salt and Light” and “God’s Ambassadors.” In doing so, they conduct themselves with the utmost dignity and humility.

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

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

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

Christian counselors make only factual and straightforward public communications.

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

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

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

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

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

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

state or imply that they are counseling professionals or hold a mental health practice license.

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

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

#### **1-850: Testimonials**

Christian counselors do not solicit testimonial statements from current clients. Christian counselors only ask for testimonials from former clients, ensuring there is no apparent harm or risk to clients, and obtain proper consent from the clients.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Christian counselors maintain honesty and integrity in all writing and publication ventures,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Christian counseling researchers honor and respect accepted scientific standards and research protocols in all research activities. Research is ethically planned and competently conducted. Researchers do not undertake or allow subordinates to initiate research activities they are not adequately trained for or prepared to conduct.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

##### ***2-110-c: Potential Benefits of Telehealth***

Christian counselors are aware that potential benefits include, but are not limited



to, alleviating geographic isolation or stay-at-home orders; provision of services to those with physical disability and/or illness; counseling for those who might not seek traditional counseling; and counseling for clients who have greater comfort with written expression.

***2-110-d: Potential Limitations of Telehealth***

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Christian counselors are informed of and apply legal, statutory, and regulatory issues related to: (1) jurisdiction for both counselor and client location regarding the delivery of services across state or national lines; (2) informed consent for electronic services; (3) applicable licensure requirements for multistate services; (4) any relevant third-party payer protocols; and (5) use and maintenance of electronic client records (e.g., compliance with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act [HIPAA]).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Christian counselors assess a client's capacity to understand, utilize and benefit from telehealth applications and whether these approaches are appropriate for delivering effective care.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Christian counselors take special precautions to protect client privacy rights with records stored and transferred electronically. All counselors should abide by HIPAA's latest guidelines on maintaining privacy in electronic databases. This requires, at

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

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

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

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

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

***2-160-a: Referral for Telehealth***

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

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

Christian counselors proactively and intentionally develop appropriate and varied referral and community resources in any geographic area in which they provide telehealth.

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

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

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

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

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

#### ES3-000: Definitions and Roles of Licensed Christian Counselors

A licensed Christian counselor is an individual who has been trained in a university or college for the specific profession of counseling and typically includes psychiatrists, psychologists, professional counselors, marriage and family counselors, and clinical social workers. Some states have specific names or licenses that are different. Please refer to each state for a list of approved licensed mental health professionals practicing in the state. Not only have these individuals completed a degree, but they have also attained a license through a state board or other affiliation to practice counseling. This practice of counseling is governed by the state or affiliation in which the license is attained, and the counselor must abide by rules and regulations set forth by this governing body to retain their license.

The licensed counselor's role in the church is especially important as this individual has specific knowledge in the area of mental health that other church members may not have. They advocate for mental health opportunities within the church and an individual to consult on matters of mental illness and sin. Furthermore, this licensed counselor may be competent to supervise other pastoral, life coaches, or lay counselors/peer coaches who work within the church setting.

#### ES3-100: Fees, Client Billing, and Financial Relationships

##### 3-110: Setting Fees

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

##### ***3-110-a: Disclosure of Fees and Payment History***

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

##### ***3-110-b: Sliding Fee Scales and Pro Bono Work Encouraged***

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

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

***3-110-c: Avoiding Self-serving Financial Relations***

Christian counselors provide fee-based services only for those situations necessary for attaining client counseling goals. They avoid financial practices that result or appear to result in poor stewardship and self-serving outcomes and do not select clients or prolong therapy based on their ability to pay high fees. For more information about financial relations, please review the Guidance Documents.

***3-110-d: Financial Integrity with Insurance and Third-party Payers***

Christian counselors maintain financial integrity with client insurers and other third-party payers. Christian counselors do not charge third-party payers for services not rendered or missed or canceled appointments unless specially authorized to do so. They do not distort or change diagnoses to fit restricted reimbursement categories. Any special benefits or reductions in client fees are typically extended in full to third-party payers.

**ES3-200: Third-party Payers and Managed Care Entities**

**3-210: Relationship with Managed Care**

Christian counselors acknowledge that the managed care system can be a resource to help clients access quality mental healthcare. However, its expanded influence in health and mental health service delivery has also posed challenges, including problems in client-provider-managed care relations such as breach of confidentiality, client abandonment, failure to maintain continuity of care, incompetent care, restriction of therapist choice and access, and the infliction of emotional distress.

