

## Section 1: Aspirations and Values of the SCE

The purpose of the Society of Christian Ethics is to promote scholarly work in the field of Christian ethics and in the relation of Christian ethics to other traditions of ethics and to social, economic, political, and cultural problems; to encourage and improve the teaching of these fields in colleges, universities and theological schools; and to provide a community of discourse and debate for those engaged professionally within these general fields (Bylaws, Art. II). In pursuit of this purpose, members of the Society have particular professional commitments and responsibilities.

As scholars in the field of ethics, we hold ourselves to a standard of free, rigorous, and intellectually honest inquiry aiming to advance scholarship and moral understanding, especially in regard to theologically informed perspectives. Our examination of moral issues shall respect the dignity of persons whose practices and positions we study. Likewise, our engagement with other disciplines and ethical and religious traditions shall be conducted with the aim of mutual learning and understanding. We seek to promote critical and constructive understandings of justice, the well-being of society, and the good of the wider creation.

As participants in institutions, we will foster just relationships with their members and constituencies—especially students, graduate assistants, colleagues, staff, clients, and patients—as well as with the communities these institutions affect.

As educators, we will strive to improve the methods and intellectual depth of our teaching. We will exercise our authority justly with concern for the development of our students, respecting their dignity and the boundaries appropriate to professional interaction.

As members of the Society, we will conduct inquiry, debate, and other interactions with colleagues openly, fairly, and respectfully. We will execute our duties competently and justly without prejudice toward those with different values and viewpoints. We will welcome and take action to ensure the full participation of new and junior members and those who bring new voices to our conversations.



Certain conduct so clearly affronts the dignity of persons that it contravenes the minimal conditions for participation in our profession. Accordingly, in activities that occur under the auspices of the Society, we will neither practice nor tolerate any form of harassment or discrimination, in deed or word, based on race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, religious community, sexual orientation, age, or disability. Neither will we practice or tolerate, in deed or word, behavior that displays disrespect for the personal integrity of others as they carry out their responsibilities within the Society. Nor will we practice nor tolerate plagiarism, copyright infringement, and unacknowledged use of the research of others (cf. Bylaws, Art. III, Sec. 3). Persons who engage in such conduct within the Society's activities shall be subject to the grievance procedures set forth in this document.

## **Section 2: Statement of Professional Conduct**

The primary purpose of this document is to promote the commitments outlined in the paragraphs above by adopting standards for the professional conduct of our members, and setting forth a grievance procedure for their reinforcement. An expectation of employees and staff of the Society is that they will review and abide by these standards. These standards, organized under three headings (respect for difference, respect for personal integrity, and respect for intellectual integrity), aim to protect the goods of our Society, to protect members from being treated in such a way that they cannot enjoy the full benefits of membership and activity in the Society, and to educate all members about the standards of behavior that membership in our scholarly community requires.

It is our responsibility, as a community of professionals, to develop and sustain our own standards of conduct. We therefore publicize these commitments and standards, and commit to renewing them by regular examination and, if appropriate, revision. Questions and concerns, and especially reports and complaints of violations of professional conduct, will be listened to, taken seriously, and responded to fairly and constructively.

These standards apply to all members of the SCE when they are involved in meetings and activities directly connected with the Society's work. These standards also will be shared

with invited speakers and other non-members who register for SCE meetings. The President is responsible for providing copies of these standards to invited speakers and to non-members who register for SCE meetings and to provide copies of these standards to employees and staff of the Society.

Further, in compliance with sound governance practices that includes the exercise of prudent risk management, the Society has adopted a Whistleblower Policy in addition to these Standards of Professional Conduct. The Whistleblower Policy is intended to encourage and enable members, staff, and others to report in good faith suspected or actual occurrences of illegal, unethical, or inappropriate behaviors and/or practices and to protect them from retaliation or retribution.

