At work, who do we represent? When we come to work as police officers, we represent many things: the police department, the city, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, not necessarily ourselves as individuals. This same notion stands for all city employees. Ethical conduct of public officials represents the fabric of our society. If public officials do not promote ethical and moral conduct then the linkages that hold society together, trust and crime, evolve into anarchy.

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If you were to look up the word ethics in a dictionary it would say something along the lines of, “a principle right of good conduct; the rules and standards governing the conduct of a profession... or a set of moral principles or values which governs an individual or group.” Individual ethics are generally formulated in childhood and change in priority over time.

A professional code of ethics establishes rules and standards that guide our conduct. The Law Enforcement Code of Ethics was established in 1957. The American Society of Public Administration developed a Code of Ethics meant for all public service. It established five basic principles; Serve the Public Trust, Respect the Constitution and the Law, Demonstrate Personal Integrity, Promote Ethical Organizations, and Strive for Professional Excellence.

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The values of an organization play a significant role in defining the culture of their employees. Having high-level values operationalized in a way employees understand creates strong linkages to ethical conduct. The organizational values of the St. Joseph Police Department are accountability, integrity, professionalism, honesty, and trust. To further strengthen the ethical behavior of the officers, the following value statement is set for the department:

“In our pursuit of excellence in policing, the St. Joseph Police Department will hold itself and its members accountable for our actions; perform our duties with integrity; serve our community with the highest degree of professionalism; let honesty be our guide; and uphold the public’s trust in our agency.”