The evolutionary path of chaplaincy from a clerical avocation to a broadened vocation represents a significant transformation in professional roles and societal accreditation and integration. In the course of this journey, the chaplaincy movement originally populated by clergy has expanded beyond the religious community as a more general interest in what is now termed spirituality took root. This professional journey occurred during a time when new insights and interest in psychology, mental health, and well-being were exploding leading to new theories, models, practices in counseling and other interventions.

Chaplaincy training achieved national accreditation standing (USA) in concert with developing theory and practice. Other interventional models and theories were emerging simultaneously, though at a more rapid pace. This growth was accompanied by research based upon theory and practice, and the insights gained began to be incorporated into the expanding model of chaplaincy training, accreditation, and practice.

Early on, beyond developing theory, little formal research was conducted within the chaplaincy arena. This status began to change in the latter decades of the 20th century. In the context of an overwhelming development in research in all professional fields and the formalization of both quantitative and qualitative research models, advances in both understanding and how to care for others expanded.

During this time, the field of chaplaincy had evolved from its roots within a religious context and early focus on pastoral counseling into more generic spiritual counseling as well. The insights of psychology, psychoanalysis, medical diagnosis, theology, and philosophy began to inform and blend in chaplaincy training and practice. Additional external (Accreditors) and internal questions (Practitioners) arose not simply about practice models but also about efficacy.

Research in the fields of pastoral/spiritual care and counseling began slowly, but it is now a formal and formidable component underlying and informing the field. The Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling has served both as witness to this evolution as well as provider of materials that inform those in the field for over 72 years. In addition to offering an outlet for personal reflections, inspired poetry, review of relevant reading and media, JPC&C’s central focus has been and continues to be providing significant peer reviewed materials relating to the theory and practice of pastoral care and counseling.

This special issue of JPC&C is focused on a few of the significant qualitative and quantitative research articles published over the last few decades. There are many others that deserve note as well, and readers are encouraged to review the archives for materials of interest.

This special issue is also composed as a Festschrift honoring The Reverend Dr. John C. Carr. Dr. Carr retires this year from his long service to the Journal of Pastoral Care Publications, Inc. and his lifelong commitment and contribution to the field. His ongoing leadership, determination, insight, and foresight have contributed to the strength of the pastoral/spiritual counseling movement. He has written, taught, mentored, and guided many chaplains and pastoral/spiritual counselors. He has provided sensitive, broadly informed compassionate care for those he has counseled over the years. Dr. Carr has served as an axis mundi for all in the profession. We offer this first special issue of The Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling in his honor and with gratitude.