

ATFE Standards of Professional Conduct and Grievance Procedure¹

Section 1: Statement of ATFE Values

The Association for Theological Field Education is an international, ecumenical community whose purposes include maximizing the quality of service to theological field education and providing for optimal growth and development of field education personnel.² In pursuit of these purposes members of the Association have particular professional commitments and responsibilities toward one another. In addition, we are a community that has always been marked by “an extraordinary degree of collaboration and a spirit of generosity”³ as we go about professional development, inquiry, and research.

We value contextual education and practical ministry formation. We bring many identities to our work together of forming and educating students in context for ministry.

As educators we always seek to improve the methods for and approaches to our work. We exercise our authority justly with concern for the development of our students, community partners, and colleagues, respecting their dignity and the boundaries appropriate to professional interaction.

As researchers we hold ourselves to a standard of free, rigorous, and intellectually honest inquiry aiming to advance theological field education.

¹ Much of the language in this document has been borrowed from the Society of Christian Ethics’ “Standards of Professional Conduct,” January 2015, and is used by permission. ATFE is grateful to SCE for their work and for their generosity.

² ATFE Bylaws, Article II

³ Joe Bush, former ATFE Chair

As participants in institutions we foster just relationships with students, faculty, and staff, as well as with the colleagues and communities outside our institutions that we partner with to provide education and formation.

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

Section 2: Statement of Professional Conduct

Certain conduct so clearly affronts the dignity of persons that it contravenes the minimal conditions for participation in our community. Accordingly, in activities that occur under the auspices of the Association we will neither practice nor tolerate any form of harassment or unjust discrimination, in deed or word, based on race, gender identity, nationality, ethnicity, religious or spiritual community, theology, sexual orientation, age, disability, political affiliation, or socioeconomic status. We will not 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 Association. While we may continue to practice generosity with respect to sharing ideas and research findings with one another, we aim to appropriately acknowledge and reference each other's work and will take care not to plagiarize or infringe copyright.

The primary purpose of this document is to promote the values outlined above by adopting standards for the professional conduct of our members and setting forth a grievance procedure for their reinforcement. These standards, organized under three headings (respect for difference, respect for personal integrity, and respect for intellectual integrity), aim to protect the values of our Association, to protect members from being treated in such a way that they cannot enjoy the full benefits of membership and activity in the Association, 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 ATFE, and other individuals attending Consultations and other meetings and activities directly connected with the Association's work. (Individuals to whom these standards apply shall hereafter be referred to in this document as "members".) These standards also will be shared with invited speakers and other non-members who register for ATFE meetings.

A. Respect for difference

We commit ourselves to sustaining a secure and open environment for discussion at our biennial Consultations. We expect, from ourselves individually and each other, thoughtful and constructive analysis and reflection—discourse which serves to invite, rather than diminish or marginalize, 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.

B. Respect for personal integrity

We commit ourselves to honoring the physical, moral, and sexual integrity of all ATFE members. In all of our professional interactions connected with ATFE, 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 ATFE should depend solely upon professional

interest and competence. No one's claim to participation should be conditioned upon a threat, implicit or explicit, to her/his personal integrity.

C. Respect for intellectual integrity

No scholarly progress can be made without freedom of thought, speech, and publication. ATFE encourages its members to formulate and present their ideas 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 material. This norm applies to both oral and written form. 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.

Section 3: The Grievance Process

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 ATFE, that is, to members of ATFE aggrieved by the conduct of other members. It may be applied to behavior outside of ATFE gatherings and business, including behavior at the member's home institution.

In some situations, an informal, mediated conversation among parties suffices to determine what happened and then to resolve a hurtful misunderstanding or repair an unintentional offense. The ATFE Steering Committee stands ready to mediate such conversations and to seek informal resolutions and reconciliation between or among members. If such mediation is successful, the ATFE Steering Committee will generate no written record, though its chair will be informed that a conversation took place. This document outlines a formal grievance process to be used when mediation has been unsuccessful and/or aggrieved ATFE members have not reached satisfactory resolutions to their complaints in other ways.

The process is intentionally flexible, allowing scope for discretionary exercise of its provisions in response to morally relevant differences in particular cases, such as the gravity of alleged misconduct and whether or not misconduct was intentional. Where possible, the process should aim at achieving reconciliation on fair terms. In some cases, the duty to maintain the values and commitments of ATFE may require the application of sanctions. Any intervention should aim at supporting and strengthening ATFE's efforts to safeguard respect for difference, personal integrity, and intellectual integrity.

The grievance process should not be regarded as a substitute for legal action.

B. The Professional Conduct Committee

The Steering Committee of ATFE authorizes a Professional Conduct Committee (PCC) to interpret and apply the grievance process, to evaluate complaints brought under it, and to make recommendations to the Steering Committee in response to such complaints.