## ***2.A. Respect for difference***

We commit ourselves to sustaining a secure and open environment for discussion in the public spaces of our Annual Meetings. We expect, from ourselves individually and each other, thoughtful and constructive analysis and reflection—discourse which serves to invite, rather than diminish or exclude, the participation of those to whom and about whom we are speaking. We respect each other through the civil language that we employ in panels, presentations, and conversation. We recognize that vigorous expression of disagreement about ethical matters does not itself count as disrespect for difference; we commit ourselves to expressing even vigorous disagreement in a civil way.

Disrespect for difference occurs when members engage in insensitive and demeaning conduct or in discrimination based on race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, religious community, sexual orientation, age, or disability—in short, and any behavior which impedes particular individuals or groups from fully participating in and enjoying the life of the Society. Any words or actions of this sort violate this standard when they contribute to an atmosphere of intimidation, marginalization, or contempt.



## ***2.B. Respect for personal integrity***

We commit ourselves to honoring the physical, moral, and sexual integrity of all SCE members. In all of our professional interactions connected with the SCE, we will treat fellow members and guests with the equal regard due to them as fellow human beings and fellow professionals, according to the norms of justice, honesty, fairness, dignity, and care. We recognize that each of us has a right to claim our own physical safety and security, as well as to make our own decisions and keep our own commitments in matters concerning romantic and sexual relationships. Participation in the roles, activities, and events of the SCE should depend solely upon professional interest and competence. No one's claim to participation should be conditioned upon a threat, implicit or explicit, to their personal integrity.

Disrespect for personal integrity can take several different forms in the context of SCE meetings, particularly in the context of the Annual Meeting at a hotel. The use of hotel bedrooms for professional purposes can create the appearance of a threat to personal integrity. Consequently, such private rooms should not be used for functions appropriate to public spaces, such as interviews, meetings or official SCE social gatherings. In public spaces, disrespect is expressed through such behaviors as: remarks, jokes, or behavior which belittle, bully, harass, or exploit other members; the display or use of degrading or pornographic images for purposes unconnected to a professional presentation; the expression of lewd remarks or conduct; and the surreptitious administration of alcohol or drugs to reduce sexual inhibitions. As teachers and scholars of ethics, we are particularly sensitive to the way in which differentials of power and position, such as those between students and teachers or junior colleagues and senior colleagues, can create or exacerbate threats to personal integrity. Unwelcome sexual advances, including unwanted touching, violate the integrity of both parties. Likewise, persistent and unwelcome social invitations threaten to violate personal integrity, particularly when the intent is to extract sexual favors in exchange for professional advantage.



## ***2.C. Respect for intellectual integrity***

No scholarly progress can be made without freedom of thought, speech, and publication. The Society encourages its members to formulate and present their ideas, arguments, and research with freely exercised imagination and responsibility, in accordance with respect for persons and standards of professional judgment. Good scholarly work requires a high degree of discretion exercised by members in determining the appropriate context and presentation of academic material. This norm applies to both oral and written forms. Respect for intellectual integrity also requires us to accurately present the work of other scholars with whom we are in conversation, particularly if we disagree with them. Finally, we must appropriately acknowledge our debt to the scholarly endeavors of others, by citing them fully and fairly in accordance with prevailing scholarly standards. Respect for intellectual integrity consists in protecting the conditions for and honoring the fruits of the vocation to scholarship, in order to facilitate a creative, honest, and rigorous scholarly conversation.

Disrespect for intellectual integrity can be expressed in several ways. Three of the more egregious kinds of violations include incidents where: 1) a member or members intimidate, ridicule, or otherwise inhibit without cause others from a full and genuine expression of their ideas, especially in contexts where there are power differentials between scholars; 2) a member presents the ideas or positions of another scholar or source in a willfully or negligently incomplete or biased way; and 3) a member misrepresents the ideas from a source as their own by willfully or negligently failing to acknowledge the source in accordance with prevailing scholarly standards.

The list is meant to be illustrative rather than exhaustive, and the possible violations are framed in a general way so as to allow appropriate latitude for a determination to be made as to whether a given incident constitutes a violation.



