

National Association of Ecumenical & Interreligious Staff
Professional Development and Standards Committee

Guidelines for Ethical Behavior

The National Association of Ecumenical & Interreligious Staff recognizes that constructive interaction with society and a positive relationship with the communities we serve is important to the mission of the organizations through which we work to provide that service. Thus, organizational policies and programs, together with the decisions and action of professional staff and all employees, must seek to assure ethical behavior and the organization's reputation whose mission and objective are responsive to the needs and overall well-being of our host communities.

INTRODUCTION

To maintain the integrity of our mission, it is crucial that the highest ethical standards be maintained in both internal and external relationships. What do we mean by ethical behavior? Ethical considerations involve a choice between "right" and "wrong" behavior in any given situation. Thus, ethics deals with the right actions of individuals, action on their own or on behalf of some other person or organization. Ethical behavior grows from an understanding of individual lifestyle in relation to community. Ethics creates moral consciousness for the individual and ethical awareness for the organization and the community. Thus the customary ethical question, "What is the universal good, and what action on my part would be in accord with it?" is more appropriately posed as "What character and conduct is in keeping with who we are as people of God?"

A code of ethics protects and enhances the integrity of the organization, its management and its employees, and serves to communicate its commitment to responsible practices. The existence of codes provides a frame of reference for both individual and organizational behavior, and articulate the values meant to govern the conduct of the organization's mission and purpose. It provides guidelines for decision-making in matters requiring discretion and judgment. For organizations whose work is based upon a faith perspective, the code may prescribe and allow reflection to access organizational behavior from the tenets of its religious belief.

These GUIDELINES FOR ETHICAL BEHAVIOR is recommended by the Professional Development and Standards Committee to the officers and members of the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ECUMENICAL STAFF for their guidance and, with additions as appropriate, for use by the organizations they represent:

- Avoid any activity, interest or relationship with persons or entities not related to the organization which would create, or even might appear to others to create, a conflict of interest with the organization.
- Comply with all applicable laws and regulations pertaining to employment practices and other areas of fiduciary responsibility.¹
- Maintain accurate books, records and financial reports according to acceptable accounting procedures.
- Be honest in communications, actions and relationships.
- Maintain honesty and integrity in colleague relationships.
- Do not engage in or tolerate sexual harassment.
- Do not engage in or tolerate racial discrimination.

- Do not engage in or tolerate discrimination on the basis of age or with those who are differently-abled.
- Maintain standards of just compensation and internal equity.
- Honor commitments and be reliable in carrying out assignments and responsibilities.
- Be fair and considerate in the treatment of all persons.
- Maintain strict confidentiality and require the same of staff and volunteers.

IMPLEMENTATION

The identification, articulation, and communication of the values and principles meant to govern conduct and to guide decision making should be a part of pre-employment interviews, new employee orientations, supervisor training and executive management development programs. If a written code is adopted, annual audits and certifications of compliance should be a part of enforcement practices that are carried out in a consistent and impartial manner.

It is incumbent upon those in positions of leadership to create a climate which fosters ethical conduct among staff and throughout the organization. Since ethical behavior is understood in the context of community, its intentional modeling is a theological imperative for the life of the community. When unethical behavior does occur, it must be immediately addressed.

EVALUATION

We tend to lose the courage of our convictions that enables us to do the right thing, that is, to make ethical decisions from a habit of an ethical lifestyle. One helpful four-way test might include:

- (1) What is the normal behavior in the community and society in general; i.e., what is the normative standard of conduct?
- (2) How does the situation satisfy the laws of your community, state, or the nation?
- (3) How does the situation in question fit your spiritual conscience?
- (4) In light of your own faith perspective, would you judge your decision or action to be acceptable in the sight of God?

Integrity and ethics exist in the individual or they do not exist at all. Personal integrity and high standards of ethics require hard work, courage, and sometimes difficult choices. Individuals and organizations are better served in the long run by doing what is right than what is expedient.

Quoting Bruce C. Birch and Larry L. Rasmussen (from *Bible and Ethics in the Christian Life*), "Whatever moral consciousness we possess does not exist prior to, or apart from, or independent of social relatedness. Communities are the forms of our social relatedness and the material reality of the moral life."

This guideline is intended for the members of the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ECUMENICAL STAFF as a community of the people of God.

July 15, 1992

¹This does not refer to matters of conscience which might involve actions of civil disobedience. Please refer to denominational and other codes of social conduct such as the recently published code by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).