

# Christianity and Social Work

*Readings on the Integration of  
Christian Faith and  
Social Work Practice*

SIXTH EDITION

T. Laine Scales and Michael S. Kelly  
Editors

**Christianity and Social Work**  
SIXTH EDITION • T. Laine Scales and Michael S. Kelly, Editors



# Christianity and Social Work

*Readings on the Integration of  
Christian Faith and  
Social Work Practice*

SIXTH EDITION

T. Laine Scales and Michael S. Kelly,  
Editors

Mary Anne Poe,  
Instructor's Resources Editor

Mackenzi Huyser and Terry A. Wolfer,  
Decision Case Editors

Copyright 2020  
North American Association of Christians in Social Work  
P.O. Box 121  
Botsford, CT 06404-0121

ISBN 978-0-9897581-6-1

# Contents

---

<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	1
---------------------------	---

## **SECTION 1**

### **CHRISTIAN ROOTS OF THE SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION**

1	Good News for the Poor: Christian Influences on Social Welfare .....	7
	<i>Mary Anne Poe</i>	
2	Twentieth-Century Pioneers: Building a Foundation for the Ethical Integration of Christianity and Social Work ...	21
	<i>T. Laine Scales and Helen W. Harris</i>	
3	Good Neighbor House: Reimagining Settlement Houses for 21st-Century Communities.....	43
	<i>Edward C. Polson and T. Laine Scales</i>	
4	Is There More to This Story? Christianity in Social Work History and Implications for Social Justice.....	63
	<i>James R. Vanderwoerd and Esther R. van der Woerd</i>	

## **SECTION 2**

### **CHRISTIANS CALLED TO SOCIAL WORK: SCRIPTURAL BASIS, WORLDVIEWS AND ETHICS**

5	The Relationship Between Beliefs and Values in Social Work Practice: Worldviews Make a Difference.....	83
	<i>David A. Sherwood</i>	
6	Calling: A Spirituality Perspective for Social Work Practice.....	103
	<i>Beryl Huguen</i>	
7	Social Work for Social Justice: Strengthening Practice with the Poor Through Catholic Social Teaching.....	121
	<i>Julia Pryce, Michael S. Kelly, and Mary Lawinger</i>	
8	Doing The Right Thing: A Christian Perspective on Ethical Decision-Making for Christians in Social Work Practice.....	137
	<i>David A. Sherwood</i>	
9	Models for Ethically Integrating Christian Faith and Social Work.....	165
	<i>Rick Chamiec-Case</i>	

- 10 Integrating Christian Faith and Social Work Practice:  
Students' Views of the Journey..... 185  
*Jon Singletary, Helen Wilson Harris, T. Laine Scales, and  
Dennis Myers*

### SECTION 3

#### HUMAN BEHAVIOR AND SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IN A DIVERSE WORLD

- 11 Integrating Clients' Religion and Spirituality into  
Social Work Practice: Current Research and  
Future Recommendations ..... 205  
*Holly K. Oxhandler*
- 12 Working with LGBT Clients: Promising Practices and  
Personal Challenges ..... 221  
*Allison Tan and Michael S. Kelly*
- 13 Social Work with People who have Experienced Trauma:  
Implications for Practice and Faith-Based Interventions..... 247  
*Hope Haslam Straughan*
- 14 Faith as a Resource for Healing from a School Shooting..... 263  
*Bree Alexander*
- 15 Elephant in the Room: Race and Christian Social Workers.. 283  
*Tanya Smith Brice*

### SECTION 4

#### CHRISTIAN SOCIAL WORKERS AND PRACTICE ISSUES

- 16 Purity, Power, and Privilege: The Intersection between  
Christianity, Sex, and Social Work Practice ..... 295  
*Melody Y. Zuniga and David K. Pooler*
- 17 EBP and Grand Challenges for Christian Social Workers... 309  
*James C. Raines and Michael S. Kelly*
- 18 Refugee Empowerment and Faith Communities:  
A Qualitative Study..... 319  
*Elizabeth Patterson Roe and Jenny Bushnell*
- 19 Technology in Social Work Practice: Ethical Considerations for  
Faithful Social Workers ..... 337  
*Nick Cross and Michael S. Kelly*

