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**AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF PASTORAL COUNSELORS  
SAMARITAN INSTITUTE**

**REPORT**

**NOVEMBER 8, 2000**



**Time:** November 8, 2000

**To:** Roy Woodruff

**From:** Bob Boorstin  
Erika Schlachter

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**RE: SURVEY FINDINGS**

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The American Association of Pastoral Counselors (AAPC) and the Samaritan Institute set out to explore attitudes toward the role of spiritual values and beliefs in the treatment of mental and emotional problems. The research aimed to follow up on a 1992 Gallup survey that examined preferences about seeking help from professional therapists who integrate spirituality with treatment.

More specifically the AAPC aimed to gauge popular support for its proposal that pastoral counselors be included in the roster of Medicare approved care givers. This formal recognition will serve to increase access for the medically underserved and the elderly populations to mental health professionals, as well as to amplify the prominence of the AAPC and its members.

The results are drawn from questions appended to a national political survey of one thousand likely voters conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Research from October 30-31, 2000. The margin of error is +/- 3.2 percent.

**Summary of Findings**

The research found that an overwhelming number of Americans recognize the close link between spiritual faith, religious values and mental health, and would prefer to seek assistance from a mental health professional who recognizes and can integrate spiritual values into the course of treatment.

- 83 percent feel their spiritual faith and religious beliefs are closely tied to their state of mental and emotional health.
- 75 percent of respondents say it is important to see a professional counselor who integrates their values and beliefs into the counseling process.



- 69 percent believe it to be important to see a professional counselor who represents spiritual values and beliefs if they had a serious problem that required counseling.
- 77 percent say it would be important for an elderly parent or relative who was in need of treatment to get assistance from a mental health professional who knew and understood their spiritual beliefs and values.
- More people mention pastoral counselors and others with religious training than any other professionals (29 percent).

### **Integrating Beliefs with Treatment**

The public sees a clear link between the strength of one's spiritual faith and the status of one's mental health—an attitude that puts pastoral counselors in a strong position as the AAPC advances its goals. When asked about the relationship between spiritual faith and religious beliefs and mental and emotional health, 83 percent of respondents said they are closely related – with 55 percent saying they are *very* closely related. This is an extraordinary level of intensity and speaks strongly to attitudes toward the importance of mental health treatments that include spirituality as well as psychotherapy.

Following up on a 1992 Gallup survey, respondents were asked to answer questions about preferences for seeking treatment from a professional counselor who represents spiritual values and beliefs, and about seeing a professional counselor who integrates the client's values and beliefs into the counseling process. To gauge intensity and gain further understanding, half the respondents were asked how important having the spiritual background is, while the other half were asked if they would prefer it. Additional questions addressed delivery of mental health services and the link between mental and emotional health and spiritual faith.

In 1992, the Samaritan Institute and AAPC commissioned Gallup to ask questions about Americans and their attitudes toward pastoral counseling. This strong level of support shown then for pastoral counselors continues eight years later. At that time, 66 percent said they would prefer to receive counseling from a person who represented their spiritual values. In the most recent findings, 63 percent they would want to receive counseling from a professional counselor who represented spiritual values and beliefs. Eight in ten (81 percent) said they wanted their own spiritual values respected and integrated into the counseling process. Most recently, 72 percent said they would prefer to see a professional counselor who integrated their values and beliefs into the counseling process. [See Figures 1 and 2]



The current research went further, however, to examine the level of importance that respondents assign to having people with training in spirituality and faith provide counseling. Almost seven in ten respondents (69 percent) said it was important to them to see a professional counselor who represented spiritual values and beliefs – with 44 percent of respondents indicating it would be very important to them. Fully three quarters (75 percent) said it was important to have faith incorporated with the process of working to overcome a serious emotional or mental problem; 47 percent said it would be very important to them. This type of intense support demonstrates the potential impact pastoral counselors could have as they attempt to serve the American public.

### **Seeking Support**

The research also examined general attitudes towards seeking assistance from mental health professionals in an attempt to understand where pastoral counselors fit into this professional constellation. Taken together, the data indicate that respondents would prefer to get assistance from those trained in spiritual beliefs and religious faith as compared to professionals with medical training. Overall, 29 percent of respondents would prefer to get assistance from a pastoral counselor or other religious cleric, compared to 27 percent for a psychiatrist and 17 for a psychologist. Additionally, 13 percent would seek assistance from their family doctors. [See Figure 3]

In order to expand the pool of people who seek treatment for mental and emotional problems, respondents were asked their reasons for not seeking professional The second most common reason that respondents gave for not seeing a mental health professional – 15 percent – is they “fear that [their] spiritual values and beliefs may not be respected and taken seriously.” Almost 20 percent (18 percent) said they “could deal with [their] own problems” and 13 percent said their health insurance doesn’t cover visits to a mental health professional. Fears that their beliefs may not be taken seriously are especially pronounced among African Americans, devout Evangelicals, those who have completed some schooling beyond high school and those under the age of 50. Clearly, the need is there and by increasing access to pastoral counselors through Medicare and other programs (including those programs where pastoral counselors are already available, such as TRICARE and FEHB), the need can start to be met.

