



## Code of Ethics for Spiritual Care Professionals

Part of the NACC Standards  
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United States Conference of Catholic Bishops  
Subcommittee on Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service  
Committee on Catholic Education

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**National Association of Catholic Chaplains  
Code of Ethics for Spiritual Care Professionals<sup>1</sup>**

- 101 The Code of Ethics for Spiritual Care Professionals:
- 101.1 gives expression to the basic values and standards of the profession;
  - 101.2 guides decision-making and professional behavior;
  - 101.3 provides a mechanism for professional accountability; and
  - 101.4 informs the public as to what they should expect from Spiritual Care Professionals.
- 102 Preamble
- 102.1 Spiritual Care Professionals are grounded in communities of faith and informed by professional education and training.
- Spiritual Care Professionals:
- 102.11 Remain proficient by regularly updating themselves in theology, enhancing professional competence, and growing in personal spirituality.
  - 102.12 Promote ethical and moral values by following *The Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services*.
  - 102.13 Respect the primacy of conscience in themselves and in those they serve.
- 102.2 They are called to nurture their personal health of mind, body, and spirit, and be responsible for their personal and professional conduct as they grow in their respect for all living beings and the natural environment.
- 102.3 When Spiritual Care Professionals behave in a manner congruent with the values of this Code of Ethics, they bring greater justice, compassion, and healing to our world.
- 102.4 Spiritual Care Professionals:
- 102.41 affirm the dignity and value of each individual;
    - 102.411 Honor all persons as being created in the image and likeness of God.
  - 102.42 respect the right of each faith group to hold to its values and traditions;
  - 102.43 advocate for professional accountability that protects the public and advances the profession;
  - 102.431 Are in compliance with the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People

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<sup>1</sup> Spiritual Care Professionals is the term commonly adopted by the Spiritual Care Collaborative to include chaplains, pastoral counselors, pastoral educators, and students.

102.44 respect the cultural, ethnic, gender, racial, sexual orientation, and religious diversity of other professionals and those served, and strive to eliminate discrimination.

102.441 Respect diversity of age, national origin, and physical ability.

102.442 Refrain from using their position, influence, knowledge, or professional affiliation for unfair advantage or for personal gain.

### 103 Ethical Principles in Relationships with Clients

Spiritual Care Professionals understand clients to be any counselees, patients, family members, students, or staff to whom they provide spiritual care. In relationships with clients, Spiritual Care Professionals uphold the following standards of professional ethics. Spiritual Care Professionals:

103.1 Speak and act in ways that honor the dignity and value of every individual.

103.2 Provide care that is intended to promote the best interest of the client and to foster strength, integrity, and healing.

103.3 Demonstrate respect for the cultural and religious values of those they serve and refrain from imposing their own values and beliefs on those served.

103.4 Are mindful of the imbalance of power in the professional/client relationship and refrain from exploitation of that imbalance.

103.5 Maintain relationships with clients on a professional basis only.

103.6 Avoid or correct any conflicts of interest or appearance of conflicting interest(s).

103.7 Refrain from any form of sexual misconduct, sexual harassment, or sexual assault in relationships with clients.

103.8 Refrain from any form of harassment, coercion, intimidation, or otherwise abusive words or actions in relationships with clients.

103.9 Safeguard the confidentiality of clients when using materials for educational purposes or written publication.

103.10 Respect the confidentiality of information entrusted to them by clients when communicating with family members or significant others, except when disclosure is required for necessary treatment and granted by client permission, for the safety of any person or when required by law.

103.11 Understand the limits of their individual expertise and make referrals to other professionals when appropriate.

### 104 Ethical Principles in Relationships Between Supervisors/Educators and Students

Spiritual Care Professionals respect the integrity of students, using the power they have as supervisors/educators in responsible ways. Spiritual Care Professionals:

104.1 Maintain a healthy educational environment free of coercion or intimidation.

104.2 Maintain clear boundaries in the areas of self-disclosure, intimacy, and sexuality.

104.3 Provide clear expectations regarding responsibilities, work schedules, fees, and payments.

104.4 Provide adequate, timely, and constructive feedback to students.

- 104.5 Maintain a healthy respect for the personal growth of students, and provide appropriate professional referrals.
- 104.6 Maintain appropriate confidentiality regarding all information and knowledge gained in the course of supervision.

