The Atlanta Cyclorama is an enormous painting depicting the 1864 Battle of Atlanta. It covers a whopping 15,036 square feet. As I understand it, the canvas originally was suspended from a large ring running around the ceiling, something like a tremendous shower curtain. Over time, the canvas began to pull away from this supporting ring. The reason is obvious even to nonengineers: this big picture was coming apart because it was held up only from the top.

The repair team determined that the supporting ring needed to be supplemented with an adhesive. After much experimentation, they found a glue which would bond the canvas to the cylindrical wall of the cyclorama’s new building without discoloring or damaging it. Thus, the painting no longer would be held up from the top only. It would be supported evenly from top to bottom. Every square millimeter of the whole fifteen thousand square foot canvas would be supported by some square millimeter of the wall.

I think my point is obvious. Without becoming too hierarchical, we can say that APC has a very fine supporting top ring, composed of the executive director, the national office staff, and the board of directors. Nevertheless, their support isn’t enough. If APC and professional spiritual care are to remain vital, you and I must work together to support our big picture in a total way. Otherwise, the strain will cause APC’s big picture to lose its integrity.

APC’s responsibilities

First, let’s talk about the supporting ring. Unlike the cyclorama repair team, we don’t want to get rid of this. APC has to have some sort of accountable leadership. APC’s leadership ring provides you, the membership, with five basic services:

- Organizational and financial structure to keep APC running effectively and efficiently.
- Interorganizational relationships, such as the Council on Collaboration.
- Advocacy tools to help you speak up.
- Professional resources to help you do your job with excellence.
- Connection to your APC colleagues and to job opportunities.

These are things that none of us can do in isolation. They must be done at an organizational level. Your leadership is answerable to you for them, and we’re hard at work. Financially and structurally, APC remains sound. Among our advocacy tools, are the recently produced DVD “Compassion and Caring” and Healing Spirit print publication, both of which have been designed to help you talk about your work as chaplains. Our Web site also continues to serve us.

Robert A. Kidd, BCC

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well and is one means of keeping us connected.

Lest I sound too rah-rah in my remarks, I need to add that APC still has growing to do. Our work on the Council on Collaboration requires ongoing attention and commitment if we are to sustain the momentum we gained by crafting our four common documents. If these powerful collaborative efforts are not attended to, the bond between the six member organizations will become flabby and less effective.

While we’re talking about growth points, I must mention our continuing education requirements. Of all the issues that have come before me, none has generated as much dialogue—to say nothing of a few monologues—as the new continuing education (CE) guidelines. I want to assure you that the APC board hears you when you say that you have struggled with these new standards.

The Education Committee is forming a work group which will include members who have written and made suggestions for our CE program. This group will be asked to examine these new guidelines, gather and review your comments, and then to make recommendations to the board. We pledge to be good listeners.

Member responsibilities

What are our responsibilities as members of APC? I see them as twofold: to be good spiritual caregivers and to be advocates for professional chaplaincy.

If others don’t see how we care for the people right in front of us, no one will believe us when we speak for our discipline. A fully engaged, well-prepared, professional chaplain shines brilliantly and is the best advocate APC could ever have. In addition, let’s become advocates beyond our walls. There are many possibilities for this.

Advocate within your organization

Take the initiative with administrators, using tools such as Healing Spirit and “Compassion and Caring” to give them concrete examples of what we do. Tell them about APC corporate membership, and build a case for them to join. Listen to them as well: to their overarching goals for the institution, to where their hearts really are, and strategize to make spiritual care lean into those goals. Make it very, very plain that we want spiritual care to be an ally in this work. Prove that we are on the team and that we are not simply doing our jobs in isolation.

Advocate within your faith group

Take relational initiative with endorsers. E-mail them anecdotes they can use to talk about the ministry of chaplaincy. In so doing, we help them to work better for each of us.

Advocate with government representatives

This kind of advocacy becomes more critical each and every year, and APC needs to do more in this realm to help. Remember the outcry over the allegations of proselytizing with the Air Force chaplaincy groups? Remember the difficulty with unqualified and opportunistic spiritual caregivers during hurricanes Katrina and Rita? APC has something to say in many areas, and we need to speak up.

We need to be ready with the titles and numbers of relevant bills coming before Congress. We need to have names and contact information for the key players in these government actions. We need to re-

member that our voices count and that we lose when we fail to speak.

Become active in APC leadership at the local level

The old saying is true: all politics is local. When the nominating committee calls you, or when you’re asked to participate in a certification committee, search your heart, search your daytimer, and find a way to say “Yes.” In this way, you make APC stronger and make yourself a better chaplain.

No one can do everything, but everyone can do something. Remember the cyclorama. Each square millimeter is important. It’s not only the ring at the top; it’s the entire wall. Each square millimeter supports a part of the painting. If that one square millimeter fails, the entire fifteen-thousand-square-foot painting is weakened.

Let’s do all our part to hold up APC’s big picture and to keep it in shape for years to come. ☞