As the old saying goes, what's in a name? I generally don't pay attention to names—or at least I like to think I don't. Choosing a name tries my patience. I want to say that the name really doesn't matter. What matters is what the person or group or company is and does and is known for. But, in fact, the name is very important, and what name one chooses often says a lot about the identify of those who bear the name.

I’ve been through two major name changes on the part of this association that I come from. The first time we chose the word “college” to be part of our name, a relative of “collegial.” Clearly that said something about who we were or thought we were. This time, we chose “professional” to be part of our name. What is that about? Well, we could talk a lot about that question, but, instead, I’d like to talk a little about what I think that name should mean for us as we live out our lives as a professional association.

Webster’s Dictionary says some interesting things about “professional.” A professional is learned, an expert, a master of a body of knowledge. But the word whose definition struck closer to home for me was the word, “professionalism.” Webster defines professionalism as involving character, spirit, methods and standards. It involves observing the standing practice of a profession. This definition implies to me an accountability to uphold all of these and to grow in them. It implies supporting the advancement of the profession—not for one’s own benefit—but to support the good that the profession stands for.

One of the questions this all raises for me is, is there a profession of chaplaincy or only professional chaplains? Is there a guild? My answer is that we can’t have one without the other. If we want to be regarded as professionals, we have to be willing to be accountable to a profession. That is part of the deal. We cannot claim to be “professional” and set our own individual agendas. To...
be fully professional is to fully participate in the agenda and the life of the profession, including the shaping of the agenda, and to support that profession as it grows and changes.

In his first president's column in the January/February issue of the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education (ACPE) News, Art Schmidt wrote, "And at the recent COMISS meeting it was evident that most of us in the pastoral care and counseling movement on this continent are of one spirit, if not yet of one mind, on some matters." I believe that Art is absolutely right on both counts.

Our spirits are speaking to each other and hearing each other—deep to deep. We are of one spirit. All of us who have been around this work for a while, I hope have experienced that connection.

In our response to disaster on September 11, 2001, and following, we who are professional chaplains worked together with one spirit. Our differences of geography, professional membership, race, and religious denomination largely vanished as we engaged in our common service. When we look at what is ethical and unethical professional behavior, our spirits all see the same thing. We all know it when we see it. When we hear Dayle Friedman in Toronto talk about her encounters with her seniors, we all say, "Yes, that's us. That's what we do. That's our profession." When we come together as we did at the EPIC conference, we sense how powerful that one spirit is that moves among us and how much it can overwhelm the issues that seem to divide us. We hear the announcement of joint standards and we all cheer. In those moments, it's all about we. It's about us.

At base, we all know in our spirits what it takes to be a professional chaplain. We are united in our desire to relieve suffering, to ease the spiritual distress of those we meet, and to do it with professionalism—that is, with character, with high standards, and with a unified spirit.

But Art is right. Despite all this oneness of spirit, we are very often not of one mind. Several years ago, three of our organizations set out with great spirit and high hopes to plan a joint life together only to find ourselves unable to be of one mind about what that life should look like. The Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling, the closest thing we have to a journal for our profession, may go out of business because we cannot come to one mind on how it should best serve us. EPIC came close to cancellation on several occasions because we could not come to a common mind on matters that were central to at least some people. Will the joint standards project be the same? So far, it doesn't look like it, but the joint meeting of the boards in November will be a real test of where we are as a profession. The same kind of thing happens within our associations. We have lots of great ideas, but agreeing on how to get them up and running is another issue.

Why are we so often of the same spirit but so seldom of the same mind? As I listen to these conversations, I hear the we so often turn to me or to my group. Too often I hear, "My group needs so and so." I hear, "This is a good idea, but why didn't anyone talk to me?" "This feels right, but look at all that I have to give up?" "This doesn't take into account my needs?" "This effort doesn't feed me?"

Too often there is an apparent unwillingness among us to appreciate and to accept that the good of the profession and of this association—which hopefully is a valid expression of that profession—transcends, and maybe even conflicts with, what is most comfortable for me. That sometimes I as an individual may not benefit and may even be inconvenienced by what the profession is doing but that I need to accept it to move the profession forward and to move forward the service that the profession provides.

We who are so caring for those we officially serve—such good listeners, such positive purveyors of hope, and so basically compassionate by nature—can become so self-centered, self-righteous, self-important, and negative when we deal with our peers in chaplaincy. We have proven that, despite this basically caring nature, we are not immune to our culture, which often emphasizes personal or group gain, interest, and privilege over duty and service to a greater community. We have proven that as trained as we are to appreciate and to value growth, we can be as resistant as anyone to change.

