

**THE FLORIDA FAMILY LAW
AMERICAN INN OF COURT**

HANDBOOK

Charter No. 322
Jacksonville, Florida

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HANDBOOK

1. **Introduction**

This handbook is to acquaint new members and to reacquaint existing members with the history, purpose, organization, and activities of the Florida Family Law American Inn of Court and the American Inns of Court.

2. **Florida Family Law Inns of Court**

In the late 1990s, a group of lawyers and judges got together to follow a tradition that began in England and has been around for centuries, The Inn of Court. The Honorable Gary P. Flower, Honorable Jean Johnson and attorneys, Homer A. C. Bliss, Cynthia L. Catalan and David A. Garfinkel formalized The Florida Family Law American Inn of Court after initially meeting informally to discuss family law, professionalism, trial techniques and procedures and to discuss new family law ideas. After meeting numerous times and feeling that this type of dialogue would assist others in the practice of family law, The Inn of Court was born.

At that time in Jacksonville, there already existed the Chester Bedell Inn of Court, which was a general practice Inn. The American Inn of Courts recognized family law as a separate entity for establishment of a separate Inn of Court. The founding members solicited The Honorable Jean Johnson and J. Demere Mason, Sr. to help organize an Inn of Court specializing in family law. The Honorable Jean Johnson and Homer Bliss then attended a seminar on how to start an Inn of Court.

Charter members were sent invitations to join the Inn of Court during its formation and initial year. The Florida Family Law Inn of Court was assisted greatly by the judges then on the family law bench, those being Judge Jean Johnson, Judge David C. Wiggins, Judge Karen K. Cole, Judge Bernard Nachman and Judge Jack M. Schemer. Additional impetus came from the help of Justice Major B. Harding of The Florida Supreme Court and The Honorable Susan H. Black of the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals.

3. **Vision, Mission and Strategic Goals of the Inn**

The vision of the Inn is that it is a legal profession and judiciary dedicated to professionalism, ethics, civility and excellence.

The mission of the Inn is to inspire the members and legal community to advance the rule of law by achieving the highest level of professionalism through example, education and mentoring.

The strategic goals include:

- a. To promote a high-quality member experience:

(1) Identify the earmarks/components of a high-quality member experience and determine how to assess whether an Inn is providing this experience to its members;

(2) Empower and enable local Inns to provide a high-quality member experience; and

(3) Enhance the quality of programs provided directly to members.

b. To have a greater impact on the profession:

(1) Identify opportunities to expand and increase membership in Inns;

(2) Assess and re-define the American Inns of Court's relationship with law schools for the purpose of increasing student and faculty awareness of and involvement in the Inns of Court;

(3) Develop strategies to recruit and retain judges at all levels;

(4) Re-engage the alumni in the strategic planning and goals of the American Inns of Court; and

(5) Develop new programs and expand existing programs to use the American Inns of Court Foundation's national and international reach to make a greater impact on the profession.

c. To be a primary resource for mentoring and education focused on professionalism, which includes ethics, civility and excellence:

(1) Have more Inns of Court with mentoring programs;

(2) Assist new lawyers in finding a mentor;

(3) Encourage more education opportunities focused on professionalism for small firm lawyers, solo practitioners and other underserved areas of the profession; and

(4) Expand our branded program offerings to non-members.

d. To be widely recognized as a leader in promoting professionalism, which includes ethics, civility and excellence:

(1) Have a clearly defined brand;

(2) Communicate our brand widely and consistently;

(3) Partner with other national legal organizations to promote professionalism; and

(4) Increase the visibility of the American Inns of Court by developing an organizational communications plan.

e. To have effective ongoing communications with members and alumni of the American Inns of Court:

(1) Analyze current communication methods and the relative effectiveness of each of those methods;

(2) Develop a plan for improving communications generally and incorporate improved communications into the ongoing operations of the organization, including each of its programs and services; and

(3) Establish a clear methodology for ongoing evaluations of the effectiveness of communications.

f. To establish a highly effective governance structure and culture:

(1) Define and implement the ideal board of trustees for the future of the American Inns of Court;

(2) Implement a strategic, efficient and effective committee structure;

(3) Review board member, officer and staff roles; and

(4) Implement a continuing board and staff education program.

g. To grow and diversify American Inns of Court revenue streams:

(1) Create a permanent capital development structure; and

(2) Implement the permanent capital development structure.