## DECISION CASES

Gabriela's Pregnancy Test.....	355
<i>Joseph Kuilema</i>	
The Walk (Part A).....	367
<i>Kenrda Wright</i>	
The Walk (Part B).....	377
<i>Kendra Wright</i>	
The Best Interests of the Child?.....	379
<i>Joseph Kuilema</i>	
Client or Congregant? .....	387
<i>Carla MacDonald</i>	
About the Editors .....	397
About the Decision Case Editors .....	398
About the Contributors.....	399



# Introduction to the 6th Edition

---

*Michael S. Kelly and T. Laine Scales*

For this 6th edition of *Christianity and Social Work*, we found ourselves reflecting on the very serious and important times we are in now, and how necessary the perspectives of Christian social workers are to address the many challenges we're facing. It's also important to continue to acknowledge and to some extent celebrate the ways that the social work world itself has changed since the first edition of this book was published in February 1998. Since that time, we have seen an increasing recognition of the need to understand how faith and social work practice intersect, and how we can generate meaningful and rigorous scholarship to speak to the many social work practitioners who are trying to figure out how to integrate their own faith experience within the larger context of social work practice.

*Christianity and Social Work, 1998–2020*

From the outset with our first edition, published by NACSW and edited by Dr. Beryl Hugen, this book has focused on that integration of faith and practice. Our contributors, leading scholars and practitioners stationed in a variety of Christian and secular higher education settings, have always been aware of how complicated and ultimately rewarding the integration of faith and practice can be for social workers. Looking at the first edition of our book, we see a range of chapters that acknowledged that social work and the Christian church had deep historical roots (“Social Work’s Legacy: The Methodist Settlement Movement” and “Church Social Work”) even when there were tensions between social work as a profession and the Christian faith of the social worker (“When Social Work and Christianity Conflict,” and the “Battle Between Sin and Love in Social Work History”). The chapters for the first edition were written by some of the leading lights of NACSW, and some of those contributors (Rick Chamiec-Case, Beryl Hugen, David Sherwood) have remained with us through all six editions of the text.

Through the first few editions of the book, it was clear that the editors and contributing authors were doing truly groundbreaking scholarship. While social work and Christianity had always been connected since the start of the profession, the tone of these first three volumes represented a new phase for the field, one that was gradually becoming more confident in asserting that social workers could do good practice informed by their Christian faith, and do so ethically. Authors like Cheryl Brandsen, Diana Garland, David Hodge, Hugen, Mary Anne Poe, Sherwood, and Mary P. Van Hook were all trying to build on the nascent literature of faith and social work practice (embodied in the NACSW journal *Social Work & Christianity*, at the time in its 3<sup>rd</sup> decade). Their work on (among other topics) spiritual assessment, spiritual considerations in end-of-life

care, and the impact of faith on family-centered social work interventions may seem today to be basic to any good social worker's practice approach, but in the late 1990s, these were still rare within many social work contexts. For many, the idea that ANY of these topics would have been covered in a textbook in a social work program would have been difficult to fathom. Now as we are well into the 21st century, the field of social work and social workers who identify as Christian has begun to engage in a renewed exploration of how to best integrate faith and social work practice, and we have this book to thank for helping to move that conversation along in its own way. As of this writing, there were approximately 750 MSW and BSW programs in the U.S, and many are housed in religiously-affiliated colleges and universities (CSWE, 2020). In addition, many Christians are educated within non-sectarian colleges and universities or practicing within both religiously-affiliated and secular agencies. We are excited that this 6<sup>th</sup> edition furthers that work in new and lasting ways.

As with previous editions, it is our intention to address the historical and contemporary roots of Christians in social work and move our field into the future by employing a variety of perspectives from Christian authors. As multiple authors in this book will make clear, 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.

Subsequent editions of this book (published in 2002, 2008, 2012, 2016 and now 2020) have furthered this exploration of faith/social work integration by adding new scholars to the book and bringing in ever more diverse and distinctive voices to the conversation. To date, the six editions of the book have seen over 60 different scholars contribute their unique perspectives to this growing field. We are determined to balance what has always made this book great with challenging ourselves to add new voices and topics to each new edition. This new edition does just that, with nine chapters revised by returning authors addressing a range of topics that we've been covering since 1998, and 10 new chapters (some of them brand-new chapters from longtime contributors, as well as new voices) addressing topics as varied as helping social work students integrate their faith journey into their practice career, empowering refugee populations, and applying a faith-based perspective to new technologies and their impacts on social work practice.