***3-210-a: Responsible Action***

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

**ES3-300: Testing, Assessment, and Clinical Evaluation**

**3-310: General Parameters**

Christian counselors conduct clinical evaluations only in the context of professional relations, in the best interests of clients, and with the proper training and supervision. Christian counselors avoid: (1) incompetent and inaccurate evaluations; (2) clinically unnecessary and excessively expensive testing; and (3) unauthorized practice of testing and evaluation that is the province of another clinical or counseling discipline. Christian counselors interpret and report testing results in a fair, understandable, and objective manner. Referral and consultation are used

when evaluation is desired or necessary beyond the competence and/or role of the counselor. More information can be found in the Guidance Documents.

## IV. ADDITIONAL ETHICAL STANDARDS FOR PASTORS AND PASTORAL COUNSELORS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### **4-030: Accepting Fees or Communicating False Roles**

Pastors and pastoral counselors should not seek or accept personal fees or other remuneration for direct ministry-based counseling and people helping services (i.e., individual, couple, family, or group counseling). They do not state or allow helpees to believe they are licensed or professional counselors. Some pastoral counselors may receive a salary as a church or ministry employee, perform certain ceremonial or professional functions associated with their roles (e.g., weddings, funerals, seminars, training, etc.) or through “suggested donations” made to a non-profit ministry. However, this income should not be confused with a fee-for-service arrangement for direct counseling activities.

## V. ADDITIONAL ETHICAL STANDARDS FOR LIFE COACHES

### ES5-000: Definitions and Roles of Life Coaches

Life Coaches have a significant role in the ministry of the church that is different and unique compared to licensed counselors, pastoral counselors, and lay/peer counselors. These coaches are often trained in specific areas and have a particular credential that specifies their areas of expertise. Life Coaches are not pastoral counselors in that they often engage in short-term and positive psychological responses. Life Coaches can help with both individual sessions as well as groups. Life Coaches are not lay/peer counselors, as they have more training and certificate education and can be credentialed through various coaching organizations.

#### **5-010: Rules of Ethics Code Application and Exemption**

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

##### ***5-010-a: Incorporating and Honoring the Code***

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

#### **5-020: Life Coaches Under the Supervision of the Church**

Life Coaches who minister only under the supervision of the church, a Christian counselor or a Christian counseling organization are expected to abide by any standards or ethical considerations placed on them by the church, counselor or counseling organization. It is recommended that they seek out and secure supervision and spiritual-ethical covering by pastors and professional clinicians.

Independent, unsupervised, and solo practice or ministry Life Coaches should be in compliance with regulations based on state and credentials regarding the client's welfare and the risk for legal, ethical, spiritual, interpersonal, and ecclesiastical problems. It is the Life Coach's responsibility to know these regulations and guidelines as outlined by the state or credential and follow them along with the Code.

#### **5-030: Accepting Fees**

##### ***5-030-a: Setting Fees***

Life Coaches set fees for services that are fair, customary, and reasonable, according to the services contracted and time performed, and with due regard for the client's ability to pay. Life Coaches avoid all deception, confusion, and misrepresentation about fees, inability to accept insurance, and financial relationships with clients and client systems.

##### ***5-030-b: Disclosure of Fees and Payment History***

Fee schedules and rules for payment shall be outlined clearly for client review at the



outset of the coaching relationship. Moreover, agreement about fees and payment schedules will be made as early as possible in the course of the coaching relationship. Professional Life Coaches provide clients or their representatives with a full and accurate account of previous and current charges upon request.

***5-030-c: Sliding Fee Scales and Pro Bono Work Encouraged***

Professional Life Coaches are free, within the bounds of biblical, professional, and community standards, to set their own fees. However, Professional Life Coaches are encouraged to utilize sliding fee schedules scaled to a client's ability to pay and other reduced payment methods to increase counseling accessibility to those of lesser financial means. These adjustments are also reflected in the fee structure used for third-party billing. Professional Life Coaches are encouraged, beyond their fee schedule, to make a portion of their time and services available without cost or at a significantly reduced fee to those unable to pay.

***5-030-d: Avoiding Self-serving Financial Relations***

Life Coaches provide fee-based services only for those situations necessary for attaining client coaching goals. They avoid financial practices that result or appear to result in poor stewardship and self-serving outcomes and do not select clients or prolong the coaching relationship on their ability to pay high fees. For more information about financial relations, please review the Guidance Documents.