105 Ethical Principles in Relationships with Faith Community

Spiritual Care Professionals are accountable to their faith communities, one another, and other organizations. Spiritual Care Professionals:

- 105.1 Maintain good standing in their faith group.
- 105.2 Abide by the professional practice and/or teaching standards of the state/province, the community, and the institution in which they are employed. If for any reason a Spiritual Care Professional is not free to practice or teach according to conscience, the Spiritual Care Professional shall notify the employer, his or her professional organization, and faith group as appropriate.
- 105.3 Do not directly or by implication claim professional qualifications that exceed actual qualifications, or misrepresent an affiliation with any institution.

106 Ethical Principles in Relationships with Other Professionals and the Community

Spiritual Care Professionals are accountable to the public, faith communities, employers, and professionals in all professional relationships. Spiritual Care Professionals:

- 106.1 Promote justice in relationships with others, in their institutions, and in society.
- 106.2 Represent accurately their professional qualifications and affiliations.
- 106.3 Exercise good stewardship of resources entrusted to their care, and employ sound financial practices.
- 106.4 Respect the opinions, beliefs, and professional endeavors of colleagues and other professionals.
- 106.5 Seek advice and counsel of other professionals whenever it is in the best interest of those being served, and make referrals when appropriate.
- 106.6 Provide expertise and counsel to other health professionals in advocating for best practices in care.
- 106.7 Seek to establish collaborative relationships with other community and health professionals.
- 106.8 Advocate for changes in their institutions that would honor spiritual values and promote healing.
- 106.9 Provide other professionals with chart notes where they are used that further the treatment of the clients or patients, obtaining consent when required.
- 106.10 Communicate sufficient information to other care team members while respecting the privacy of clients.
- 106.11 Ensure that private conduct does not impair the ability to fulfill professional responsibilities or bring dishonor to the profession.
- 106.12 Clearly distinguish between statements made or actions taken as a private individual and those made as a member or representative of one of the cognate organizations.

## 107 Ethical Principles in Relationships with Colleagues

Spiritual Care Professionals engage in collegial relationships with peers, other chaplains, local clergy, and counselors, recognizing that perspective and judgment are maintained through consultative interactions rather than through isolation. Spiritual Care Professionals:

- 107.1 Honor all consultations, whether personal or client-related, with the highest professional regard and confidentiality.
- 107.2 Maintain sensitivity and professional protocol of the employing institution and/or the certifying organization when receiving or initiating referrals.
- 107.3 Exercise due caution when communicating through the internet or other electronic means.
- 107.4 Respect each other and support the integrity and well being of their colleagues.
- 107.5 Take collegial and responsible action when concerns about or direct knowledge of incompetence, impairment, misconduct, or violations against this Code arise.
- 107.6 Communicate sufficient information to other care team members while respecting the privacy of clients.

## 108 Ethical Principles in Advertising

Spiritual Care Professionals engage in appropriate informational activities that educate the public about their professional qualifications and individual scopes of practice. Spiritual Care Professionals:

- 108.1 Represent their competencies, education, training, and experience relevant to their practice of pastoral care, education, and counseling in an accurate manner.
- 108.2 Do not use any professional identification (business cards, letterhead, Internet or telephone directory, etc.) if it is false, misleading, fraudulent, or deceptive.
- 108.3 List and claim as evidence only degrees and certifications that are earned from educational institutions and/or training programs recognized by the certifying organizations of Spiritual Care Professionals.
- 108.4 Ascertain that the qualifications of their employees, supervisees, and students are represented in a manner that is not false, misleading, fraudulent, or deceptive.
- 108.5 Represent themselves as providing specialized services only if they have the appropriate education, training, or supervised experience.