### **The Elderly**

The use of pastoral counseling to care for an elderly parent or relative emerges as one of the strongest elements that may help bolster AAPC’s case to be included and recognized by Medicare. Almost eight in ten (77 percent) say it would be important to them to get treatment for an elderly parent or relative from a professional who knew and



understood their spiritual beliefs and values (56 percent said it is very closely related.)  
[See Figure 4]

While 75 percent of seniors say it is important for them (63 percent of seniors say it is *very* important to them), there is great support among all age groups. As the number of those over the age of 65 increase and baby boomers come to grips with their aging parents, AAPC is poised to fill this major gap in the mental health coverage that currently exists for seniors.

### **Demographic Base of Support**

While there is general support for faith based mental health treatment, there are certain segments of the population who are even more likely to value this type of counseling. Women, African Americans, devout Evangelicals, those who attend church most frequently, and those without a college degree responded most favorably to the type of treatment pastoral counselors offer.

Important differences emerged between men and women. While overall there is only a slight difference between genders on the closeness between spirituality and emotional health (85 percent of women vs. 81 percent of men say the two are closely related), the levels of intensity are much more stark: 60 percent of women said spiritual and religious beliefs were very closely linked to emotional and mental well-being compared to 48 percent of men.

Women were much more likely than men to want to see a professional counselor who represented spiritual values and beliefs: 73 percent of women said it was important, compared to 64 percent of men. Eight in ten (80 percent of women) said it was important to them to have a counselor who integrated their values into the counseling process compared to 70 percent of men. However, among young men, there is not as much support—only 55 percent of young men said they would prefer to see someone who represented spiritual values and beliefs, compared to 69 percent for young women, 64 percent for older women and 66 percent for older men.

Overall, women were slightly more likely than men to say they would want to see a pastoral counselor (27 percent) than men (23 percent). Men were more likely to want to handle their own problems than women: 22 percent of men said they can deal with their own problems, compared to 15 percent of women.

The level of education also plays an important role in attitudes toward spirituality and mental and emotional health. People who do not have college degrees are more likely to prefer or find it important to see a professional counselor who represents



spiritual values and beliefs: 71 percent of those only with high school diplomas and 77 percent with some post high school education say it is important compared to only 63 percent of those with college degrees. However, those who are college educated are more likely to say and find it important, to see a professional counselor who integrates their values and beliefs into the counseling process – a fascinating contrast between the two questions.<sup>1</sup> Those who had some sort of post high school education were more likely to prefer to see a pastoral counselor (28 percent) than those with a college degree (23 percent). There is a striking difference when examining age and education – 30 percent of younger non college respondents said they would prefer to seek treatment from a pastoral counselor compared to 20 percent of younger college educated respondents.

Age also plays an important role among those who seek to combine spiritual and mental/emotional healing. Intensity of feeling about the closeness of spirituality and mental/emotional health appears to increase with age – 65 percent of seniors say it is very closely tied, compared to 58 who said very closely among 50-64 year olds and 44 percent of 18-29 year olds. Three-quarters of senior citizens said they would prefer to see a professional counselor that represented spiritual values and beliefs. Among senior citizens there are high levels of support for seeking the assistance of pastoral counselors – 24 percent would prefer to seek assistance from a pastoral counselor, whereas 23 percent who would prefer their family doctor and 21 percent, a psychiatrist.

Interestingly enough, the second highest levels came from 18-29 year olds (68 percent). There are very high levels of support for the integration of spirituality into counseling from younger respondents – 80 percent of young women and 77 percent of young men said they would prefer to see a counselor who integrated spirituality into the counseling process.

Race also is a very important factor in determining attitudes among respondents. Virtually all (97 percent) African Americans say emotional and mental health were closely tied to spirituality. Black respondents were also more likely than white respondents to fear that their values and beliefs would not be respected when asked why they would not see a mental health professional

African Americans were much more likely to want to see a counselor who represented spiritual values and beliefs (77 percent) compared to whites (62 percent). In addition, 54 percent of African Americans said it was very important to see a counselor who integrated their spiritual values and beliefs with counseling vs. 47 percent of whites. African Americans are the most likely to want to see support from a pastoral counselor – 42 percent compared to 23 percent of whites. .

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<sup>1</sup> The answer to this seemingly opposite trend is not readily apparent in the data.



Finally and not surprisingly, those who attend church frequently are the most likely to want to combined spirituality and treatment for mental and/or emotional problems. Eight of ten (80 percent) of those who attend church every week and 79 percent of those who go once or twice a month said they would want to see a professional counselor who integrated the two, compared to only 60 percent of those who hardly ever or never attend services. There are also differences between denominations – devout Evangelicals are more likely to prefer to see a counselor who represents spiritual beliefs and values (76 percent) than Roman Catholics (34 percent) and mainline Protestants (28 percent). Virtually all (98 percent) of devout Evangelicals said spirituality and emotional/mental health were closely related versus 85 percent of Protestants and Roman Catholics.

### **Summary**

There appears to be a favorable environment for the type of role pastoral counselors can play, especially for the growing elderly population. Voters say it is important to them that mental health counselors be able to integrate the spiritual health and mental health in the course of counseling. These data also show a widely held belief that emotional well-being is closely linked with spiritual faith. Finally, the results show that a fear exists on some level that mainstream counseling and therapy may not always take the seriously the spiritual and emotional beliefs of patients. These findings put the AAPC in a distinct position to make the argument that their members can fill a void that currently exists in treating mental and emotional problems. AAPC can work to gain inclusion into Medicare by promoting its pastoral counselors as uniquely qualified to serve in this capacity.