

Joint Statement from the Strategic Partners in Spiritual Care

In May 2018 the Strategic Partners in Spiritual Care met at the APC headquarter just outside Chicago: the executive directors and elected leadership of the American Association of Pastoral Counselors, ACPE, Association of Professional Chaplains, Canadian Association for Spiritual Care, National Association of Catholic Chaplains, and Neshama: Association of Jewish Chaplains. This face-to-face meeting was on the strategic topic of how we can deepen our partnerships for the betterment of the profession. We gathered to think deeply about the ways our goals overlap, and our current needs converge, as well as to be realistic about how we might be stronger together as a fleet of services to our members, our employers and the world than we will be if we keep on sailing in our individual boats.

Much of the day's conversation revolved around the future of our professional discipline itself. We were joined via technology by Dr. Wendy Cadge, professor of sociology at Brandeis University and author of *Paging God*. She is perhaps the best friend our profession has outside our own ranks -- precisely because she is "outside" looking in with a researcher's eye with an increasingly international lens. Dr. Cadge has some of the clearest sense of the waters we now sail in. Our groups represented at the meeting are certainly not the only boats on these waters, and part of our task is the same as ever -- how to collaborate with others in our fields without losing our unique sense of direction -- especially in the matters vital to our profession (rigorous standards of education, certification, accreditation and ethics).

One such way that we plan to grow our partnership is to expand the joint ethics process between ACPE and APC to include the other cognate partners. The joint ethics process between APC and ACPE, which was piloted in 2004, has been a huge success for their organizations. Our intention is to grow the professionalism, fairness and compassion APC and ACPE have experienced by including in this joint process our other partner groups that have comparable standards for education, certification, accreditation and ethics.

In 2020 the leaders of these organizations and our members will gather together for another opportunity to collaborate in a Joint Conference. The planning and organizing of this conference has been a smooth and exciting process, and our hope is to build on these relations to partner and coordinate more activities together. With each organization heading up a portion of the joint conference, we all have equal skin in the game. Our goal is to provide a dynamic and inclusive experience for members from all the organizations and to foster an environment of collaboration as well as unity.

We know that chaplaincy and pastoral counseling specifically, as well as spiritual care in all forms in general, are growing disciplines. In a world where more and more people are drifting away from traditional religious settings while maintaining a "spiritual" identity, the need for sophisticated, high-quality spiritual care in institutional and other professional settings is destined to grow. In the face of such opportunities it is incumbent upon us more than ever to ensure that we are training, vetting and certifying the highest quality professionals to serve the field. This is an historic opportunity.

With these opportunities in mind, our groups plan an additional step to deepening our relationships and furthering the profession. We feel that now is an appropriate time to speak together with a unified voice when advocating for professional excellence in spiritual care. Presently the Strategic Partners are laying the groundwork to join with ACPE's Advocacy Committee to speak for the

profession and to advance the work of professional chaplains and spiritual care providers and their role in their institutions.

We have a spirit of collaboration and resolve that is energizing. In as much as each of the Strategic Partners has unique tasks, needs, services, and concerns, we are evermore dedicated to working with professional organizations that have (1) a shared view of the role of professionals in spiritual health and psycho-spiritual counseling, (2) aligned missions and values, and (3) shared commitments on how best to grow and inspire the future of the discipline. The vision of the Strategic Partners is to formalize a relationship that enables us together to act to ensure all those we serve experience the highest quality spiritual care and to safeguard the future of the spiritual care profession.

We are enthusiastic about our continued work as Strategic Partners and growing our group of allies for the betterment of the profession, in service to our members and all those they serve.