The winds of spirit are whirling through our association during these days of nature's hurricane season: an entirely new and bold governance, a three-fold increase in staff professionals. I hesitate to use that word as the current national office staff are as professional as anyone I know—so understandably they got their backs up recently when I used the term in reference to the new positions, and rightly so. I was quick to nuance my meaning: professional as in "of the profession," not as a manner of conduct. How's that for a divergence? But one worth sliding by the editor's pen—since she is not of the profession—but like the other staff, eminently professional.

And so back to governance, professional staff, and next, a sweeping change in the manner in which we will relate to each for education, certification, standards, advocacy, and professional development (the dissolution of the regional structure). What happened here? A trinity of change factors—governance, staff, structure—and hopefully, a trinity in community, one with the other, continuing to live and enliven one and another.

Whatever happened here caught speed and swept through a membership that signed on to this change at a ratio of 1,215 to 97. That's phenomenal. Since the day our Elections Chair announced the vote to me, I have been overwhelmed with a latent fear with the realization that it could have been very different, like 700 to 600! What would that have meant for the organization? Perhaps it was the friendly face of denial that never led me to think of the possibility of such a split. So what would that have meant? Besides my quick return to Boston, the implications of such radical change not being accepted could have been so divisive.

And for that reason, I believe, no matter what happens in our future, we need to celebrate you, the membership, who are the real heroes in this restructure. You faced into the wind and you let it carry you to this moment. I do not speak these words lightly. If I remember one thing in my tenure as your Executive Director, it will be this historic moment and precisely your vote, not my work, nor the work of the task force, nor the work of the NLC—all important and instrumental—but nothing compared with your willingness to throw your cares to the wind.

Tad Dunne, the theologian, speaks of two movements of God's revelation in history. He says God moves in the Word and the Wind.
God moves in the revealed truth of sacred scripture in the "law and the prophets," and then in the definitive Word, the "Word made Flesh" himself, in history. But Tad Dunne goes on to say that God moves in the Wind, the Spirit, the Ruah of Hebrew scriptures, the Pneuma of the New Testament scriptures. This is the driving force of God's blow on and in and through history.

I love the story of the Wind as much as I love the story of the Word. Both speak the truth. Both speak of God's revelation. Another way of the describing "the Wind" is, I believe, "the tradition." It's the wind stories that are discerned in the midst of a lot of proposed stories. Those that hold up to the revealed Word and the wisdom of the forefathers and foremothers become the tradition. The classical spiritual wisdom figures—people like Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, Clare and Francis, Jane de Chantal and Francis de Sales, Catherine of Siena and Ignatius of Loyola—are all watchers of the Wind.

The winds of spirit blowing through our association, I believe, are parallel to the winds of spirit that blow through our own individual histories. We have the long view and the short view, the whole story and the particular chapter, a perspective and an immediacy.

The power of spiritual direction is the companionship of one who has eyes to see and ears to hear not only my immediate, particular situation, but also the eyes and ears that look and listen to my present within the perspective of a long view into the whole of my story, especially in this one life of mine infused with a God blowing revelation in a constant and life-giving energy.

And what God is revealing may not make any sense to me in the present moment. But in the long view it may be a revelation more precious than gold.

For example, I was recruited for a position at a Catholic university more than 10 years ago. I was excited. The position was everything that I could want personally and professionally—using my gifts, my passion, my sense of direction at that time in my life. Things happened fast and though there were several bureaucratic obstacles, I negotiated them seemingly well.

And now to the Cardinal. He couldn't have been more solicitous, more encouraging, or more sensitive, but his answer was no. In conscience he didn't feel he could give me permission to pursue this particular call. I was terribly disappointed. My "wisdom" was quite contrary to his. Though accepting the decision, I struggled with this missed opportunity to which I felt called.
And perhaps there was an authentic call there—or the possibility of one—but that was the short view, one particular chapter in my mid-thirties life, an immediate situation and setting. I have often looked back, now with a longer view, a greater sense of the story of this life and this calling, growing in the personal failures and triumphs with spiritual guides who could lead me to a perspective now quite different. For me, that option would have turned my life into academia and not into health care which is something that I have truly loved. But I cannot always know the direction that the wind is blowing.

And neither can you. Each of us has many moments where change can come at gale force or in a hardly noticed puff, yet all the while needing discernment of those who "watch" with us in the companionship of discernment.

As the winds of change move through our association, and indeed our own personal lives, so too do we experience this movement in the patients, clients, inmates, parishioners, who look to us to watch the change wind its way through their lives.

And what God is revealing may not make sense to them in the present moment. But in the long view it may be a revelation more precious than gold.

For example, I knew a woman parishioner who at the age of 44 became pregnant well after she was blessed with her family of now 3 teenage daughters. With twins. Shock became double shock and with it a lot of anger, fear, questioning, doubt. I came into the parish five or six years later and went to visit them one evening in their home. What I had heard was of the turmoil and struggle in the immediacy of this woman with an unexpected pregnancy. But what I saw—in the chronological warp of time and space—was of the joy and glow of this woman and her husband each holding an identical son on their respective laps.

These are wind stories. These are stories of God blowing in such unexpected ways through an association, through a pastor, through a parishioner.

And in the hardened wood where truth continually crosses our paths, these stories are not yet over. The wind could blow in entirely different and contradictory directions in the long view of history, collective or individual. Down the road the NACC could end up with "zones" (read "regions") and that may be fine. Down the road I could end up in academia and realize that health care was a small part of the total design that God is sketching out in God's creative genius.
Down the road heartaches and painstaking decisions could await this family, these twins, their lives, their families.

But in the end there are no guarantees, save a God whose revelation is word and wind. And next to that God, a human person, whether in community or solitude, who catches the revelation in the echo of one word, or in the push of one wind. ✡