The ATFE Steering Committee shall appoint members to the PCC. It shall total four members with two-year terms coinciding with ATFE biennia. Two members shall

rotate off every two years, providing for staggered terms and continuity.⁴ If a case is pending at the conclusion of a biennial Consultation, at least the chair will continue until its resolution. Members of the PCC should be seasoned members of ATFE, who possess sound and sober judgment, as well as tact, discretion, and skill with people. In aggregate, they should represent the ATFE 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 the complainant(s) or respondent(s), that member of the PCC will acknowledge the conflict and recuse herself/himself from case review and deliberations over intervention if any are forthcoming. Likewise, if any member of the PCC is named in the complaint, he or she will not participate in deliberation of the case.

C. The Grievance Procedure

The parties of a grievance are: Complainant(s), Respondent(s), Chair (of the PCC), Representative (of the PCC), and the PCC.

i. The Initial stage

A member bringing a grievance (the Complainant) to the PCC is encouraged to contact the PCC as soon as possible after an incident has occurred. The Complainant should bring a grievance directly to the Chair of the PCC, who ensures that all inquiries and complaints are properly undertaken and concluded. However, in cases it deems sufficiently serious, the PCC reserves the right to pursue the inquiry independent of the Complainant's participation. In these cases, the PCC will consult with the ATFE Steering Committee about how to proceed.

⁴ Two of the inaugural members will be asked to serve for four years before rotating off.

When a grievance is brought to the Chair, the Chair shall promptly convene the committee, by telephone if need be, and assign a member of the PCC to handle the case as its Representative.

Note: The PCC will protect the privacy of both the Complainant and the Respondent in every way possible during the process of the complaint and thereafter. However, all parties should realize that the confidentiality of ATFE proceedings is not protected against legally mandated disclosure.

ii. Pursuing a complaint

The Representative will promptly and impartially solicit a signed, written statement from the Complainant (if the initial complaint was made to the Chair verbally). The PCC will not pursue complaints that are not put in writing by the complainant. The statement will be submitted to the person against whom the complaint is brought (the Respondent), with a request for a written response. Complainants will be assured confidentiality by the PCC but not necessarily anonymity. The Representative shall then solicit and investigate additional relevant evidence, including from others not necessarily aware of the complaint. The solicitation of comments from witnesses and others shall be done delicately and with circumspection. The PCC shall conduct its investigation in a timely manner, normally completing it within 30 days. The Representative will write a report of the inquiry detailing additional evidence in the case.

The PCC will then meet to consider the case, including the statements by the Complainant and the Respondent, and the report on the investigation, and any recommendations by the Representative. The PCC shall reach its decision based on the preponderance of the evidence (at least 51% of the evidence supports the recommendation) and shall reach consensus whenever possible.

iii. Possible outcomes of the grievance procedure

There are four possible outcomes to the grievance process: No action, Restriction, Suspension, or Termination. Outcomes are determined by a majority vote of the PCC.

- a) The PCC might conclude that there is insufficient 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 or grievance.
- b) The PCC might conclude that the Respondent's membership in ATFE should be restricted. Restriction might include, e.g., ineligibility for receiving an ATFE grant, being a Consultation presenter, or serving as an ATFE officer. In addition, the PCC might require the Respondent to undergo some sort of education regarding professional commitments and appropriate professional behaviors.
- c) The PCC might conclude that the Respondent's membership in ATFE be suspended for a period of time. The Respondent would not be allowed to attend the Consultation or participation in other ATFE events during this time.
- d) The PCC might conclude that the Respondent's membership in ATFE be permanently terminated.

In the case of b, c, or d, the Chair shall prepare a written report detailing and justifying the proposed sanction. This report should include, as appendices, the statements of the Complainant and Respondent, as well as the Representative's report of the inquiry. The PCC shall provide the Steering Committee with this report and its appendices. The Complainant and the Respondent will receive a copy of the Chair's report and its appendices. In the case of c or d (i.e., the PCC's conclusion is either suspension or termination), the PCC's conclusion must be affirmed (or overturned) by the ATFE Steering Committee. The sanctions of suspension or termination require a 2/3 vote of the Steering Committee. The vote of the Steering Committee is final. The ATFE Steering Committee Chair will notify both the Complainant and Respondent in writing.

D. After the Grievance Process

The PCC will create a file for each case it has pursued. For each case in which a violation has been found to have occurred, the Chair of the ATFE Steering Committee shall maintain one electronic copy of the complete case file, which includes the Chair's report, including all appendices and, if applicable, the Steering Committee's decision. Any hard copies shall be destroyed immediately after the grievance process has concluded. ATFE Steering Committee chairs shall pass files on to their successors.

The PCC Chair shall prepare a written annual report to the Steering Committee, describing the number and general type of cases it has received during the previous year. The PCC Chair shall additionally prepare a short oral report, to be given at a biennial Consultation business meeting, summarizing the annual report but identifying cases only according to the kind of violation involved (regarding disrespect for difference, personal integrity, or intellectual integrity).