### *Decision Cases: Tools for Learning*

We are excited to again have decision cases in this new edition. Decision cases are tools for learning that give readers practice at "thinking like a social worker" while applying concepts and theories. (Scales & Wolfer, 2006). These cases are real; that is, a social worker reported an actual situation he or she experienced to an author who created the decision case. Decision cases differ from other types of exemplars you may have seen. They are not designed to illustrate best practices, but rather, to leave readers with a "messy" problem or dilemma to analyze and discuss. Through this application and analysis, learn-

ers may practice skills of problem-solving and be reminded that there is not always one correct answer in practice; there may be several different responses to be considered and discussed (Scales & Wolfer, 2006). Teaching notes in the Manual for Instructors will be helpful to discussion leaders. We are grateful to Terry Wolfer and Mackenzie Huyser for editing these four cases and guiding the case authors in this process.

#### *Connection to the CSWE Educational Policy Accreditation Standards*

In organizing this 6th edition, we have carefully considered the Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) from the Council on Social Work Education. These standards shape the core content of social work curricula and this book engages the EPAS in each chapter. It is important for schools of social work to show how they prepare students to demonstrate specific competencies in social work practice. To help with this integration, we are planning to provide teaching resources and materials for instructors through the publication of our accompanying *Instructors Resources for Christianity and Social Work: Sixth Edition*. We hope these tools and resources continue to be a helpful guide for students and instructors.

#### *This Book, NACSW, And Our Own Faith Journeys*

In the 22 years since this book was first published, NACSW has continued to be a major and lasting force within social work. Today, NACSW has over 1,600 members from 60 different Christian denominations in the U.S. and Canada. Its annual conference, the journal *Social Work & Christianity* (now in its 47th year), and its many online training offerings testify to its continuing impact on the field. NACSW is growing with students too, with 1/3 of NACSW members being students, many of them possibly reading these words right now. If that's you, we want you to know that both of us were once where you are right now, trying to make sense of our faith and our calling to become a social worker. We hope this volume gives you some further encouragement and ideas on your journey.

We both work in Christian colleges, informed by our specific Christian traditions (Laine at Baptist Baylor, and Michael at Jesuit Catholic Loyola Chicago). As teachers and researchers, we are eager to see more Christian social work scholarship that we can draw on to help prepare our students for careers as practitioners. We both came to the field, in part, because of the calling of our Christian faith and, while we certainly don't require the same religious commitment of our students, we want to speak to those who are attempting to integrate their faith experience with their social work preparation. We know from our own experiences that it can be a challenge to even raise the issues that are in these pages with student colleagues, faculty members, and supervisors. As you read these chapters, we hope you will feel energized and encouraged by the abundance of scholarship for Christian social workers: you are far from alone if you endeavor to become a social worker rooted in your own Christian faith experience.

## References

- Council on Social Work Education (2020). *Directory of accredited programs*. Retrieved from <https://www.cswe.org/Accreditation/Directory-of-Accredited-Programs.aspx>
- Council on Social Work Education (2015). Educational policy and accreditation standards for baccalaureate and master's social work programs. Alexandria, VA: CSWE. Retrieved 02-22-2020 from <https://cswe.org/getattachment/Accreditation/Standards-and-Policies/2015-EPAS/2015EPASandGlossary.pdf.aspx>
- Scales, T. L., & Wolfer, T. A. (Eds.). (2006). *Decision cases for generalist social work practice: Thinking like a social worker*. Thomson Brooks/Cole.

# SECTION 1

## Christian Roots of the Social Work Profession

---



# Good News for the Poor: Christian Influences on Social Welfare

---

*Mary Anne Poe*

For the United States of America, the wealthiest and most powerful country in the world, the question of what to do about the poor in our midst is a haunting question. How do the poor impact our economy and political system—our freedom and well-being—our rights and privileges? How does American prosperity affect the poor? The United States has to address the problem because of concern for the very ideals that are American. It also has to address the problem because widespread poverty leads inevitably to social unrest.

For Christians, the question of what to do about the poor raises even more critical concerns. How does God want the poor to be treated? What does the Bible say? What is our responsibility as individuals and as part of the church to our poor neighbors? How should Christians try to influence the political and economic systems?

