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A Conversation with Past AMCAP Presidents, 1975-1995

from the original video conducted and narrated by

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Editor's note: This paper is edited from the video prepared by Dr. Bush for AMCAP's 20th anniversary celebration in 1995, assembled from interviews with some of AMCAP's past presidents.

AMCAP — The Association of Mormon Counselors and Psychotherapists — has served thousands of professionals the past twenty years, supporting them in their challenge to blend gospel principles with therapeutic practice.

AMCAP — Promoting ideals and standards of helping others, consistent with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

AMCAP — Encouraging open communication, collaboration, and fellowship; especially, fellowship.

Gary Carson, EdD, Past President 1978-1979 To me, the greatest contribution AMCAP has been able to make, and will continue to be able to make, is to provide an arena where people who have the common faith come together—one, for interaction and clarification of issues, but another one is for fellowship. When I see Rich Berrett, it’s an embrace. I love Rich Berrett. I love Henry Isakson. I love Wayne Wright. These are individuals that I just have great affection for, and that when I see them, it’s a time to rejoice.

Evelyn Thatcher, MA, Past President 1986-1987 The greatest thing that I remember is my association with Danny Gray and with Richard Ferre. We had board meetings at Richard’s place in Salt Lake City; and Dan and I became very close friends.

Richard Johnson, PhD, Past President 1980-1981 AMCAP has been kind of a refuge; AMCAP has been a safe place. And we do promote ideas here, but they’re gospel-based ideas.

Vance Hendricks, EdD, Past President 1992-1993 Well, I think the highlight of the presidency was the association with the people, both in the Executive Board and the board of directors; and, AMCAP members are great!
Brent Scharman, PhD, Past President 1988-1989 I think the best experience was perhaps two-fold: one, the monthly board meetings that we held — people were quite faithful about getting to them, and coming from some pretty good distances at times — and you form such a nice, wonderful, close bond in relationships. And then number two, I think the opportunity to do some creative thinking and see it come to fruition, such as in the conferences — and changes that were made to the newsletter and journal, and that sort of thing.

Faith and fellowship — Keys to AMCAP’s success.

Who were the AMCAP founding fathers, and what brought them together twenty years ago?

Henry Isakson, PhD, Past President 1976-1977 Some of my fondest early memories are of the times when some of us Mormon counselors and psychotherapists would get together at the APGA convention and have a lunch or a breakfast together and just kind of compare notes as professionals and as Mormons. And eventually, after some years of meeting like that on kind of an informal basis, we organized what we called the LOS Personal and Guidance Association.

E. Wayne Wright, D.Ed, Past President 1975-1976 We had quite a group; they were mostly people from BYU, Weber State, University of Utah, and Utah State. But we couldn’t get on the program; we didn’t have status to get on the program at APGA typically. And the agendas of the APGA were different from ours. So we met privately and had a reserved space; we would get together for a day or for an evening, and just put on our own program — for us. We decided to meet every month for the ensuing year; we met down at Vic Cline’s office, and we had — the ones that I remember were — Victor Cline, Henry Isakson from Ricks College, Gary Carson from Weber State, Burton Kelly from BYU, and myself from USU.

Gary Carson, EdD, Past President 1978-1979 It was Henry who came up with the acronym — The Association of Mormon Counselors and Psychotherapists, AMCAP. That was kind of the beginning.

Two decades of devoted leadership fostered growth and exceptional programs from AMCAP’s best.

E. Wayne Wright, D.Ed, Past President 1975-1976 Elder Harman Rector came to our stake conference. After his meeting with the stake leadership, I cornered him (since I was on the high council, I had a foot in the door). And I said, “There are a group of us who are trying to start an association of Mormon counselors and psychotherapists; and we want to gain acceptance in the Church. We want the Church to know of us; but we want the Church to trust us, and to know what we’re about. Would you be willing to speak to our group, and tell us what we need to know from a Church standpoint?” And he said — and I remember this very clearly — he said, “I don’t know anything about counseling. But I know that if I can define a problem, I know where to find the answer, and the answer is in the scriptures.” And he said, “I will think about this, and get back to you.” And he did, and he spoke to us.

Gary Carson, EdD, Past President 1978-1979 President Ezra Taft Benson came to that meeting. At the time, President Benson was president of the Quorum of the Twelve. We had an awards ceremony and an awards dinner; that was during the year that I served as president, so I had the opportunity to introduce him. It was one thing to sit there at the table with him and with the other officials of the organization — but at the time I got up to introduce him, I looked down at him at that table and reviewed all the kind of things he had done, with regards to distributing welfare and organizing that effort after World War II — and I looked down that table at him and said, “This is kind of stunning, because in another day and time, we might have introduced him as Peter.” Those were precious, kind moments!