4. **American Inns of Court**

The American Inns of Court concept was the product of a discussion in the late 1970s among the United States' members of the Anglo-American Exchange of Lawyers and Judges, including Chief Justice of the United States Warren Burger and Judge J. Clifford Wallace of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. Burger subsequently invited Rex E. Lee, then Dean of the J. Reuben Clark School of Law Brigham Young University Law School and later U.S. Solicitor General, and Dallin Oaks, then president of Brigham Young University and later justice of the Utah Supreme Court, to test the idea.

At the suggestion of Lee, a pilot program was entrusted to Senior U.S. District Court Judge A. Sherman Christensen, who shaped the idea into a workable concept. The first American Inn of Court was founded February 2, 1980 in the Provo/Salt Lake City area of Utah, and included law students from Brigham Young University.

Within the next three years, additional American Inns formed in Utah, Mississippi, Hawaii, New York and Washington, D.C.

In 1983, Chief Justice Burger created a committee of the Judicial Conference of the United States to explore whether the American Inn concept was of value to the administration of justice and, if so, whether there should be a national organization to promote, establish and assist American Inns, and promote the goals of legal excellence, civility, professionalism and ethics on a national level.

The committee reported to the Judicial Conference affirmatively on the two questions and proposed the creation of the American Inns of Court Foundation. The Judicial Conference approved the reports and, thus, endorsed the American Inn concept and the formation of a national structure.

In 1985, the American Inns of Court Foundation, with 12 Inns nationally, was organized to support the Inns and to promote the goals of legal excellence, civility, professionalism and ethics on a national level. The establishment of the American Inns of Court Foundation was celebrated at a dinner in Salt Lake City in June 1985. Speakers at the dinner program included Judge Christensen, judge Aldon J. Anderson and Dallin Oaks.

The American Inns of Court movement has grown faster than any other organization of legal professionals. Today, there are nearly 400 chartered American Inns of Court in 48 states, the District of Columbia, Guam and Tokyo. There are more than 30,000 active members nationwide encompassing a wide cross-section of the legal community, including federal and state judges, lawyers, law professors and law students.

5. **Membership**

Please refer to Article Two – Membership of The Florida Family Law American Inns of Court Bylaws, 2017 revision.

The Florida Family Law American Inn of Court has four classes of membership: Masters of the Bench (Masters), Barristers, Associates and Pupils.

Masters are the most experienced members of the profession: attorneys in public or private practice, members of the judiciary and professors of law. Masters normally have 15 years or more of legal experience after admission to the Bar. There is no required tenure for Masters.

Barristers have between five and 15 years of legal experience after bar admission. Barristers typically serve staggered four-year terms, so that approximately one-fourth of the Barristers will be succeeded each year.

Associates generally have between one and five years of legal experience. The term of membership for Associates is three years.

Pupils are law students at any level who have been recommended by their schools for participation in the Inn. The term of membership for Pupils is one year. The Inn enjoys affiliations with Florida Coastal School of Law, Florida State University School of Law and University of Florida School of Law.

Inactive Members. The Executive Committee may confer Emeritus and Honorary Membership status. Emeritus membership is based on distinguished service to the Inn, and Emeritus members may retain such membership status for as long as they want. Honorary membership is based on distinguished service to the bench or the bar, in the education of law students, in furtherance of the objectives of the Inn or in the achievement of other noteworthy accomplishments.

Membership in the Inn is not restricted by the nature of a member's practice or legal activity, although the membership and programs are generally focused on litigation practice. Members include judges and professors, civil and criminal litigators, business attorneys, family law specialists, corporate counsel and court legal staff.

6. **Diversity Policy**

The Florida Family Law American Inn of Court embraces and encourages Diversity and Inclusiveness!

a. More than just an organization, the Florida Family Law American Inn of Court is dedicated to (1) upholding the standards of the legal profession, (2) practicing law with dignity and (3) encouraging respect for our system of justice. Achieving a higher level of excellence and developing a deeper sense of professionalism only occurs with an abiding commitment to the goals of diversity and inclusiveness.

b. The Florida Family Law American Inn of Court firmly believes that personal diversity in all its aspects is essential to our ability to accomplish our mission. Diversity embodies all those differences that make us unique individuals and includes people of different races, ethnicities, cultures, sexual orientation, genders, religions, ages, personal style, appearances, physical ability as well as people of diverse opinions, perspectives, lifestyles, ideas, and thinking. We value differences in views and perspectives and the varied experiences that are part of a diverse membership. Diversity enriches and broadens our membership, which in turn leads to more creative and meaningful programs.

c. For the same reasons, the Inn values professional diversity. Legal professionals and law school faculty, administrators, and students from all disciplines, from both the public and private sectors, from all economic strata, and from the least experienced to the most seasoned are vital to maximizing the Inn experience. Only by drawing and retaining a diverse membership will we guarantee the success of our unique organization as well as our individual professional pursuits. Therefore, our Inn is committed to creating and maintaining a culture that promotes and supports diversity not only through our organization, but in our profession as well.

d. As is evident, the Florida Family Law American Inn of Court encourages the inclusion, not exclusion, of all people who desire to better themselves personally as well as professionally and engage in camaraderie with fellow attorneys not experienced elsewhere.