Social welfare programs and policies are a response to questions that arise in each generation. Why should we care about the poor? How do we determine who deserves help and who does not? Should we attempt to change individual hearts or change social structures in order to alleviate poverty? Who is responsible for the poor? Programs and policies always reflect our values about the nature of poor people and our responsibility to them. What we do as a society about poverty, what programs and policies we develop, depends on how we answer these questions.

Like music in a symphony, there have been recurring themes in the relationship between programs and policies that serve the poor and the belief systems that inform them. The political, economic, and social contexts give shape to particular programs and policies that emphasize specific beliefs that vary in different historic periods. Political, economic, and social conditions interact with belief systems in unpredictable ways at various times to influence views of poverty (Dobelstein, 1986). This chapter highlights some of those themes as they have been experienced through history and how Christian faith and practice have intersected with the public arena to address needs.

## **Biblical Principles Regarding the Poor**

The Bible records God's revelation to people and how humans have responded to God. The biblical record, taken as a whole, supports specific principles about what it means to be human and how humans should relate to God,

to other people, and to the environment. Some of the fundamental premises in the biblical record set the stage for social welfare history. These basic premises have been described in more detail by others (Keith-Lucas, 1989; Lupton, 2007; Myers, 2011; Sider, 2007), but generally include the following:

- Humans are created beings designed for relationship with others. They are interdependent.
- God is concerned for justice and right relationships among people.
- In these relationships humans can do great good or great harm.
- Humans have the ability and responsibility to choose, perhaps not their particular life circumstances, but how they will respond to their life circumstances.
- Humans have value and dignity.
- Work is a natural part of human nature and contributes to one's sense of worth and dignity.
- The ability to create wealth is a gift.
- Material and environmental resources should be shared. They do not "belong" to any one person or group. Stewardship is the human responsibility to share resources fairly.
- God has a special concern for those who are disadvantaged.

The earliest biblical records reveal distinctive guidelines for the care of the poor. The guidelines are shaped by the covenant relationship of a people with their God who represented love and justice. If God is Creator, then all human life should be treated with respect and care. This is a way to honor God. The guidelines apply not only to individuals and families, but also to the larger community and society.

The ancient Hebrew idea of charity, *tsedakah*, is directly related to the concept of justice (Hoang & Johnson, 2016; Keller, 2010; Morris, 1986; Poe, 2008;). The helper benefited from the act of charity as well as the one receiving help. It was a reciprocal benefit that balanced relationships between people. In the Scriptures, God specified the need for interdependent relationships and charity as an aspect of this. The prophet Micah summed up this principle by stating, "He has showed you, O people, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8). God intended that society benefit by sharing resources among all its members in a just and equitable way.

The Old Testament law specified how the community should provide care and to whom. God's people were supposed to be hospitable to strangers and foreigners (Exodus 22:21; Hebrews 13:2). The Sabbath and Jubilee years restored property and maintained a more equitable distribution of resources (Leviticus 25; Exodus 21: 1–11; Deuteronomy 15:12–18). Those with wealth were supposed to leave grains in the fields for the poor (Leviticus 19:9–10; Ruth). Communities and families cared for widows and orphans (Deuteronomy 14:28–29; 26:12). They were to offer kind treatment to slaves and debtors and provide a means for them to gain their freedom (Deuteronomy 15). Lenders were to make loans without charging interest (Exodus 22:25; Deuteronomy 15:1–11).

God is known for avenging the mistreatment of the weak (Psalm 9:8, 12, 16; 10:17–18). The prophets railed against the people and nations that failed to behave mercifully and justly with the poor. They voiced words of judgment when the laws were ignored (Isaiah 59:15; Ezekiel 34:1–6; Amos 4:1–3; Amos 5:21–24; Zechariah 7:8–14; Malachi 3:5). Those who could work were expected to do so, but the laws were aimed at the community and required the kind of compassion toward the poor that God himself had demonstrated. God's word strongly asserts that God is just and wants people to behave in a just and caring way toward one another, and especially toward the weak (Sider, 2007).

The New Testament added a new and more challenging idea to the care of the poor. Jesus' life serves as a model for all to follow. The four Gospels record the behavior of Jesus toward those who were disenfranchised. The message to those who will hear it is to "follow Jesus," do what Jesus did. Jesus asked his followers to love others as he loved. The reason to care about the poor is not simply the reciprocal benefit of charity or obedience to the Old Testament laws, but one's commitment to God. One cares about others, especially the poor, not because it brings benefit but because that person in need is made in the image of God: "Whatever you do for one of the least of these, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40).