Wendy Ulrich, PhD, Past President 1994-1995 Well, I joined AMCAP as a student, in my doctoral program, so it was extremely important for me in that context to be in association with other members of the Church who were trying to do the same kinds of things I was learning about, and to see that perspective. So I think, having the opportunity of living outside of the mainstream of the Church, to associate with other people in the profession has probably been the most important thing for me. I still remember some of the first conferences I came to. I remember particularly noticing some of the women who were involved in AMCAP — and that was really important for me — to see that there were people in this profession whom I could really relate to as role models. I remember Anne Horton being a real presence. I remember Bev Shaw and Joan Anderson being people I admired from afar, even before I knew who they were or what
they did in the organization — just the way they carried themselves, and the way they participated in what was going on; it was really vital to me.

Gary Carson, EdD, Past President 1978-1979 I think at that point in time, it was a response people had to a genuine kind of need that they felt from within. I don’t attribute it to a massive effort to try and canvass and petition people for membership. I believe there were efforts to make people aware, and we began to have conventions: initially just one a year, and then as I recall we went to spring and fall. And there were some, to me, outstanding things that took place at those conventions. We were fortunate to have some people who were very capable, who were willing to come and present, and ultimately generate pre-convention workshops — I think specifically of Carlfred Broderick. Ron Bingham was also one of the people who was involved in that early group; and so as we started to generate programs for conventions, I remember Ron specifically recommending Carlfred, whom I think he had met at Penn. State. And Carlfred had such genuine warmth and such a great sense of humor, and such a broad background and training, that when he presented it was just a delight. It was total joy.

Alan Westover, MS, Past President 1993-1994 Over the course of the last six years, I’ve seen from my vantage point, my perspective, a lot of movement. And presently, I feel very comfortable with where AMCAP is at, relative to the gospel-secular issue. And I think we’ve got a lot of the wrinkles smoothed out in the organization. Anne Horton was the president when I first got involved; she was very instrumental in bringing Becky Gray [AMCAP secretary] on board, which was a tremendous step, a very important step.

It hasn’t always been easy. From challenges about the use of “Mormon” in the Association title, to rejections to print announcements in the Church News, AMCAP leaders and members have overcome several hurdles in creating an identity.

Henry Isakson, PhD, Past President 1976-1977 We had some challenges! In fact, after the first meeting in 1975, as I recall, we were notified by the legal department of the Church that the Church had a proprietary interest in the name “Mormon,” and in the initials “LDS;” and they questioned whether or not we should be using it as part of our name. Apparently an article had appeared in the Salt Lake Tribune about one comment that was made by somebody on a panel in our second meeting, about the counselors wanting to work on the image of the Church, particularly in the Salt Lake Valley. And it took a little doing to get them to give us permission to continue to use the name. At that time, we had offered a little disclaimer that we put on our letterhead and our publications and all of our announcements and so on, saying that we were a professional organization not affiliated in any way with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

Wendy Ulrich, PhD, Past President 1994-1995 I think one of the key challenges for AMCAP is that our leadership only stays in for a very short period of time; it’s hard to find the continuity to keep something moving. That has both its strengths and weaknesses, of course. We can see a lot of strengths in that because there’s opportunity for lots of change and diversity of opinion and diversity of styles to be expressed, but it does make it challenging to keep an agenda moving forward.

Alan Westover, MS, Past President 1993-1994 You know, there are two or three things I have felt for a long time that AMCAP could do better — and I certainly have not felt successful in making a difference, or at least not a large enough difference. One of those arenas is in drawing the membership into the participatory element in AMCAP. We still have too few people doing too much of the work.

Jonathan Chamberlain, PhD, Past President 1995-1997 I think it has had kind of a varying personality, like an individual — maturing, struggling, in search of something that gives it credence and purpose. There are many good people who really need to belong to AMCAP and enjoy what we enjoy.

Brent Scharman, PhD, Past President 1988-1989 I suppose major frustrations were the issue of the balance between science and religion, how to provide an organization based in values and Church standards and that sort of thing — and yet set a high standard professionally, so that people would come to a conference and feel like they got both. That’s a challenging thing to do!
Despite the controversies and the search for balance between spiritual and secular, AMCAP has survived twenty years — primarily by being true to the faith and following the Brethren.

E Wayne Wright, D.Ed, Past President 1975-1976 We went through some hard times keeping straight with the Church, and avoiding anything that would cause the Church to back away from us. We were doing everything possible to court the favor and the trust of the Brethren.

