



In Memoriam: Michael S. Kelly, Ph.D., MSW

Michael Stokely Kelly, professor at Loyola University Chicago School of Social Work and longtime member and editor of NACSW publications, died on Thursday, September 2, 2021 by suicide. He was 52 years old. Michael is survived by his wife, Lucy Fox; their three sons, Benjamin, Isaac and Alfred; and countless loving relatives and dear friends.

He was a family therapist, a youth minister at St. Giles Family Mass, and served for 14 years as a school social worker. He earned his PhD in social work from the University of Illinois at Chicago in 2006 and soon after joined the faculty at Loyola, later becoming Lucian and Carol Welch Matusak Professor and School Mental Health Advanced Practice Program Certificate Program Director. He authored or edited several books, published over 100 articles, was the Associate Editor of *School Mental Health: A Multidisciplinary Research and Practice Journal*, co-editor of SSWN (www.schoolsocialwork.net), and Editor-in-Chief of the *International Journal of School Social Work*. A beloved teacher, Michael has mentored hundreds of school social workers across the US and Canada.

I first met Mike in the early 2000's when he came to Baylor University for a visit. He had all the enthusiasm of a young faculty member on the tenure track who was deeply committed to the pursuit of integrating social work and faith. His strong Catholic belief and his position within Loyola University gave him a great place to wrestle with so many deep questions. Most particularly, Mike and I had conversation, and eventually co-authorship, around the histories of

social work. We were troubled that the Christian stories had been left out of most published stories of how social work developed.

We had fun co-authoring around settlement houses and the untold stories. When I had the opportunity to recruit a co-editor for the NACSW book, *Christianity and Social Work*, Mike was my first choice. We viewed some things similarly, but also other things differently. We wrote together, wrestled together over editing questions, and dialogued with many NACSW members in our workshops at the NACSW annual conventions. I loved his willingness to live with the questions and recognize that there are no pat answers in our pursuit to be social workers who allow our faith to shape our professional work. He expressed this in our “Introduction to the 6th Edition”:

... there is not one way to be a Christian social worker; rather it is our hope that the multiplicity of voices contained here will argue for how many ways there are to be a faithful Christian and effective social work practitioner. (CSW, 2020, p.2)

He challenged me to embrace that multiplicity, as I know he did so many students and colleagues.

I will miss Mike in a very personal sense, but I will also grieve the profound loss of his giftedness to NACSW, CSWE, and social work education. There are so many unanswered questions about why someone would choose to take their life. A loss by suicide can cause us to experience anger, grief, confusion or even anxiety. Mike’s family wants to remind us that mental health struggles are real and do not need to be hidden, that there is no shame in not being ok. If you are feeling down, lonely, isolated please reach out to loved ones or definitely seek professional care and support. If you are having thoughts of death, self-harm and you do not feel that you can stay safe please immediately call 911, the Suicide Crisis Line at 800-273-8255.

Mikes family wants to remind you of the very real presence and possibility of hope, and that no matter how dark it might feel today there is a brighter, lighter, happier future for you.

Rest in peace, Mike, until we meet again.

Laine Scales

T. Laine Scales, Ph.D.
Professor of Social Work & Baylor Master Teacher

Editor’s Note: NACSW recognizes that the topic of death by suicide can be extremely difficult and potentially triggering for many of us. One of NACSW’s members, Ruth Cassidy, has many years of experience supporting people around the issue of suicide and has offered to make herself available at rccassidy@yahoo.com to anyone reading this article that would like to reach

out for support. Ruth also recommends the following online resources to better understand suicide and how to prevent and address this vitally important mental health issue:

- <https://sprc.org/>, <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>
- <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/suicide-prevention>
- <https://afsp.org/>