The New Testament also proclaims God's concern for justice. Jesus announced his mission in his first public message in the synagogue in Nazareth. He read from the prophet Isaiah,

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (Luke 4:18–19)

His ministry was characterized by attention to the weak and helpless and oppressed. The early church adopted the same standard of care so that "there was no poverty among them, because people who owned land or houses sold them and brought the money to the apostles to give to others in need" (Acts 4:34). The apostle James warned the church about unequal distribution of material resources (James 5:1–6) and about prejudicial treatment based on one's social class (James 2:1–17).

The Bible supports the value of work and the accompanying idea that one's ability to create wealth is a gift. Adam and Eve worked in the Garden even before their fall into sin. The story of Job shows that wealth can be transitory and is subject to God's control. Jesus himself worked as a carpenter. The apostle Paul admonishes believers to "settle down and get to work and earn your own living," and "whoever does not work should not eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10–12).

## **Social Welfare History in Western Cultures**

Biblical principles about human relationships and God's will for humans have had a profound impact on social welfare history in the Western hemisphere. The earliest records of church life reveal radical efforts to be sure that material and spiritual needs were met. The book of Acts states that material resources

were shared in the community so that none were needy. The early church stressed the need to provide help to the poor even if some that were helped were not deserving of it (Keith-Lucas, 1989; Wolterstorff, 2006). The church was a “haven of vital mutual aid within the pagan environment” (Troeltsch, 1960, p. 134).

The charity of the early church was formulated in small Christian communities that had little or no influence on the state in the early years under Roman rule. Christianity began with many, but not all, members from the poorer classes because most people were from these ranks (Stark, 1996). The aim was to show God’s love. The church was not a political movement and thus not necessarily directed at prompting social reform.

The human tendency of those with sufficient means to try to distinguish the deserving from the undeserving emerged regularly and in contrast to the earliest biblical teachings. Some early Christian leaders responded to this human tendency toward judgment. Chrysostom of Antioch in the fourth century was a strong advocate for charity based on the need of the giver to share. He was concerned with the heart of the giver and the need for those who had sufficient means to share with those who did not. Gregory of Nazianzus believed that a lack of care for the poor was a greater sin than giving to the undeserving poor (Keith-Lucas, 1989). The tension between the idea of charity as a need of the giver’s soul and charity to simply meet the needs of the poor has existed throughout social welfare history.

As Christianity spread through the Roman Empire and beyond, it began to exert more influence on political, economic, and social policies. Thus, by the time Constantine institutionalized Christianity as the “state” religion, biblical ideas of justice and charity held some political power. By the Middle Ages, the church and state were enmeshed with the church taking the lead role in the care of the poor as well as many other matters of political or economic interest. Over time the church’s initial interest in showing God’s care for the poor was overshadowed by interest in maintaining a seat of power in the political arena. After the Middle Ages, the church’s power diminished. The Renaissance, the Industrial Revolution, the Enlightenment, and the Modern Era all had the effect of shifting political and economic power from the church to more secular entities. The locus of control for social welfare shifted as well.

### **Who Is Responsible for the Social Welfare?**

A major theme through history has addressed the question of who is responsible for the poor. As Christianity developed and became more institutionalized, the social welfare system also developed. The church provided social services—not always with compassion or justice—but nevertheless motivated by biblical imperatives. It amassed an enormous amount of property after Constantine’s rule and through the Middle Ages, some of which was to be used for the benefit of the poor. The bishop of each diocese was the patron for the poor (Troeltsch, 1960). Hospitals, hospices and sanctuary were typical services provided by the church for those who did not get aid through the feudal system (Keith-Lucas,

1989). Tithing was a prominent aspect of life in the church. Usually one-third of the tithe was designated for the care of the poor (Dolgoff & Feldstein, 2003). The giving of charity became a way to earn one's salvation.