## 109 Ethical Principles in Research

Spiritual Care Professionals engaging in research follow guidelines and applicable laws that strive to protect the dignity, privacy, and well-being of all participants. Spiritual Care Professionals:

- 109.1 Engage only in research within the boundaries of their competence.
- 109.2 In research activities involving human participants, are aware of, and ensure that the research question, design, and implementation are in full compliance with ethical principles.
- 109.3 Adhere to informed consent, including a clear and understandable explanation of the procedures, a description of the risks and benefits, and the duration of the desired participation.

- 109.4 Inform all participants of the right to withdraw consent and to discontinue involvement at any time.
- 109.5 Engage in research while being sensitive to the cultural characteristics of participants.
- 109.6 Maintain the confidentiality of all research participants and inform participants of any limits of that confidentiality.
- 109.7 Use any information obtained through research for professional purposes only.
- 109.8 Exercise conscientiousness in attributing sources in their research and writing, thereby avoiding plagiarism.
- 109.9 Report research data and findings accurately.

**National Association of Catholic Chaplains  
Principles for Processing Ethical Complaints**

- 201 As spiritual care professionals from many faith traditions we recognize the infinite value of each person, and demonstrate respect for all living beings and the natural environment.
- 202 While our individual spiritual care organizations may configure specific procedures in different ways, we are all committed to accountability to the principles stated in this document. We strive toward the very best in our common calling as healers, as we steadfastly seek to confront ethical breaches as both challenge and opportunity. In so doing we seek to discover the true meaning of concepts like “faithfulness” and “justice”.
- 203 The principles of restorative justice should inform the lens and questions by which situations are addressed within each organization’s process of addressing ethical concerns. Restorative justice asks: Who has been hurt? What are their needs? Whose obligations are these? (Howard Zehr, The Little Book of Restorative Justice, 2002, p. 21)
- 204 It is with the above realization in mind that the following principles for ethical processes have been fashioned. They exist to serve two complementary purposes.
- 204.1 To provide our organizations and their members with procedures designed to support highly ethical behavior and a means to address breaches in the Code of Ethics.
- 204.2 To communicate clearly to the public at large the means by which we seek to fashion our ethical ideals into practical instruments of service.
- 205 Guiding Principles
- Following is a general set of principles which should serve as the foundation for procedures for addressing ethical concerns.
- 205.1 Each process for ethical accountability shall be consistent with the adopted Code of Ethics.
- 205.2 Each organization shall administer its own procedures and impose sanctions, maintaining a commitment to respect for the dignity and well-being of each person involved in the process.
- 205.3 Each process should be based on transparency, and designed to encourage as much openness and communication as possible.
- 205.4 Each process will balance transparency and confidentiality. Maintenance of records will permit access to information and materials only in accordance with an organization’s policies.

## 206 Recommended Elements for Ethics Procedures

Each professional organization's framework within which to process concerns about ethical behavior of members should include the following:

- 206.1 Use of an accountability statement (with renewal subject to the discretion of each organization, e.g. annual renewal when membership is renewed).
  - 206.11.1 Every certified member is required to sign and submit the NACC Ethics Accountability Statement at the time of certification and at each renewal of certification.
- 206.2 Structure for processing an ethical complaint.
- 206.3 Optional procedures for intervention before a formal complaint is filed.
- 206.4 Guidelines for filing a written complaint.
- 206.5 Guidelines for investigating a complaint which include:
  - 206.51 Notice of allegations to the person purported to have violated the Code of Ethics.
  - 206.52 Opportunity for that person to be heard in responding to the allegations.
  - 206.53 By an impartial gatherer of facts.
- 206.6 Guidelines for adjudicating a complaint after investigation, and a clear standard of review by which evidence will be evaluated by an impartial fact finder.
- 206.7 Guidelines for determining remedies and sanctions.
- 206.8 Guidelines for communicating a decision.
- 206.9 Guidelines for appealing a decision on the limited grounds within an organization's policies.
- 206.10 Guidelines for processing an appeal and rendering a final decision.
- 206.11 Guidelines for monitoring and review of sanctions.
- 206.12 Guidelines for recruiting, training, and providing resources for Commission members.