

Bill Branch, MD
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I am back from the 2008 Winter Course at Ghost Ranch in Santa Fe. Aside from the beautiful high desert, mountain vistas and the warmth of connecting with old and new friends, I am enjoying the fine sense of balance that always comes from participation in groups with wonderful like-minded people. By like-minded, I mean a shared sense of values. There's also a delightful energy derived from creative role plays and a special joy from working with our talented young facilitators in training.

Deepest thanks to Calvin Chou and Jenni Levy for directing this outstanding Winter Course. A host of others contributed hugely, and I will not name them all now, but plan to communicate gratitude individually at a later time. For now I offer the Academy's and my personal thanks. A volunteer mission-driven organization is an amazing organism. The contributions of our members are enormous. Its worth reflecting on what it takes to nourish such an organization.

Shared values clearly bring us together. Personal relationships keep us together. Our special values of mutual respect, positive regard, honesty in relationships and over arching commitment to making the relationship with the patient reflect those values account for the passion and dedication that makes a Winter Course like the one at Ghost Ranch possible.

In line with these thoughts are the obligations of AACH to its members. Several were discussed in Santa Fe. We heard that members want transparency in the organization, they want their voices to be heard, and they wish for appreciation and gratitude for their work in the Academy. I was reminded again in Santa Fe that we should continually improve our efforts to make all of this come to life for each member of AACH. The President's letter is an effort at transparency and also includes appreciation. Faculty meetings and ongoing dialogue represent renewed commitments to hearing the voices of all members. Suggestions made in Santa Fe that we will take up on the Executive Committee, which is charged with the oversight of the operations of AACH, include expanding the capacity of our website to provide information on the membership, including secured access to the minutes of the Executive Committee available to members and expressing gratitude and appreciation in letters from the President or other officers of the Academy to those who lead our many courses, Forums and other educational endeavors. Such gratitude in writing would be a minimal acknowledgement of the enormous work put in by our members, and perhaps would be helpful for their teaching portfolios and promotions in their own institutions.

I know of no other organization whose members so willingly volunteer to take the lead in creating such wonderful activities. Surely we are motivated by the friendships, shared values and dedication to achieving the mission of our organization. I look forward to many fruitful conversations and efforts to enhance communication between the leaders of AACH and its now more than 400 members.

With all best wishes,
Bill Branch, President, AACH