## Section 3: The Grievance Process

### ***3.A. The Purpose of the Grievance Process***

The grievance process provides structure and guidance for responding to evident or alleged violations of professional conduct. The process may be applied only to grievances between members of the SCE, that is, to members of the SCE aggrieved by the conduct of fellow members in the context of meetings and activities directly connected with the Society's work. The process is intentionally flexible, allowing considerable scope for discretionary exercise of its provisions in response to relevant differences in particular cases, such as the gravity of alleged misconduct and whether or not misconduct was intentional. The overarching goal is to reestablish a respectful and just environment for inquiry and discourse at SCE meetings. Where possible, the process should aim at achieving reconciliation on fair terms. In some cases, the duty to maintain the values and commitments of the SCE may require the application of sanctions (e.g., suspension or expulsion). Any intervention should aim at supporting and strengthening the SCE's efforts to safeguard respect for difference, personal integrity, and intellectual integrity.

### ***3.B. The Professional Conduct Committee***

The Board of Directors of the SCE authorizes the PCC to interpret and apply the grievance process, to evaluate complaints brought under it, and to make recommendations to the Board in response to such complaints.

Each year the President shall appoint two members to the PCC for three-year terms, totaling six members and chaired by one of the members. The President also shall appoint the chair for the coming year. Terms of outgoing committee members end at the conclusion of the Business Meeting at the next year's Annual Meeting. If a case is pending, the chair will continue until its resolution. Since respect for intellectual integrity requires vigilance, sensitivity, and courage to identify and remedy infractions, the members of the PCC should



be chosen for their practical wisdom. They should be seasoned members of the SCE, who possess sound and sober judgment, as well as tact, discretion, and skill with people. In aggregate, they should represent the SCE community in all its diversity. Members of the PCC are encouraged to take relevant training for their role at their home institution or elsewhere if it is available to them. Allowing for the possibility of a conflict of interest between a member of the PCC and a member against whom an allegation has been submitted or a member who has submitted a grievance, that member of the PCC will acknowledge the conflict and recuse themselves from case review and deliberations over intervention if any are forthcoming.

The PCC will review cases of alleged misconduct arising within the formally constituted activities of the SCE, if it deems the grievance process of peer inquiry to be an appropriate means to address the allegation. The PCC will not further inquire into complaints it deems capricious or principally vindictive upon initial receipt. The PCC will not attempt to obviate or preempt civil or legal proceedings, nor will it, except in unusual circumstances, pursue a case while the dispute is pending in another forum. Review of and/or inquiry into a complaint by the PCC should not be regarded as a substitute for legal action.

### ***3.C. The Grievance Procedure***

The Grievance Procedure is designed for use during or soon after a formally constituted event of the SCE. The swift passage of such events imposes limitations on the PCC's ability to obtain information, provide due process, protect confidentiality, and resolve the case with effective mediation or appropriate sanctions. Therefore, members are encouraged to notify the PCC with complaints as soon after the event(s) as is possible.

The parties of a grievance are: complainant(s), respondent(s), chair (of PCC), representatives (of PCC), and the PCC.





## ***3.C.i. The Initial stage***

A member should bring a grievance directly to the chair of the PCC, who ensures that all inquiries and complaints are properly undertaken and concluded. If any member of the PCC is named in the complaint, that person will not participate in deliberation of the case. No person who has been accused in a complaint will participate in the inquiry or resolution of the complaint.

When a grievance is brought to the chair of the PCC, the chair shall promptly assign two members of the PCC to handle the case as its representatives. The representatives are charged with conducting a preliminary inquiry to determine if the allegation grieved warrants further inquiry. The representatives will first contact the complainant to gather relevant details and, if the representatives deem it right, second, gather relevant details from the member against whom a complaint has been made.

After gathering relevant details, the representatives will orally consult with the PCC on the findings of their investigation. No names or other identifying features will be a part of the oral consultation. In this oral consultation, the PCC will determine possible responses as set forth in further detail below.