We too often practice another lesson of our culture, that life is a zero sum game. That is, if you get something, then I must have to give up something. If you are right, then I must be wrong. We don't often enough entertain the possibility that a "win-win" can be found, that maybe, for the good of the profession and those the profession serves, it's best that someone else besides us win this time.

We can lose perspective and behave as if this is all about me or
my subgroup or even my association when it is about the profession and what the profession represents, which, in this case, is the delivery of spiritual care to those who are suffering. We can lose track of the fact that we are not about the aggrandizement of the profession for its own sake, but we are about the important function that the profession hopefully performs.

Yes, there are a lot of things we have to give up to grow this profession. An example is our worship together. As our culture becomes more diverse, and we become more diverse as an appropriate response, we cannot worship together as we used to. When I first joined the APC, the worship services were mostly run by members of the Salvation Army, hardly interfaith. A day will come soon when we do not do anything together that any of us would recognize as worship. This is a loss. I am a life-long Lutheran. My spirit is fed, and I am often moved to tears by a rousing chorus of "The Church's One Foundation Is Jesus Christ, Her Lord." However, while my work excites me and feeds me in many ways, that Lutheran part of my identity is not something that I usually can feed in the multifaith and multicultural world in which I have been called to minister.

In the planning of EPIC, we only began to learn what is truly involved in accommodating diverse cultures. Providing translations into another language is expensive even in Canada where they are more used to it.

On another front, doing advocacy effectively is not something that lends itself to extended processing before decisions are made and actions taken. If we want to do advocacy effectively, our leadership will have to be given a great deal more autonomy than many members have been comfortable with to date.

We lose track of what an association like the APC is and is not. It is not a church or synagogue, and it is not a social club. The APC is not here to make us comfortable or entertain us. It is here to make us better professionals. Being at a convention like this should, in many ways, make us feel uncomfortable. It should stretch us and challenge us. Especially for those of us who have had place and privilege in this culture and profession, this adjustment is a continuing struggle. The club that was built to be a comfortable place for European, straight, Christian men, and then European, straight, Christian women has got to go if our profession is to fulfill its mission.

All too often we think of the APC as an association here to serve us, to serve me. Of course, doesn't the mission statement say the APC exists to "serve its members"? Yes it does. But who are these members? Sometimes it's easy to think of the members as we and the association, or perhaps the leadership or staff, as some disembodied they.

Well, the problem is, there is no they. It's all we. Since we are all a part of the they as well as a part of the we, the mission is essentially saying they we are all here to serve each other. Moreover, the full mission statement says "serve its members and promote professional chaplaincy." The problem is that we often like to think of those as two separate tasks.

There is a famous quote from Rabbi Hillel: "If I am not for myself, who will be for me?" People sometimes interpret this as, "I take care of myself first. If I have time left, I'll do something about the others." Rabbi David Saperstein, who has lobbied in Washington on social justice issues for the Reform Jewish movement in America for decades, says this is a mistaken interpretation. We have to take into account the second part of the quote which is "If I am only for myself, who am I?" and "If not now, when?" According to Rabbi Saperstein, the concern for oneself and concern for others are one and the same thing.

As an example, it makes no sense for me, as someone who commutes to New York City every day, to say that I am too busy worrying about my personal security to worry about US foreign policy as if one has nothing to do with the other. Nor does it make sense for me to say I am too busy worrying about my personal financial security to worry about the financial security of the health care industry. Likewise, it makes no sense for me to say that I am too busy looking after my own personal reputation in my hospital and community to worry about the reputation of my profession as a whole and to take part in certification and other activities that uphold that reputation. And it makes no sense for me to say that I am too busy demonstrating my worth to my own administrator to take part in research and other efforts that demonstrate the worth of the profession of which I am a part. And yet, these themes are often heard among us.

I would propose what may be a paradigm shift in how we think of the APC. Let's forget about the
idea that the APC exists to serve us. Let's work on the idea that we fulfill our obligations to the APC in order to gain the privilege of being considered official members of the profession of chaplaincy and for the privilege of being of service to this wonderful profession to which we each have the great good fortune to have been called. We are members of the APC because it gives us the privilege of serving our profession not because membership gives the profession the opportunity to serve us.

And what does the nature of this service need to be? While there are many possibilities that fit our individual talents, I suggest that there are at least three forms of service which need to be mandatory for all of us.

