A New Certification Program

Proposal from AAPCSE Coordinating Council

October 2017

The AAPCSE Coordinating Council is recommending formation of a new organization to extend the mission of AAPC to new constituencies. The proposed new organization is described in a separate document. This document explains one of the proposed products to be offered by the new organization, a certification program. Both proposals are responses to the service-not-survival question that has guided us the past two years: “What does the world need that we have resources to meet?”

**In Clay, Not Stone**

This proposal, like the proposal for developing a new organization, remains in process. We are asking the region to consider and discuss these proposals prayerfully, to approve continued development of the ideas/work represented in these proposals, and to approve formation of a New-Wineskin Organization Steering Committee that will take our in-clay work, improve upon it, and make more solid recommendations to us over the next 12 months.

**Multiple Certification Tracks**

The certification program we are proposing is actually several certification programs. Under the broad umbrella we are proposing for the new organization, we see several potential certification tracks:

* Spiritually-Integrated Psychotherapy
* Pastoral Counseling
* Pastoral Care
* Spiritually-Integrated Healthcare Practice
* Spiritually-Integrated Organizational Leadership.

**Two Objectives**

These new certification programs are envisioned to accomplish two objectives:

1. to provide information/education in spiritually-integrated practice to a broad sector of interested professionals, and
2. to connect a broad sector of professionals to a community of formation and transformation.

**Extending the Wisdom of AAPC**

While both objectives are answers to our organizing question (“what does the world need that we have resources to meet?”), the second is, in our conversation, more important than the first. The wisdom of AAPC is that skilled therapists and other practitioners are formed over time in a community of learning and practice. The certification program we are proposing is not intended to teach practitioners everything they need to know to do spiritually-integrated work over their professional lifetimes. Rather, it is intended to connect practitioners to a community of formation that will engage them and support them over their professional lifetimes.

**How Psychotherapists Get Continuing Education**

In order to connect practitioners to a community of formation, we first have to connect with practitioners. In researching and considering how best to do that, we have been impressed with the number of psychotherapists and other professionals who now organize their ongoing continuing education around earning specialized certifications (like EMDR, Emotionally-Focused Therapy for Couples, and many others). Many of these require continuing education hours (30-40 is typical) and consultation/supervision hours (10 is typical).

**The Goldilocks Test**

We are proposing a certification program modeled after these other certification programs, one that engages learners over a long enough period of time that they come to know our community (our values, practices, and people), but not so long that the process overwhelms or discourages interested professionals from considering our programs.

**One Example: Certification in Spiritually-Integrated Psychotherapy**

The current model for our Spiritually-Integrated Psychotherapy Certification, for instance, calls for completion of a 30-hour continuing education curriculum and 10 hours of consultation/supervision with an approved consultant/supervisor.

The proposed 30-hour curriculum, as it currently exists, is:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Course Titles** | **Contact Hours** |
| ***Foundations of Spiritually-Integrated Psychotherapy*** | **6** |
| ***Developing Spiritual Conversations*** | **3** |
| ***Spiritual Assessment*** | **3** |
| ***Spiritual Interventions in Psychotherapy***  | **6** |
| ***Spiritual Struggles in Psychotherapy*** | **3** |
| ***Spirituality and Belief System of the Therapist*** | **3** |
| ***Spiritually-Integrated Case Formulation*** | **6** |
| ***Total CE Hours*** | **30** |

**A Paradigm Shift: Certification as Entry-Point not End-Point**

The certification paradigm we are proposing represents a significant shift in the certification paradigm AAPC has lived from since our founding. In that paradigm, certification represented the culmination of a process of formation, a blessing that an end-point level of competence had been attained. (Even though AAPC stopped certifying competence several years ago now, the requirements for certification continued to represent significant hours invested in learning and supervision.) In the paradigm we are proposing, certification represents an entry-point into a community of formation, a threshold near the beginning of a professional journey.

**For Good Reason**

We are proposing this shift in paradigm because the old paradigm was no longer working. In the years 2012-2015, across 50 states, AAPC certified 27 people, an average of nine per year. This level of connection does not meet our hope for the level of service we want to offer in the world.

**What About Liability Associated with Certification?**

AAPC ended its certification program not just because of disinterest, but also because of concerns about liability. We have consulted with other professional associations that offer certification and with an attorney. We have learned that protections against liability are fairly simple, involving disclosure and disclaimer language. We would work with an attorney to draft such language and are confident that the risks of offering certification are minimal and manageable.

**Is There a Market for These Certifications?**

We believe there is. There is unquestionably strong interest among psychotherapists in how to integrate spirituality ethically and skillfully into the work of psychotherapy. Research in spiritually-integrated psychotherapy, publications on spiritually-integrated psychotherapy, and workshops addressing spirituality in psychotherapy are all on the rise. There are now over 60 dual degree graduate programs (MDiv + Masters in Counseling/Social Work), four in North Carolina alone. Additionally, the Board of the Samaritan Institute has reviewed a draft of our Spiritually-Integrated Psychotherapy curriculum and is ready to pilot the training in several of their centers, as soon as we are ready to offer it.

**The Long Game: Connection with a Community of Formation**

If professionals attend our continuing education events only, or complete one of our certification programs only, and do not remain connected with our professional community over time, we believe we will have made at least a modest impact on improving the quality of spiritually-integrated professional care. It is our experience, however, that doing spiritually-integrated work well requires wisdom that comes from seasoning, support, mentoring, and exposure to diverse perspectives. It is our hope that many of those who connect with our community through the certification program will find it to be a professional home.