**5-040: Communicating False Roles**

Life Coaches do not state or allow clients to believe they are licensed clinicians or trained pastoral counselors. Professional Life Coaches clearly identify their credentials, qualifications, levels of training and certifications, and make potential clients aware of the nature and limitations of the coaching relationship.

## VI. ADDITIONAL ETHICAL STANDARDS FOR LAY COUNSELORS/PEER COACHES

### ES6-000: Definitions and Roles of Lay Counselors/Peer Coaches

Lay counselors and peer coaches have a significant role in the counseling and care ministry of the church. They are not professional clinicians or ordained ministers, but may work as salaried staff or volunteers in designated helping roles. These caregivers often function in one-to-one crisis care and helping roles and are increasingly involved in developing and leading the many small support and recovery group ministries of the contemporary church.

#### **6-010: Rules of Ethics Code Application and Exemption**

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

##### ***6-010-a: Incorporating and Honoring the Code***

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

#### **6-020: Lay Counselors/Peer Coaches Under Supervision of the Church**

Lay counselors and peer coaches minister only under the supervision of the church, a Christian counselor or a Christian counseling organization. They seek out and secure supervision and spiritual-ethical covering by pastors and professional clinicians.

Independent, unsupervised, and solo practice or ministry by lay counselors and peer coaches should be avoided due to regard for client welfare and the excessive risk for legal, ethical, spiritual, interpersonal, and ecclesiastical problems.

#### **6-030: Accepting Fees or Communicating False Roles**

Lay counselors and peer coaches should not seek or accept personal fees or other remuneration for ministry-based counseling and people helping services (i.e., individual, couple, family, or group counseling). They do not state or allow helpees to believe they are licensed, professional or trained pastoral counselors. Some lay or non-ordained caregivers may receive a salary as a church or ministry employee, perform certain professional functions associated with their roles (e.g., seminars, training, etc.) or through “suggested donations” made to a non-profit ministry. However, this income should not be confused with a fee-for-service arrangement for direct counseling activities.

## VII. STANDARDS FOR RESOLVING ETHICAL-LEGAL CONFLICTS

### ES7-000: Base Standards for Ethical Conflict Resolution

#### **7-010: Base Rules for Resolving Ethical-Legal Conflicts**

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

#### **7-020: Attempting First to Harmonize Conflicting Interests**

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

#### **7-030: When Conflict Cannot Be Harmonized**

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

##### ***7-030-a: Responsible Action***

In making such decisions, counselors may consider whether such action is: (1) defensible biblically (based on the counselor's understanding) and ethically; (2) done according to the client's best interest; (3) done without self-seeking purposes; (4) done with sober consideration after consulting with informed colleagues and Christian counseling leaders; and (5) done with a willingness to face any adverse consequences. Such action must never be done to hide wrongdoing or justify an obscure or self-promoting position.

##### ***7-030-b: Resolution Parameters***

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

## VIII. PROCEDURAL RULES

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

### **PR8-000: Authority, Jurisdiction, and Operation of the AACC Law & Ethics Committee (LEC)**

#### **8-010: Mission, Authority, and Jurisdiction of the LEC**

##### ***8-010-a: LEC Mission***

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

##### ***8-010-b: LEC Authority***

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

##### ***8-010-c: LEC Jurisdiction***

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

## **PR8-100: General Orientation to Ethical Enforcement**

### **8-110: Attitude and Action Toward Ethical Complaints**

Neither the LEC nor any IBCC Credential Holder nor CCN member shall refuse to hear nor uncritically accept a complaint against another member. Any LEC member, IBCC Credential Holder or CCN member individually hearing a complaint 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.

#### ***8-110-a: Reporting Violations to LEC***

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

#### ***8-110-b: Respecting Fundamental Rights of All Parties Involved***

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

#### ***8-110-c: LEC Duties Toward the Complainant***

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

#### ***8-110-d: LEC Duties Toward the Complainee***

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

## **PR8-200: Credential Holder, CCN Member, and AACC Member Response to LEC Action**

### **8-210: Commitment to Cooperate with Ethics Process**

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

**8-210-a: Failure to Cooperate with Ethics Process**

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

## **IX: SUMMARY**

The AACC Ethics code endeavors to guide Christian counselors in their practice with clients in a way that produces positive results from counseling and demonstrates the character of Jesus in every action that the Christian counselor takes. It is this overarching ethic of beneficence that not only drives this Code, but also guides the Christian counselor to be the burden bearer that God has called them to be. It is the hope of this Ethics Committee that this Code helps explain and deliver much-needed guidance in the area of ethics for Christian counselors.