

## Secular versus Christian

One of the most important decisions facing any Christian practicing in the field of counseling is whether they will operate under the authority of their state or under the church. The question is not whether a counselor should be held accountable, but to whom they should be accountable. A license from a state requires them to abide by the state's regulations. An ordination or license from a church or religious institution holds him/her accountable to the organization that issues it.

My training provided me with everything required to become licensed by the National Christian Counselors Association (NCCA). NCCA licensed counselors are practicing in every state of the USA and dozens of other nations around the world.

I believe that I have a Divine call on your life to counsel and minister to the hurting, and that a state license may inhibit such ministry, so I decided to be a servant of the Church rather than an agent of the state.

The National Christian Counselors Association Licensing Program is not a state license and is, in fact, distinctly different. Most states have regulatory laws governing the practice of psychology. Many of them also legislate the practice of general counseling. The laws vary from state to state. For example, some states have a counselor category called "Licensed Professional Counselor." Therefore, the National Christian Counselors Association requires its counselors to clearly identify their license, e.g., "National Christian Counselors Association Licensed Pastoral Counselor" or "National Christian Counselors Association Licensed Clinical Christian Counselor." This ensures that the NCCA counselor is operating within legal and ethical standards, and maintaining the public's trust and confidence.

State regulatory laws help to protect the public and ensure professionalism within the counseling profession. The NCCA strives to attain a similar goal within the Christian community and, at the same time, operate within compliance with state laws. The state and federal governments also have jurisdictional boundaries. They cannot pass laws that prevent the Church from fulfilling its purpose and ministering to humanity's needs. The state recognizes that counseling is one of the responsibilities of the Church and its clergy. For this reason, the state does not and must not interfere with the Ministry of Counseling.

The major difference between state-licensed professional counselors and Pastoral or Christian counselors, who are licensed by the NCCA and under the authority of the Church (Body of Christ), is clear and well-defined. Counselors who have been licensed by the state are held to strict ethical standards which mandate an individual's right to be free from religious influence. **The state licensed professional counselor is forbidden to pray, read or refer to the Holy Scriptures, counsel against things such as homosexuality, abortion, etc. Initiating such counsel would be considered unethical by the state. In most states in the U.S., state licensed counselors "must not promote their personal religious beliefs" according to the code of ethics in each respective state. The only time a state licensed counselor can involve religious (Christian) principles, morals, activities, instruction, etc., is if the counselee initiates or requests counsel in this area. The state-licensed counselor may not have the education, experience and knowledge of Scripture that the NCCA counselor provides.**

Opposite from that, Pastoral counselors are required to pray, share their faith, read the Holy Scriptures, etc. The fact that Pastoral and Christian counselors do these things creates a clear distinction. We are two distinct professions and govern ourselves accordingly.

As you can readily see, the state governs secular counselors and the Church is responsible to set standards and govern ministers who have devoted their lives to the ministry and to Pastoral counseling.

None of this is to say that the Christian counselor, minister or priest is not permitted to request fees and receive remuneration for the services they render, as long as they remain adherent to the state laws governing such procedures.

The NCCA requires all who are certified or licensed by its Licensing Board of Examiners to:

1. Be credentialed ministers (ordained, licensed or commissioned) whose goal is to evangelize and ease the emotional pain and suffering of humanity.
2. Provide their service under the authority of a legally organized local church, a national church organization or a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit ministry.
3. Complete specialized training provided by the NCCA.
4. Complete the minimum requirements for continuing education and annual license renewal.
5. Uphold NCCA's Code of Ethical Standards.