7. Meetings

There are monthly dinner and program meetings of the Inn's general membership from September through April, with the exception of December. At our monthly meetings, usually held on the third Thursday of the month, Pupillage Groups present their programs, which are normally one hour in length. Members of each Pupillage Group meet before their scheduled program to select, prepare and practice their programs. CLE credit is usually available for both presenters and attendees.

The agenda for the monthly meetings is typically to gather at 5:30 p.m. for socializing. At approximately 6:15 p.m., after administrative announcements, dinner is served. Following dinner, a formal program is presented by a Pupillage Group. The meeting is then adjourned.

8. Attendance

Membership in the Inn is a privilege. The Inn furthers its goals by the active involvement and efforts of its members. Therefore, all members are expected to attend Inn meetings and participate in Inn activities.

9. Pupillage Groups

Pupillage Groups are the core membership units of the Inn. The Pupillage Groups consist of proportionate numbers of Masters, Barristers, Associates and Pupils. Pupillage Groups are normally constituted for a single membership year. Each Pupillage Group is led by a Group Chairperson (typically one of the Master members of the Group), who is also the Chairperson.

Each Pupillage Group meets to select a presentation topic, prepare and practice a presentation and then present that program at a regular meeting of the Inn.

Pupillage Groups should also meet periodically throughout the membership year on an informal basis for discussion, for mentoring and for outreach purposes.

10. **Governance**

Please refer to Article Three – Organization of The Florida Family Law American Inns of Court Bylaws, 2017 revision.

The Inn is led by Officers and an Executive Committee. The Officers include a President, President-Elect/Counselor and Secretary/Treasurer. The officers serve a one-year term unless a two-year term is recommended by the Executive Committee and approved by the Benchers, and may succeed themselves only once. The Secretary/Treasurer shall serve a one-year term and may serve additional terms as recommended by the Executive Committee and approved by the Benchers.

The Executive Committee is composed of the officers and such other active members as determined by a majority vote of the Benchers. The Executive Committee determines the meetings' Order of Business.

The President, assisted by the Executive Committee, traditionally leads the Inn. Generally, the President will serve for a term of two years. When a vacancy occurs with respect to any of the four officers, the remaining officers will nominate an Inn member to fill the vacancy, subject to a vote of the Executive Committee.

The Inn's Executive Committee, which is selected by the Inn's Masters, is the primary group responsible for overseeing Inn membership and operations.

11. **Committees**

Much of the Inn's work is carried out through standing and ad hoc committees, such as the Executive Committee. Various members of the Executive Committee and other members of the Inn—typically Masters and/or Barristers—are tasked with heading up the Inn's efforts at mentoring, membership, outreach and other efforts of the Inn.

The Executive Committee is responsible for the operation of the Inn, including supervising and appointing members to standing and ad hoc committees, establishing and monitoring pupillage groups and mentoring programs, voting on admission of members, overseeing finances, facilitating relationships with the Law Schools and other Inns and the American Inns of Court, and such other matters as properly come before the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee meets regularly, usually on the Tuesday prior to the Thursday monthly meeting, and is charged by the President.

12. **Florida Family Law Inn of Court Mentoring Program Summary**

a. Goals of the Mentoring Program. Mentoring is intended to help any member, presumably Associates, Barristers and Pupils (law student members), flourish in their family law practice and in the knowledge of family law, to acclimate them to the field of family law, and to enhance their employment and practice prospects. The mentoring program is meant to foster “one-on-one” mentoring relationships between members of our Inn outside of regularly scheduled monthly meetings. It is also intended to assist a member with any issue concerning professionalism, judicial relations, rules of procedure and evidence, coping skills and stress management, substantive law, law practice issues and concerns, and specific practice experiences. The Mentoring Program has also been expanded to assist and mentor non-Inn Florida licensed lawyers who regularly practice family law in the Fourth Judicial Circuit of Florida and are providing pro bono services through the auspices of Jacksonville Area Legal Aid. It has also been expanded to non-Inn Florida licensed lawyers whom have been directly referred by any member of the Judiciary. All such non-Inn member lawyers shall only be paired with a Mentor if available after all Mentees who are Inn members have been paired

b. Selection of Mentors and Assignment of Mentees. Mentors are selected among experienced, well-respected attorneys who would be willing to mentor Barristers, Associates, Pupils or other non-Inn Florida licensed attorneys as qualified hereunder. Mentors may be Masters, Barristers, or Emeritus members of the Inn. The Mentoring Director is responsible to assign one (1) Mentor to one (1) Mentee in order to achieve the best possible mentoring results. In determining the pairings, the Mentoring Director will do his/her best to accommodate the interests of the proposed Mentor and proposed Mentee. It has been the experience of other Inns that multimember mentoring teams have had difficulty getting together and truly focusing on the Mentee.

