

Evangelical body proposes code of ethics for pastors

by [Chris Lisee](#) in the [July 25, 2012](#) issue

The National Association of Evangelicals is urging pastors to seek a common moral ground by uniting under a consistent code of ethics. NAE leaders said the new code will provide uniform guidance to church leaders across the 40 denominations that comprise the nation's largest evangelical group.

The new code is a good starting point for ministers in a profession that can be individualistic and entrepreneurial, said David P. Gushee, a professor of Christian ethics and director of the Center for Theology and Public Life at Mercer University.

"In some ways it's the Wild West out there in terms of the context of preparation for ministry in the evangelical world," he said. "Any effort to raise the moral bar and establish a minimal set of expectations for clergy—or any profession—is a very good thing."

The code puts into writing ethical guidelines that often go unspoken. Specifics include, among other things, sexual "purity," regular financial auditing, not recruiting members from a pastor's former congregation, and ethics of counseling.

A recent NAE survey said that seven in ten evangelical leaders are not required by their congregations to sign a formal code of ethics. Signing the code will not be required for NAE membership, but NAE President Leith Anderson said it offers a tool for denominations to secure moral leadership.

The code was compiled by a team of ethicists, pastors, and denominational leaders working over an 18-month span. "It's like writing a book," Anderson said. "It's a lot of work to get things correct."

Published in English and Spanish, the code covers issues ranging from sexual behavior to resource management and financial integrity to physical health. "It's setting an example, it's lifting the bar, and it's calling pastors to meet a standard," said Samuel Rodriguez, president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership

Conference.

Rodriguez lauded the code for holding leaders to a higher standard in a world he said is saturated in materialism and moral relativism. “You would assume that Christian leaders, of course, would embody the idea of integrity and purity and accountability. This code of ethics is a call to affirm standards not only to live a life above reproach, but really to apply higher standards than what society today will deem appropriate,” he said.

Unveiled on June 13, the code has received support from prominent evangelical leaders. Signatories include Rodriguez; Bishop Charles Blake of the Church of God in Christ, megachurch pioneer Bill Hybels, and Rick Warren, author of *The Purpose Driven Life*.

Anderson said the NAE has already begun its next project—a code of ethics for churches. —RNS