The representatives may convene an informal conversation with the complainant and the respondent to determine what happened and seek to informally resolve the complaint. If the informal conversation is successful, the representative shall orally inform the PCC of the successful resolution of the incident and no written record shall be generated.

For example, under the standard of **respect for difference**, if a member of the SCE uses a derogatory racial term in a conversation at the hotel bar, but doesn't realize the term is offensive, the representative may explain its offensiveness, the respondent may





understand, and a sincere apology may be all that is required. Under **respect for personal integrity**, a request for some form of sexual intimacy that was honestly but mistakenly believed to be welcome might be settled with a sincere apology. Or, as another example, under **respect for intellectual integrity**, using material from the writings of another without proper citation in an essay the respondent publishes in the Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics, but unintentionally and in a minor way, might be resolved with a sincere apology and a note of correction to be included in the Co-Editors' Preface in the next issue of the JSCE.

A more formal procedure will be required if the informal conversation fails to resolve the complaint. The representatives shall ask the complainant whether that person wishes to proceed further and shall ordinarily respect the complainant's wishes in this regard by referring the complaint formally to the PCC or by ending the investigation.

If the complainant chooses to proceed, the representatives shall inform the chair, who should promptly convene the PCC, in person or in an online audio/video conference, to evaluate the complaint.

At least five (5) of the six (6) committee members must be present. By a majority vote of those present, the PCC shall decide either to accept the complaint for further inquiry or to decline to consider it. The following shall be used by the PCC to evaluate a complaint:

- a judgment of the resources and competence of the PCC to handle the matter;
- the seriousness of the complaint;
- the degree to which the complaint alleges specific violations of the SCE Declaration of Professional Commitments;
- sufficient evidence to proceed with further inquiry;
- the availability of a more suitable forum, such as a university grievance procedure or the AAUP.

If the PCC decides to decline consideration of the complaint, the representatives will explain the decision to the complainant and to the respondent, if aware of the complaint. No written record will be kept of the complaint or the PCC's decision not to consider the case.

Note: The PCC will protect the privacy of both the complainant and the respondent to the extent reasonably possible during the process of the complaint and thereafter. However, all parties should realize that the confidentiality of the SCE proceeding is not protected against legally mandated disclosure.

### ***3.C.ii. Pursuing a complaint***

If the PCC decides to pursue the complaint with the complainant's participation, the representatives will promptly and impartially solicit 1) a signed, written statement from the complainant (if the complaint was made to the chair verbally). The statement will be furnished to the respondent, with a request for 2) a written response. The representatives may solicit additional relevant evidence, including from others not necessarily aware of the complaint; the solicitation of comments from witnesses shall be done delicately and with circumspection. The representatives will write 3) a report of the inquiry detailing the additional evidence in the case (if any).

The PCC will then meet in person or in an online audio/video conference to consider the case, including the statements by the complainant and the respondent, and the report on the inquiry and any recommendations by the representatives. At least five (5) of the six (6) committee members must be present (or five [5] of seven [7], if the chair of PCC is continuing past the end of their term on a pending or ongoing case, per section 3.B).

### ***3.C.iii. Possible outcomes of the grievance procedure***

3.C.iii.a) The PCC may conclude that there is insufficient or insubstantial evidence of violation to warrant any action, and therefore officially close the investigation. The chair shall so notify the complainant and the respondent. No written record will be maintained of the incident.

3.C.iii.b) The PCC may conclude that a violation has occurred. If the PCC does so, it shall recommend a sanction to the Board, if it deems a sanction to be warranted.

Recommendations for sanctions are determined by a majority vote of the entire PCC.

3.C.iii.c) Possible sanctions include:

1. Requiring the respondent to undergo some sort of education regarding the Society's professional commitments and appropriate and inappropriate behaviors, and to provide documentation to the PCC that this training has been completed. Failure to comply may result in the rescinding of membership.
2. Recommendation to the Board to suspend, restrict, or terminate the membership of the respondent, in accordance with Article III, Section 7 of the Bylaws.

