



# International Association for Identification

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Phil Sanfilippo, President

## **An open letter to the membership and individuals certified by the International Association for Identification**

The International Association for Identification (IAI) was established in 1915 to further the aims of the identification profession. Many years ago, the leadership of the IAI realized that it would be beneficial to create a Code of Ethics for the membership that would outline the type of conduct that was expected of IAI members. Since its inception, the Code of Ethics concluded with the following statement, "I humbly accept my responsibility to Public Trust and seek Divine guidance that I may keep inviolate the Profession of Law Enforcement."

As assigned in 2009 through 2010, the IAI Documents Review Committee was tasked with updating the Code of Ethics for the purpose of making it pertinent to non-member certification holders and to make it more applicable to the current day. Updates to this concluding statement included removal of the reference to seeking Divine guidance and the reference to Law Enforcement. The change to the reference to seeking Divine guidance proved to be significantly controversial to the membership. I will explain the reasons this change was recommended, how the amended Code of Ethics came into existence, and how the leadership of the IAI will deal with this issue in the future.

The IAI is the oldest and largest, but not the only professional association in the world. When reviewing the codes of ethics for many of the other professional associations such as the National Association of Medical Examiners, the Association of Firearms and Tool Mark Examiners, the American Academy of Forensic Science, the American Board of Forensic Document Examiners, the American Society of Questioned Document Examiners, the Canadian Identification Society, the Fingerprint Society (United Kingdom), the American Board of Forensic Odontology, and the American Society of Crime Lab Directors (ASCLD), we found no verbiage related to seeking Divine guidance or other religious concepts. ASCLD has within its Code of Ethics a general prohibition of discrimination based upon race, religion, national origin, sex, age, or disability. *As a matter of fact, no association of forensic professionals was found to have this type of verbiage in their documents dealing with ethics and professional conduct.*

The decision to remove the reference to Divine guidance was made based on two factors. First, the members of the committee felt that the concept of prayer, as insinuated in the original Code of Ethics, was inappropriate for inclusion in a document that sets forth what is expected of practitioners working in the field of Forensic Identification. This was amplified by the fact that we are currently attempting to defend our position that the IAI and its members are practitioners of science. It was agreed by the committee that religious beliefs and practices are best left to the individual and his or her respective religious institution. Regardless of this factor, the committee was concerned by the fact that some individuals have historically expressed disdain at this passage because they are not religious. This concern extended to the possibility that in the future, such individuals might bring legal action against the IAI citing discrimination. This concern is not without basis. Title 28 of U.S. Code 42.203 prohibits discrimination on the basis of race,

color, religion, national origin, or sex. This law pertains to any organization (like the IAI) that receives federal funding. Many of the initiatives undertaken by the IAI such as the Standardization II Committee and its work are funded through federal grants.

A new Code of Ethics was drafted and submitted to the Board of Directors. The Board of Directors accepted the new Code of Ethics *unanimously* and directed the Resolutions Committee to place the new code before the membership for consideration.

The 2010 general membership meeting was held on Friday, July 16, 2010. When the Code of Ethics was being considered for passage, IAI members in attendance at the meeting amended the resolution changing the final passage to, "I humbly accept my responsibility to public trust and seek Divine guidance that I may keep inviolate the profession of forensic identification, analysis and investigation." When the vote was held, this amended version was passed. This vote was held in accordance with Article IX of the IAI Constitution, which reads in part, "The Code of Ethics... shall be adopted and/or amended only by a resolution passed by a majority vote at a general membership meeting." Even though the number of members voting the amended Code of Ethics into being represents less than 3% of the total membership, I assure you that these individuals represented a majority of those members in attendance at the general membership meeting.

Since its passing, a considerable number of IAI members have expressed concern with the new Code of Ethics. Some have even self-reported Ethics Violations since they do not "seek Divine guidance." Frankly, interest in this issue is not entirely bad. Getting the membership involved in issues facing the IAI is always one of the goals of the association and its leadership. However, the investigation of wholesale groups of individuals self-reporting violations may cause an economic hardship for the IAI. For this reason, ethics violations reported solely on the basis of "Divine guidance" will not be certified for investigation, pending the outcome of an investigation of this situation. New members and certificants as well as individuals seeking recertification may opt out the requirement to seek Divine guidance by striking "~~seek Divine guidance that I may~~" from the Code of Ethics.

The leadership of the IAI would like to see the reference to seeking Divine guidance removed from the Code of Ethics. This is not intended to be seen as a condemnation of anyone's religious beliefs. The aim of the leadership is to remove prayer, as *mandated* by the Code of Ethics, from consideration where *professional* ethical behavior is being discussed or debated. Now that this issue is being openly discussed, I look forward to meaningful and constructive dialog with the membership so we may improve the IAI, its documents, and its programs. I hope those of you who are concerned with this issue will join us in Milwaukee in August when this issue will be reconsidered by the general membership.

Respectfully yours,  
*Phil Sanfilippo*