What Is a Clinical Member of ACPE; Why Become One?

Chaplain Jan McCormack, MDiv, BCC,
Director, Chaplaincy & Pastoral Counseling
Denver Seminary, Denver Colorado
jan.mccormack@denverseminary.edu

My denomination required a unit of CPE for ordination and endorsement to be the Air Force chaplain I wanted to become. I reluctantly enrolled under duress. Within weeks I was hooked on the CPE learning process and the ministry opportunities. While I waited for an AF position, I completed two more units. After I came on active duty as an AF chaplain, I completed my fourth unit of extended CPE. I never intended to do hospital ministry full-time (back then CPE was mostly in the healthcare organizations), nor to become a CPE supervisor. It would have been natural for me to “take the learning and run” with no thought to staying connected to the ACPE organization. Yet I opted to join ACPE in 1981 and have renewed my membership every year since. I have attended numerous annual and regional ACPE National Conferences and affiliated with whatever ACPE region I found myself in as the AF moved me around the country and world. I served as the Clinical Representative to the South Central Region.

Why did I do this? I personally needed and wanted a network of trained clinical chaplains to peer with and to consult with for myself and my clients, especially outside of my institution. ACPE members have kept me honest, semi-sane and current theologically, educationally and psychologically. As I moved, they provided the stability of a group that would welcome me back “home” anytime, anywhere. In a military institution that values quick diagnosis and action and often equates emotion with weakness, my fellow ACPE colleagues kept me from loosing the kinder, gentler, humorous parts of me. Without ACPE colleagues over the years, it would have been even harder than it was to keep myself internally balanced. They often proved a great source for local resources that I needed for my parishioners and a quick way for me to learn about the new community I had moved into. Finally, it gave me a great line for my resume! When I retired from the AF, I found myself using my ACPE network to help me process my grief and move on to other opportunities.

We clinical members of ACPE are the success stories of the CPE process and a tribute to our supervisors’ investment in us! I have taught didactics for their CPE groups and they have done the same for my military groups. I have worked as a military, hospital, police, prison, industrial, disaster and NASCAR and drag racing chaplain. I am now in my 2nd career as the Director of the Chaplaincy and Pastoral Counseling at Denver Seminary, where I was hired to create an MDiv, MA and DMin program with a chaplaincy specialty. I have been contracted by the US Army and the US Air Force Chaplaincies to help them create a mentoring program, the US Navy Chaplaincy to teach “Institutional Ministry” to their chaplains and several denominations to teach “Brief Therapy” and other didactics to their clergy/chaplains. I have taught numerous workshops/seminars and authored several articles plus the book, The Work of the Chaplain. I serve on several local and national boards. Who would have thought that one unit of CPE, taken with reluctance, would be the beginning of so much joy in chaplaincy?

I want for my seminary students the great experiences I had in my CPE training. I encourage them to take CPE and to join ACPE as student members. My seminary is so sold on ACPE training that we have applied to become our own ACPE CPE Center and I hope to enter the supervisory process myself 31 years after that 1st CPE unit! Perhaps that ACPE network may someday lead to employment for my students, but I promise them, it can definitely lead to a peer group that can prove invaluable to them both personally and professionally—just as it has for me.