

**“PROTECTING THE FAMILY”**  
***THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF MATRIMONIAL LAWYERS***  
***IMPROVING THE PRACTICE***

In 1962, a small group of nationally-known matrimonial lawyers met to discuss the need to humanize and dignify the most traumatic area of family relations. As a result, the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers was founded to improve the practice of law and the administration of justice in the area of divorce and family law.

The academy was formed...”To encourage the study, improve the practice, elevate the standards and advance the cause of matrimonial law to the end that the welfare of the family and society be preserved.” today, the Academy is recognized as the pre-eminent family law association in America with more than 1,500 Fellows.

**Expertise and Professional**

Fellows of the Academy concentrate their practices in family and matrimonial law, a specialty that involves all aspects of pre marriage counseling and agreements, legal separation, divorce, annulment, unmarried cohabitation, child custody, property valuation and division, and support. Academy Fellows are recognized by their colleagues and by the judges where they practice as leading experts in the field. Each Fellow must demonstrate by personal contact a professional and ethical commitment to his or her clients and to the betterment of society in resolving what are often intensely emotional and complex family problems. By demonstrating the highest standards of matrimonial practice, Fellows of the Academy have set the standard for the rest of the matrimonial bar and have helped improve the quality of family law practice throughout this country for attorneys and litigants alike.

**Programs and Benefits**

Professional fellowship is the keystone of Academy membership. The national Academy meets twice yearly. Each November at the annual session in Chicago, there are committee meetings, educational programs, elections of officers and board members, and social events. Then, each March, the Academy holds its midyear institute at various locations throughout the United States.

The Academy has been a leader in both arbitration and mediation programs through which its members are trained by leading experts and certified. In addition, the Academy offers a new training program for new matrimonial lawyers who joins firms in which Academy Fellows are members and which helps them handle matrimonial matters.

State chapters have their own schedules of programming and educational seminars which deal with topics of local or national interest.

**Continuing Education**

The Academy has achieved national recognition by pioneering in-depth studies of child custody, taxation, estate planning, property valuation and various psychological and sociological topics with a degree of sophistication that is seldom available to the occasional family law practitioner. Through in-depth programs, the Academy has developed the most effective procedures to try to resolve custody, support and enforcement problems. Experts from various fields are frequently called upon as guest speakers and panelists to provide a cross-fertilization of ideas that enhance the expertise and broaden the perspective of the family law practitioner.

## **Publications**

The Academy is particularly proud of its Journal which is published annually in cooperation with the University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Law. Each issue of the Journal concentrates on a single subject such as child custody or retirement benefits, which is explored in depth by the authors.

This unusual format results in a publication recognized throughout the United States as a source for the most complete coverage of specific topics in family law. The Journal contains both original articles drafted by Academy Fellows and digests of articles on the same subject from other publications.

The Academy published *The Bounds of Advocacy* in 1991. This unique publication sets forth standards of fair play for laymen and lawyers involved in family law cases. While the standards are aspirational, they epitomize the conduct of Academy Fellows in their individual practices. *The Bounds of Advocacy* is widely recognized as the first effort of a specialized bar association to establish standards for an entire area of practice. It has been cited nationally in law school ethics courses and legal literature. At least two states have adopted *The Bound* as part of their state ethics code.

A later publication, *The Divorce Manual, A Client Handbook*, was written for clients contemplating a divorce. The handbook provides client with a realistic overview and considerable detail as to what to expect in the divorcing process. The handbook has proved invaluable to attorneys who distribute it to new clients as part of their service.

In 1995, the Academy published a booklet entitled *Representing Children, Standards for Attorneys and Guardians-ad-Litem in Custody or Visitation Proceedings*. This publication delineates the appropriate procedures to be followed by guardians and attorneys for children in matrimonial actions where the best interest of their wards or clients are in conflict with those of their parents. This fine line of attorney conduct has never been explored as comprehensively as in this Academy publication. It has served as a guide to guardians and attorneys for children throughout the nation.

The Academy also developed a Model Relocation Act. As people become more mobile, there are many more cases involving the relocation of custodial parents and proceedings brought by or against the custodial parent to permit or deny such relocation. The Model Act includes stringent notification requirements, outlines the factors which the court should consider in making its decisions and sets forth alternative "burden of proof" and presumption language for states to consider.

The Academy also has launched a national public awareness campaign to counter the profound effects of divorce on our nation's children.

This awareness effort features Public Service Announcements, a free "how-to" booklet - *Stepping back From Anger: Protecting Your Children During Divorce* - and an instructional video. All are aimed at parents in those of divorce and intended to defend children.

As a professional service, the Academy maintains and publishes a list of its certified Fellows to assure the availability of qualified expert matrimonial counsel throughout the United States. This roster of Fellows, updated each year, details the experience and qualifications of each Academy member. It also identifies those Fellows who have been re-certified by the Academy based on their participation in continuing legal education over the proceeding five years.

### **Local Activities**

The Academy's thirty three state chapters, representing Fellows throughout the U.S., conduct local and statewide seminars designed to develop a better understanding of family law and matrimonial practice at the local level.

Academy Fellows regularly volunteer their expertise in the family law area for civic, legislative, educational and social groups and for the media. Academy fellows have been in the forefront in developing and promoting legislation in many states and in Congress, resulting in a revolution in divorce laws in the past twenty years. Often, the Academy offers suggestions about proposed state and federal legislation, which reflects the experience of those who specialize in family law.

### **Membership**

To apply for membership in the Academy, a candidate must first have been admitted to the bar for at least ten years and have concentrated at least seventy-five percent of his or her practice in matrimonial law. Candidates from states where family law is subject to certification must be certified as specialists.

There are two exceptions to the above requirement: 1) for attorneys who practice in geographical areas where the seventy-five percent of practice is not feasible, a fifty percent concentration in the area is acceptable; 2) for attorneys who devote ninety percent of their practice to matrimonial law, the ten-year practice requirement can be reduced to five years. Each candidate is personally interviewed by an Admissions Committee after information as to the candidate's expertise and ethics is solicited from members of the local Bench and Bar where the candidate practices. Each candidate must have substantial trial experience in matrimonial litigation with consideration given to the ability to achieve settlement without the necessity of trial. Each candidate must pass a written examination covering federal taxation and local laws and procedures as they relate to the practice of family law. A candidate must also demonstrate the highest standing in his or her legal community for character and ethical practice.

### **To Find Out More Information**

Fellowship in the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers represents both a recognition of achievements in family law and a commitment to the highest standards of practice in the field.

Those seeking further information about membership may contact the Academy office in Chicago or visit the Academy web site at <http://www.aaml.org>.