Response to APC Decision to Withdraw from Merger Talks with ACPE

Colleagues,

We wanted to share with you a letter that was sent yesterday to the members of the APC Board regarding their decision to withdraw from merger talks with ACPE. Please complete the form below to stay informed about developments in this matter.

George Fitchett

Director, Transforming Chaplaincy

January 5, 2022

Dear Rev. Garland and APC Board Members,

We write to convey our shock and disappointment regarding the decision of the APC Board to discontinue merger discussions with ACPE. We believe that creating a unified professional association for spiritual care and spiritual care education in the U.S. is *the* top priority for chaplaincy and spiritual care today. We ask you to reconsider this decision, return to the table, and continue to explore a merger with ACPE.

Creating one professional organization for spiritual care and spiritual care education will give the field a stronger, unified voice for our work, including our commitment to the highest standards for performing it. It will help better align the tasks of education and certification of contemporary spiritual care practitioners. It will expand the utilization of research to advance effective spiritual care and spiritual care education. Pursuing these goals through a merger with ACPE is a uniquely powerful way to advance the mission and vision of APC. This is an opportunity that must be embraced.

Your emails of December 10, 2021 and December 23, 2021 about your decision suggest to us that discontinuing the merger discussion was poorly reasoned: “A merger between APC and ACPE would not be in the best interests of APC, especially as APC is a solvent and strong independent nonprofit organization with no forecasted financial or legal problems” (December 23, 2021). While professional associations often prioritize the growth and continuation of the organization over the needs of their individual members, they do exist to serve the needs of their members, including their needs for continuing education, strengthened professional practice through research, professional support, networking, and the like. We ask that you focus on what is best for the *members* of APC – which, we strongly believe, entails re-entering a discussion of merging with ACPE.

As you return to the table to restart the merger discussion, we ask also that you answer several pressing questions about your abrupt decision:

1. The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which APC signed when entering the merger conversation specified that the outcome might not be a merged organization, but that disagreements and stumbling blocks would be discussed with others at the table. Why did such a conversation with ACPE about your concerns not take place before you withdrew from the merger talks?
2. The emails of December 10 and December 23, 2021 indicate that your decision to withdraw from the discussion was based largely on how APC’s legal counsel interpreted the “laws that guide our fiduciary responsibilities.” Was a second opinion secured regarding this interpretation? Why was there no discussion with ACPE’s counsel on this issue?
3. There are examples of other non-profit organizations who have legally merged, as well as a range of different kinds of functions that could be shared in a merged organization. What specific models were considered? Why were all of them apparently rejected by the APC Board?
4. Given that conversations, feedback sessions and the like have been in process for the last two years, what was learned in the last few months that was not learned earlier? If your decision was guided by new information, what was that information and why was it not shared with APC members? If the decision was not guided by new information, what informed it?
5. Who participated in the discussions in early December that led to the decision to withdraw from merger conversations? We are deeply concerned about the fact that the decision was made shortly after new officers and new board members began their tenure. Did the new members of the board feel fully informed about all that had taken place since merger conversations began in March 2018 in a way that enabled them to cast an informed vote? Was Jon Overvold, the outgoing President and the person who has led much of the merger conversation, consulted about the decision?
6. Given all the work that has been done to date on a potential merger, why did the board not conduct a straw poll – at the very least – of APC members to determine their views about the merger and a potential withdrawal?
7. Since the 1980s, professional organizations of healthcare chaplains have made numerous efforts to merge. Each effort to date has failed, in part because merging requires staff and leadership changes in all participating organizations. Few volunteer members of Boards of Directors want to confront the challenges of these difficult decisions. What role did these factors play in your decision to withdraw from the discussion about merging?

In answering our questions and returning to the table, we ask you finally to consider what you know about the needs and priorities of chaplains, and specifically APC members, today. We are concerned that APC has lost sight of its members’ needs and values institutional growth and continuation over the needs of its members. Some of the undersigned are happy to partner with you on a survey of APC members to gather the information you need to make the best decision on this important matter.

Sincerely yours,

Wendy Cadge and George Fitchett

Co-signed by:

Marilyn JD Barnes

Jamie Beachy

John Betz

Marta Dabis

Allison DeLaney

Cate Michelle Desjardins

David Fleenor

Paul Galchutt

Kristin Godlin

George Grant

Daniel Grossoehme

Katy Hyman

David Johnson

Allison Kestenbaum

Michelle Kirby

Dirk Labuschagne

Kathryn Lyndes

Sarah McEvoy

Ron Oliver

Jon Overvold

Caroline Peacock

Brent Peery

Geila Rajaee

Shelly Rambo

Nina Redl

Kristen Schenk

Christina Shu

Alexander Tartaglia

Beba Tata

Timothy Usset

Charles Valenti-Hein

Kelsey White

Jeanne Wirpsa

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