3.C.iii.d) If a sanction is recommended, the chair shall prepare a written report justifying the proposed action. This report should include, as appendices, the statements of the complainant and respondent, as well as the representatives' report of the inquiry. This report goes to the Board for further action.

3.C.iii.e) If the recommendation to the Board is made to suspend, restrict, or terminate membership (3.C.2), the following additional procedures must be followed:

1. The PCC shall provide the Board with copies of the chair's report, including all appendices (3.D).
2. The complainant and respondent will be provided a copy of the chair's report, including all appendices. They will be offered an opportunity to make a written response to the Board on the PCC's recommendation.
3. The sanction of suspension or restriction requires a majority vote of the Board of Directors. The sanction of expulsion requires a two-thirds (2/3) vote of the Board. The vote of the Board is final.
4. The President shall notify the complainant and the respondent of the Board's decision in writing.

## **3.C.iv. Records**

3.C.iv.a) The PCC will create a file for each case it has pursued.

3.C.iv.b) For each case in which a violation has been found to have occurred, the Executive Director shall maintain in the office files one copy of the complete case file, which includes the chair's report, including all appendices (3.D). If applicable, it shall also include additional materials submitted to the Board and the written decision of the Board.

3.C.iv.c) These documents shall be made available only to those who serve in the office of President, the Executive Director, and the Chair of the PCC, and shall be destroyed five years after the date of filing.

3.C.iv.d) All other copies shall be destroyed immediately after the PCC or Board meetings dealing with the case have concluded.

## **3.D. After the Grievance Process**

The determinations and recommendations rendered by the PCC are final and may not be appealed—by the complainant, respondent, or a third party—to the Board or to the entire membership, except when those determinations result in the Board's decision to suspend, restrict, or terminate membership as set forth in Article III.7 of the Bylaws, which decision may be appealed to the Board.

3.D.i. The SCE prohibits the use of false testimony. If it is discovered that anyone—complainant, respondent, or third party—knowingly provided false information regarding a case, the PCC or the Board may take disciplinary action against the offending party pursuant to the terms of the SCE Standards of Professional Conduct.



3.D.ii. The SCE prohibits retaliation. If retaliation is taken against any member, or against an employee of SCE filing a complaint against a member, or against the respondent, the PCC or the Board may take additional disciplinary action against the one who retaliates pursuant to the terms of the SCE Standards of Professional Conduct.

3.D.iii. The SCE prohibits disclosure of confidential material unless required by law or to protect the safety of a party or a third person. If the confidences of the complainant, the respondent, or other parties directly involved are abused by the members of the PCC or the Board, the Board may take disciplinary action against the individual(s) who disclose confidential material pursuant to the terms of the SCE Standards of Professional Conduct.

Whether or not these misuses of the grievance procedure exacerbate the original complaint, they are themselves violations of respect for personal and intellectual integrity, and so are subject to the same disciplinary standards.

### ***3.E. PCC Annual Report to the Board***

The chair is the official liaison to the Board, President, and Executive Director, and must report every inquiry and formal complaint. The chair shall prepare a written annual report to the Board, describing the cases it has received during the previous year in the following way:

1. The chair shall identify the number and general type of cases resolved by a PCC member on an informal basis.
2. The chair shall describe in general terms, which omit all direct and indirect identification of the parties involved, each case the PCC declined to consider.
3. The chair shall prepare an abbreviated version of the case report of each case the PCC decided to give full consideration, omitting all direct and indirect identification of the parties involved.



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## ***3.F. PCC Annual Report to the Membership***

The chair shall prepare a short oral report, to be given at the Annual Meeting, summarizing the annual report to the Board, but identifying cases, resolved or declined, only according to the kind of violation involved (regarding disrespect for difference, personal integrity, or intellectual integrity). Care shall be taken that the information reported is generic, out of respect for confidentiality.

*Standards of Professional Conduct and Grievance Process revised and approved by Executive Committee, April 28, 2021.*