The first of these forms of service I suggest is our own conduct which needs to live up to the spirit and character of our profession, particularly in relationship to our colleagues and our association. This includes fulfilling our responsibilities as members: paying our dues on time and fulfilling our continuing education responsibilities. An unconscionable amount of our association revenue—that is, our dues—is spent reminding members and cajoling members to fulfill their membership obligations. This service also includes taking the time to share our ideas and our programs with our peers. Making others reinvent the wheel is not in the spirit of our profession.

Second, we each need to do our part to make sure that those who come after us are up to the standards of our profession and are received into the profession in the way that we were or would like to have been. The number of chaplains certified by the APC has almost doubled since I was certification chair. The candidates come from increasingly diverse backgrounds. The burden on those involved in the certification process has risen dramatically. These are wonderful problems. However, the rise in the number of candidates and their increased diversity have also raised the likelihood that the process will be overwhelmed and not work the way it is supposed to.

Area certification chairs will spread the work much more evenly across states. Those who live in states without many candidates will now have more of an opportunity to participate as committee members and as mentors. To my mind, to refuse to serve on a certification committee is a dereliction of our responsibilities as members of this profession. We will soon have a training program that will be required of all those who will serve on certification committees. My goal for the association would be that every member would be, and would want to be, knowledgeable and trained to serve.

The third area of service is advocacy. It takes many forms. We can advocate through publication. We can advocate through research. We can advocate through direct intervention. Like certification, this activity is not only for everyone, it is a team game. That means that everyone plays and everyone plays according to the same game plan. This is not a place for lone rangers. We also need people who want to help develop this plan. One of the biggest needs of our profession is for an advocacy plan that is proactive rather than reactive and focused rather than scatter shot.

This also is no place for competition. Too much of our time is spent knocking down the efforts of other professions who are taking the place we think we should have and too little effort is spent building on those endeavors and being thankful that someone has stepped up to fill this void that we have been delict in filling.

Likewise, we need to stop the competition that sometimes happens between our associations. Advocacy will only be effective if we are all in it together. Too often we have allowed the fragile state of the health care industry to pit one part of our profession against another. We cannot spend any more time on competition around whether a position should be filled by a CPE supervisor or certified chaplain. We need to find a way around this issue.

We should have no more time for the turfsim and protectionism that results in chaplains seeking jobs having to surf several Web sites to find what's open or that results in those seeking to advertise those jobs having to pay as much as one thousand dollars to make sure any one job ad gets maximum exposure. We have no more time for the turfsim and "our groupism" which keeps us from producing common materials promoting professional pastoral care.

And, by the way, these separations are major causes for our dues being as high as they are. A common Web site and common publications would mean big savings to all of our associations. This is a team game. We are all on the same team.

We all need to be ready to participate in research. Whether we like it or not, we live in an age when he or she who has the best
numbers often wins. One of the major reasons we don’t know what a reasonable chaplain’s salary should be is that when we send out a survey, most of our members don’t return it. There is no good reason that I have ever heard why every member shouldn’t return a salary survey and quickly. We are all on the same team and we all must get in the game. One of our members is currently doing some research on best practices. His biggest frustration is that his fellow members keep refusing to participate.

I was at a panel presentation on psycho-social-spiritual screening before a large audience of mostly oncology doctors and nurses several years ago. The chaplain on the panel made a big pitch for including chaplains in research projects. After the presentation, the first two comments from the audience were from doctors who told of asking their chaplains to participate in research and being told that the chaplains didn’t have the time or it wasn’t part of their job. As I said earlier, it makes no sense for us to spend time demonstrating our worth to our individual administrators and not take the time to assist our profession as a whole demonstrate how it contributes to patient care.

The good news is that we are a profession. We are a profession that is increasingly recognized. We live in an age where spirituality and religion enjoy renewed respect. We live in an age where the contribution of religion to health is increasingly recognized. While there are still naysayers out there, it no longer works by and large to blame the problems of professional chaplains on health care administrators and members of others professions. Some data we at the HealthCare Chaplaincy are about to publish on a national survey of hospital administrators suggests that there is strong support for chaplaincy even among administrators whose hospitals do not employ chaplains. Many of the doors we have knocked on and often beaten our heads against for years are now open to us.

We can grow, and we will grow. We have come a long way. But we have to all re dedicate ourselves to the service of our profession. Because, lest we forget, the more professional chaplains there are out there, the better prepared we are, and the more advocacy there is to support our hiring and continued placement, the more the spiritual needs of the suffering and those who care for them will be tended to. And that, my friends, is what it’s all about.