c. Mentoring Program. The subject matter of the mentoring relationship and the individual meetings or contacts is at the sole discretion of the participants. Regular contact between the Mentor and the Mentee shall be maintained to ensure that the goals of the mentoring program are met. It is the responsibility of the Mentoring Director or the Associate Mentoring Director to monitor the interaction between the Mentor and the Mentee. The Mentoring Director shall be responsible to have the Mentors complete an Initial, Interim, and Final Mentor, and have the Mentees complete an Initial and Final Mentee Report, which shall reflect the results of the mentoring program. Additional mentoring opportunities shall come from 1) Mentee participation in one (1) program pupilage team per year (for Inn member Mentees), 2) Mentees sharing dinner with at least 2 or 3 new faces at each monthly Inn meeting (for Inn member Mentees), and/or 3) The mentoring director and/or Associate Mentoring Director making themselves available to both Mentors and Mentees for telephone calls and individual meetings. The Mentor and Mentee shall be required to execute a form entitled “Expectations and Acknowledgement”

concerning client confidentiality, conflicts of interest, confidentiality of Mentor/Mentee communications, etc.

d. Meetings and Formal Term. The formal term of the Mentor-Mentee relationship is nine (9) months beginning with the announcements of the pairings in our September monthly meetings. Mentees are expected to contact the Mentors within two (2) weeks of the pairings to propose a get-acquainted meeting. During the nine (9) month term, each mentor pairing shall meet at least four (4) times outside of the regularly scheduled Inn meetings in order to achieve the goals of the mentoring program. Mentors are also strongly encouraged to meet with their Mentees prior to the Inn's regular monthly meeting in order to field and discuss issues and concerns.

e. Mentees' Profiles. The Mentees shall convey, either orally or in writing, information about themselves to their Mentors. This may include completion of a profile from the American Inn of Court web site with a view toward assisting the Mentors in formulating their various mentoring plans.

f. Formulation of Mentoring Plans. The Mentors are encouraged by the Mentoring Director to develop a plan to meet with the Mentee, to introduce them to other family law attorneys, and to arrange for them to accompany an established attorney to proceedings, if requested by the Mentee. The Mentors should discuss their mentoring plans with their Mentees at their initial meeting. On the other hand, The Mentees should share with his or her Mentors their expectations regarding what they wish to accomplish through the mentoring relationship. Mentors are required to interface with the Mentees on a regular basis to attain the goals of the mentoring program as set forth in subparagraphs a and d above.

g. Sharing Approaches to Mentoring. The Mentors are encouraged to share their mentoring plans and approaches. This is accomplished by informal conversation among Mentors, the Reporting Forms, and a commendation that accompanies the presentation of the Mentor of the Year award. The Mentoring Director and Associate Mentoring Director encourage Mentors to enlist the aid of other seasoned members of the Inn if they are confronted with a particularly challenging mentoring issue.

h. Individual Mentoring Sessions. Discussion should be had between the Mentor and Mentee regarding mentoring options and approaches, and how to provide the optimal mentoring experience. The individual meetings between the Mentor and the Mentee may be formal or informal, taking into account the individual circumstances of the Mentee. During the meetings, professionalism and ethical concerns should be discussed and emphasized.

i. Monitoring the Mentoring Experience. The Mentoring Director and or the Associate Mentoring Director, several times throughout the year, shall reach out to the Mentees, by telephone calls and/or email, to ensure that the Mentees are getting the most

out of their mentoring experience. The Mentors are also required to complete report(s) regarding their mentoring plan and experience. The communications are intended to facilitate and monitor the Mentees' mentoring experiences and, in particular, to help:

- The Mentees develop a relationship with their Mentors and use Mentors as resources – arranging meetings between Mentees and Mentors where necessary;
- Improve the mentoring program and the performance of individual Mentors; and
- Implement successful mentoring strategies within the Inn.