Gary Carson, EdD, Past President 1978-1979 Much to our great satisfaction, in all of those early efforts, there was never a time when I felt that we as a group were in conflict with the Brethren.

Much has been accomplished. Much lies ahead. Where is AMCAP today, and where are we going?

Evelyn Thatcher, MA, Past President 1986-1987 My greatest hope for AMCAP would be an active membership, helping each other and supporting one another, especially in the outlying areas.

Henry Isakson, PhD, Past President 1976-1977 What are my future wishes for AMCAP? Well, I hope it will continue to grow; but above all I hope it will continue to provide the associations I missed so much when I was in a depression feeling sort of all by myself — especially when I was out in Massachusetts and Florida, and didn’t have opportunity to discuss my feelings about various topics and various issues, and so on, with fellow Latter-day Saint counselors. So I appreciate very much the opportunity to be a part of this organization over the years, to have been a part of it, to have been a part of the founding fathers group, and to have seen the tremendous growth. We now have members literally all over the world, in all of the mental health professions. And I’m so happy that we’ve been able to survive and continue with our program. I have great hope for the future of AMCAP.

Alan Westover, MS, Past President 1993-1994 I’m kind of an ideal-oriented guy. Our membership is diverse, and if our membership grows, we can do specialization within the organization. Perhaps one of the days of the conference there can be break-out groups, where people of like minds can congregate and address those things which are most exciting to them.

Vance Hendricks, EdD, Past President 1992-1993 I think the need that brought LDS therapists together in the very first place still exists; I think that remains one of the paramount issues. That is — giving LDS therapists an opportunity to meet together and to support each other, and to consider in a highly professional way the application of their skills and knowledge within an LDS environment, and within its theology.

Alan Westover, MS, Past President 1993-1994 It has been a very meaningful experience for me to work with AMCAP, and I have a testimony that AMCAP has a mission in the Church. From time to time, people address the question, “Has AMCAP outlived its usefulness?” But I think we have just scratched the surface of its potential. Because, for example, we’ve got the chaplains, we’ve got Ricks College, we’ve got BYU, we’ve got LDS Social Services, and tens of thousands of professionals out there. This is an organization that crosses those boundaries, and can bring everybody together.

Wendy Ulrich, PhD, Past President 1994-1995 I think certainly the Savior’s approach in the work that He did was twofold, and included both of these things. [1] It certainly included how do you cope with difficult circumstances, how do you find freedom within the circumstances you are in if you can’t escape them. But also, [2] how do you heal — and I think we know Him as a healer. I think AMCAP is an organization that is committed to both of these principles, that we are trying to help people to (what we would say) repent, to change, and also to heal. And I think these are Christ-like qualities; I think these are Christ-like endeavors. These are things that we take from His example. I hope that AMCAP would continue to be a place where the best of both of those approaches is examined and put forward, where people are trying to find that integration — of not only coping, but also of knowing that people can truly change at a deep level, that we can heal and find peace in our lives in that way.

AMCAP — Searching for peace, with Christ at the center; supporting one another in personal and professional balance and growth.

Happy Birthday, AMCAP!
AMCAP Past Presidents

1976-1977: Henry L. Isakson, PhD
1977-1978: Burton C. Kelly, PhD
1978-1979: Gary L. Carson, EdD
1979-1980: Richard L. Berrett, PhD
1980-1981: Richard W. Johnson, PhD
1981-1982: Allen E. Bergin, PhD
1982-1983: Carlfred B. Broderick, PhD
1983-1984: Della Mae Rasmussen, EdD
1984-1985: Val D. MacMurray, PhD
1985-1986: Richard C. Ferre, MD
1986-1987: Evelyn Thatcher, MA
1987-1988: Clyde A. Parker, PhD
1988-1989: Brent Scharman, PhD
1989-1990: Anne L. Horton, PhD
1990-1991: Elvin R. Tanner, PhD
1991-1992: Beverly L. Shaw, PhD
1993-1994: L. Alan Westover, MS
1994-1995: Wendy Ulrich, PhD
1995-1997: Jonathan Chamberlain, PhD
1997-1999: Janet Scharman, PhD
1999-2001: Lane Fischer, PhD

AMCAP Founders

O. Kent Berg
Ronald Bingham, PhD
Joe J. Christensen, PhD
Victor B. Cline, PhD
Grant Hyer, LCSW
Donald Lankford, MSW
Ramona Morris, MSW
Robert J. Peters
Lucretia Thayne
Jan L. Tyler, MS