

Life Together in the Community of Faith

Standards of Ethical Conduct

Study Guide for Christian Education Committees (Local Church, Presbytery)*

A companion piece to, and adapted from,
A Study Guide for use by Sessions and Congregations published by
Curriculum Publishing, 1999

The 210th General Assembly (1998) approved a report submitted by the Special Committee on a Professional Code of Ethics. The report as approved, is titled: **Life Together in the Community of Faith:**

Standards of Ethical Conduct for **Members** of the Presbyterian Church (USA);
Standards of Ethical Conduct for **Employees and Volunteers** of the Presbyterian Church (USA), and
Standards of Ethical Conduct for **Ordained Officers** of the Presbyterian Church (USA).

The Committee that produced this report was given the task of providing a resource that can help the Presbyterian Church (USA) prevent harm to individuals and the community of faith and provide an example of ethical conduct in the world. In this vein, the General Assembly recommended that these Standards be studied and used in congregations, sessions, new member classes, adult education classes, personnel committees, judicatory committees (local, presbytery, synod and general assembly), seminaries and in all places where the church is seeking to be a community of God's people.

For this particular Study Guide the suggestions are that you look at "B" from the list above Standards of Ethical Conduct for Employees and Volunteers. Most Christian Education Committees in the local church and presbyteries are made up of volunteers with one or two staff advisors, so the statements in this part of the documents, although not exactly fitting your work will be a guideline as you begin to define how you have and how you want to conduct yourselves and your work in an ethical way.

For this particular Study Guide, the Resources you will need are:

1. Standards of Ethical Conduct (OGA 98-009 -- \$3.00)
2. Life Together in the Community of Faith – Standards of Ethical Conduct -- A Study Guide (09-5203 -- \$1.25). Both of these can be ordered from Presbyterian Distribution Service at (1-800-524-2612) or on the Presbyterian Church (USA) website at <http://www.pds@ctr.pcusa.org>.
3. Bibles
4. Newsprint

* The term "education committee" may be called by other names in your congregation or presbytery, but in general it is the committee assigned the responsibility of planning for all aspects of the nurture of congregations and presbyteries as they plan programs to fulfill the call of God to be disciples.

For the purpose of this Study you will be using a process that has five basic elements:**

1. Activating prior knowledge
2. Acquiring knowledge
3. Understanding knowledge
4. Using knowledge
5. Reflecting on knowledge

Goal:

Local church and presbytery Education Committees will develop a broader and deeper understanding of the Ethical Standards adopted by the Presbyterian Church (USA) in 1998 and demonstrate the proper use of these standards both personally and in their committee work.

Objectives:

1. Name the knowledge already present in the group about how they are to act as Christians living in community.
2. Add to the group's knowledge as they read and think together about how the ethical standards impact what they do personally and as a committee.
3. Plan ways to use these ethical standards in their lives and volunteer committee work.
4. Reflect on what they have learned and how they will do things the same or differently in the future.

Time Commitment:

Beginning the initial study should take 3 – 4 hours. After the initial study, it is hoped that committees will continue to reflect on and use the standards in their work as they confront new issues and opportunities. Groups are free to organize the basic material here to fit their committee structure. The study could be done as part of several committee meetings or in a retreat setting or in a special meeting designed as a daylong study time with other business being completed. These are only suggestions. Please fit the study to your particular situation.

** From John A. Zahovik, Constructivist Teaching (Bloomington, IN: Phi Beta Kappa Education Foundation, 1995

Session I

A. Access the knowledge of the members of the committee by getting them involved in stating what they already know. The following questions may be helpful:

What do I know about ethical conduct?

How do I know what I know?

Give members a minute to jot their thoughts down and then ask them to share responses as you make a list on newsprint.

B. Depending on the size of your group, divide into small groups of 2-3 people and assign each group 2-3 of the scripture passages listed on page 2-3 of the study guide Life Together in the Community of Faith – Standards of Ethical Conduct.

Two questions for the group:

1. How do the ideas presented by the scripture passages compare with the whole groups listing of knowledge?
2. How do these ideas add to the groups listing of knowledge?

C. Come back together in total group and share reports from each group and add to list of knowledge.

Session II

For this session the participants should have a copy of the Standards of Ethical Conduct for Employees and Volunteers of the Presbyterian Church (USA). These can be found on page 2 of the Standards of Ethical Conduct or on a chart included in the Life Together in the Community of Faith Study Booklet.

A. Whole Group Reading and Discussion

1. Ask the group to read the five statements in Part I and think of a specific example of how they have fulfilled each statement or how they might fulfill each statement.
2. Invite anyone who would like to share to do so and allow for questions and discussion to take place.

B. Again divide into small groups of 2-3 people. Depending on the number of groups you have, assign the statements in Part II of the Standards of Ethical Conduct so that all of the statements are considered; i.e.; if you have only two groups, each group would look at seven different statements. Ask each group to discuss the following questions and be ready to report back to the total group.

1. How does each statement relate to our work on the Christian Education Committee? Give examples or think of a scenario or possible case study that would make each statement come alive and inform the committee's work.
2. Why should our committee agree to use the standards?

3. How can our committee use the standards?

C. Come together as a whole committee. Share and discuss reports from the groups.

Before the next session especially if you have planned time between Sessions II and III, ask the group to reflect on the study they have done so far and begin thinking about what norms they would suggest the committee adopt for the committees behavior and practices.

Session III

A. Ask the committee members to share any norms they think would be appropriate for the committee to think about. List these plus any other ideas that may be generated out of this sharing.

B. It may be wise to have on newsprint around the room each of the fourteen (14) statements in Part II of the Standards of Ethical Conduct that were discussed in Session II. Give each member post-it notes to write down their suggestion for norms and then place each of the notes on the statement to which their suggestion relates.

C. Engage in a general discussion about the norms and the matching with the idea of moving to some consensus on what the norms and practices of the committee might be in light of this study of the standards.

It may be hard to come to consensus completely at this time so a plan might be to assign to 2-3 committee members the task of taking the work of the committee, distill it into a workable form and present it at the next committee meeting for discussion and approval.

It is always good to continually revisit and reflect on knowledge gained and norms set for the group, so you are encouraged to keep this Standards of Ethical Conduct before the committee and always assess and possibly adjust practices as the group changes and grows.