The state was reluctant to assume responsibility for the poor early in Western history. In England, The Statute of Labourers in 1349 was the first law enacted that gave government the responsibility. The value of work and a person's responsibility to provide for family dominated its formulation. The law's intent was less about charity and more focused on a means to control labor and the behaviors of poor people (Dolgoff & Feldstein, 2003). A series of Poor Laws followed the Statute of Labourers from its passage in 1349 to the mid-1800s. The shift had begun from church responsibility for the poor to government responsibility. Beginning with the Poor Laws, the state gradually accepted a role in oversight. The church and its biblical understandings, though, helped to shape the laws because the bishops sat in the House of Lords and government officials were drawn from the clergy. As government involvement increased, church acceptance of responsibility slowly abated (Poppo & Leighninger, 2005). However, individual church members or clergy continued to provide leadership and personnel for the actual work of poor relief.

## **Social Control**

The need for order has had great popularity during certain periods of time as a way to control the poor. Reasons and motives for helping the poor are numerous. On one extreme is the biblical imperative to love as God loved. Christian believers have Jesus as a model for how to care about the most marginalized and oppressed people. Biblical injunctions include doing justice, showing mercy, valuing every life regardless of circumstances, and personal responsibility and freedom to behave in a manner that contributes to the good of all. At the same time a reason for helping the poor developed out of a need to regulate the social and economic order, to encourage productive work and discourage dependency. The Poor Laws were, in part, designed to regulate labor and the migration of people from one community to another. Minimum wage laws and various tax laws are also a means to regulate poverty through control of the economic system (Chapin, 2017; Executive Order No. 13,828, 2018; Lippold, 2015; Piven & Cloward, 1993).

Reasons for helping the poor and efforts toward that end can begin with the best of intentions and after time become sidetracked. The poor can be hurt by the very efforts designed to help. Assistance given in the name of Christ but not in the spirit of Christ is perhaps capable of doing the greatest harm (Keith-Lucas, 1989; Perkins, 1993). Those who profess to help, yet are judgmental, patronizing, or cruel, do not reflect the manner of help prescribed by God. An argument can be made that the emergence of state-operated "help" for the poor tended to shift the emphasis from one of charity as outlined by the model of Jesus to one of social control.

## **Personal Responsibility**

During the period of the Protestant Reformation in the church, the culture changed from an agrarian one built on a communitarian spirit to an industrial society focused on individual rights and responsibility. Families were more isolated and less interdependent. Understanding of many biblical principles was shifting as well. Rather than the one Holy Catholic Church representing the biblical tradition and having authority to interpret biblical principles, the reform movement sanctioned individual responsibility to God for understanding and interpreting scripture and for how to live one's faith. Martin Luther, John Calvin, and the Anabaptists stressed personal salvation and church authority became less hierarchical. Anyone who had faith could relate to God and interpret the Bible. Though all Christian groups continued to give consideration to the poor, the emphasis on personal responsibility meant that the poor, too, were responsible to live holy lives. God would bless faithful believers (Keith-Lucas, 1989).

The reformers were outraged at the abuses of power perpetrated by the church. They decried the greed of the ecclesiastical establishment and sought to restore biblical concern for individual dignity and faith (Couture, 1991). The perspective on social welfare was also shifting. Biblical imperatives to show compassion and mercy had ebbed in relation to the need to urge the poor toward personal responsibility and labor. The "principle of less eligibility" established in the Poor Laws continued to ensure that those who labored would not have less material resources than those who received aid (Dolgoft & Feldstein, 2003). Rigorous scrutiny and early means tests prevented those who were considered "undeserving" from enjoying the benefits of aid. The theology of the Protestant Reformation focused on personal salvation and holiness, challenged church authority as it had been practiced by Roman Catholics, and encouraged hard work and thriftiness. The Protestant work ethic became the standard applied to poor people and to social welfare programs.

The English Poor Laws crossed the Atlantic and shaped the social welfare system in the American colonies (Chapin, 2017; Stern & Axinn, 2018; Trattner, 1998). Still, the Judeo-Christian tradition provided the philosophical basis for treatment of the poor (Hugen & Scales, 2008). Biblical principles, though often misconstrued in actual practice, remained the rationale for the system that existed. The biblical belief in the value of work and the responsibility to care for one's family became the dominant philosophical basis for almost all social welfare programs. Principles that were powerfully informed by the life and work of Jesus and the early church, however, were weakened by the traditions of church and society.