j. Reporting on the Progress and Results of the Mentoring Program. Mentors and Mentees shall report to the Mentoring Director and or the Associate Mentoring Director, respectively, on their individual mentoring sessions and the extent to which they have fulfilled their mentoring plans. The Mentors and Mentees, may also be requested to complete a Survey and/or Reporting Form to evaluate their mentoring experience, its positive aspects, and to make suggestions for improvement. The Reporting Forms shall be maintained by the Mentoring Director or the Associate Mentoring Director until the beginning of next Inn year at which time the Forms will be destroyed. The information contained within the Forms shall be used solely for quality control purposes in order to better the Mentoring Program and for no other reason. No persons shall have access to the information contained within the Forms except the Mentoring Director, Associate Mentoring Director, and the other members of the Executive Committee.

k. Mentoring within Pupillage Groups. The “One-on-One” Mentoring program does not abrogate the responsibility of each pupillage group to meet periodically (at least 2 times per year) to mentor the Barristers and Associates in their group. The group meetings may be formal or informal at the discretion of the pupillage group leader. The Mentoring Director and/or Associate Mentoring Director shall contact each pupillage group leader to ensure that the goals of the mentoring program are achieved at the group level

l. Awards. The service of the Mentors is acknowledged at the annual banquet by a commendation based upon the reporting and information received by the Executive Board from sources including but not necessarily limited to the Mentoring Director and or the Associate Mentoring Director. A special award is given to the Mentor of the Year who is deemed to have provided the most valuable mentoring to his or her Mentee.

13. **Finances**

The Inn is supported entirely by the fees paid by its members at the beginning of each membership year. The membership year runs from July 1 through June 30. Fees are set by the Executive Committee to enable the Inn to meet its financial obligations,

principally to pay for the cost of the monthly dinner meetings and the annual dues to the American Inns of Court Foundation. The fees are generally different amounts for the different categories of members. The current fee schedule of the Inn can be located on the Inn's website.

14. **Awards**

The Inn has established the Rudy Hernandez Award. Rudy Hernandez was a well-respected family law attorney in Jacksonville and an original Master member of the Florida Family Law American Inn of Court. In its second year of existence, Rudy passed away suddenly and the Inn, under the leadership of its second president, Judge David C. Wiggins, decided to honor Rudy's memory with a professionalism award named in his honor.

Judge Wiggins formed a committee of three of the original members of the Inn who unanimously selected Harry Mahon as the first recipient of the Rudy Hernandez Professionalism Award. The award is presented annually to a member of the Inn whose commitment to the practice of family law encourages and exemplifies civility, humility, compassion, integrity and the highest moral and ethical standards of the family law community in Northeast Florida.

The Nominating Committee consists of three members who are previous recipients of the award; the chairperson, who is chosen by the group as a whole, last year's recipient and a third person chosen by the first two committee members. The Nominating Committee then gather the proposals and devise a short list of the top two or three nominees to be decided at a meeting of all past recipients.

15. **American Inns of Court Foundation**

The national organization for all Inns throughout the United States, is the American Inns of Court Foundation, which is headquartered in Alexandria, Virginia (www.innsforcourt.org). There are nearly 400 Inns nationally with more than 20,000 active members.

Members of the American Inns of Court receive "The Bencher," which is a publication of the national organization.

16. **Professional Creed of the American Inns of Court**

Whereas, the Rule of Law is essential to preserving and protecting the rights and liberties of a free people; and

Whereas, throughout history, lawyers and judges have preserved, protected and defended the Rule of Law in order to ensure justice for all; and

Whereas, preservation and promulgation of the highest standards of excellence in professionalism, ethics, civility, and legal skills are essential to achieving justice under the Rule of Law;

Now therefore, as a member of an American Inn of Court, I hereby adopt this professional creed with a pledge to honor its principles and practices:

I will treat the practice of law as a learned profession and will uphold the standards of the profession with dignity, civility and courtesy.

I will value my integrity above all. My word is my bond.

I will develop my practice with dignity and will be mindful in my communications with the public that what is constitutionally permissible may not be professionally appropriate.

I will serve as an officer of the court, encouraging respect for the law in all that I do and avoiding abuse or misuse of the law, its procedures, its participants and its processes.

I will represent the interests of my client with vigor and will seek the most expeditious and least costly solutions to problems, resolving disputes through negotiation whenever possible.

I will work continuously to attain the highest level of knowledge and skill in the areas of the law in which I practice.

I will contribute time and resources to public service, charitable activities and pro Bono work.

I will work to make the legal system more accessible, responsive and effective.

I will honor the requirements, the spirit and the intent of the applicable rules or codes of professional conduct for my jurisdiction, and will encourage others to do the same.