## **Personal Regeneration and Social Change**

Two religious movements of the nineteenth century had particular influence on the administration of social welfare. The first of these was revivalism. The periods of the Great Awakenings stressed personal regeneration and

holiness. Those transformed by the power of God were called to service in the world. The goal for the revivalist was dynamic Christian faith that would change society as a whole. George Whitefield and George Muller established orphanages. Jonathan Edwards advocated for American Indians who were being exploited by settlers. Many leaders of the abolitionist movement were products of revivals, including Harriet Beecher Stowe, John Woolman, and Charles Finney (Cairns, 1986). Numerous social ministries emerged as a result of spiritual revivals. These included urban mission centers, abolitionist societies, the Salvation Army, the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), and Volunteers of America (Cairns, 1986; Magnuson & Magnuson, 2004; Smith, 2004;). The revivals sparked concern for the spiritual salvation of souls and also for the overall welfare of society (Cairns, 1986; Poe, 2002).

The second religious trend affecting social welfare practices in the nineteenth century was the social gospel movement (Trattner, 1998). Theological liberalism of the nineteenth century was an attempt to make the Christian tradition congruent with the prevailing scientific naturalism of the day. Theologians like Walter Rauschenbusch and Washington Gladden articulated this theology for the academy. Charles Sheldon popularized it with his novel, *In His Steps*. Interestingly, a phrase from this book, "What would Jesus do?" re-emerged in evangelical Christian circles in the last decade of the twentieth century (Poe, 2002). The social gospel focused on building the kingdom of God on earth. It adopted the popular scientific methodologies of the day and hoped for social change based on humanitarian ideals rather than regenerate hearts.

This more liberal theology called into question long-standing "fundamentals" of the faith. The nature of Scripture and the doctrines of creation and Christology were subjected to scientific analysis. Liberal theologies minimized the supernatural aspects of faith while more conservative theologies emphasized them. The divergent theologies caused the two groups to disassociate from each other in their works of service in the world. Whereas liberal theologies contributed to the rise of the profession of social work and increased governmental oversight of social welfare (Wenocur & Reisch, 2001), conservative theologies focused on church growth, evangelism and the future kingdom of God, and distanced themselves from secular attempts to reform society by good works.

The philosophies of naturalism, materialism, and capitalism, dominant in the twentieth century, along with twenty-first century postmodernism, do not necessarily reflect a Christian worldview that demands care for others because they are valued creations of God. These philosophies emphasize productivity, the value of work and wealth, and subjectivity. The profession of social work, though, espouses values of celebrating the worth and dignity of every person regardless of their circumstances. As David Sherwood asserts, it is only fair to ask of the profession "where those values come from and what gives them moral authority and obligation" (2016, p. 57).

## **Social Casework and Social Reform**

The growth of the profession of social work in the late nineteenth century illustrates another recurring dilemma. Can poverty be eliminated by helping one person at a time—the social casework method? Or is poverty best fought by social reform as reflected in the settlement house movement? Through history, both approaches have been used by church and state. The early church functioned as a community in which no one had need (Acts 4:32–34). The Great Awakenings of the nineteenth century resulted in organized efforts to change aspects of the social order such as abolishing slavery. At other times, the focus was on one individual poor person at a time. For many Christians, poverty is simply a spiritual matter healed by spiritual regeneration. As people are converted, society itself will be transformed. This thinking especially dominates some forms of evangelicalism. For other Christians, poverty is a reflection of an unjust society that needs reform. Conversion of individual souls is not the focus for these Christians, but rather social action.

The state also has approached aid to the poor by addressing individual needs for change as well as changing social structures. Income transfer programs are directed at individual poor people who deserve aid to enable them to rise above poverty level. Programs such as Head Start, though, reflect a broader institutional effort to change the nature of the poor community to allow more equal opportunity in the market place. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 captured both of these methods to some extent, though the emphasis is clearly individual reform. In this Act, assistance is time-limited with expectations that the poor will enter the labor market quickly. Individuals can lose benefits if they do not comply with certain lifestyle rules. For example, a mother under age eighteen must live at her parents' home or in another adult-supervised setting and attend school. Welfare mothers must identify the fathers of their children and convicted drug felons need not apply. To encourage steady employment, states can use funds for employment supports like childcare. Tax laws and minimum wage laws are examples of addressing the economic system in order to reduce poverty. The Earned Income Tax Credit is an example of a policy that “helps the poor, rewards work, strengthens the family, and discourages welfare” (Sider, 2007, p. 103).

## **The Welfare State**

The early twentieth century was a period of growth and prosperity for the nation, which was still relatively young. As the free market economy matured, the United States clearly represented the land of opportunity. Immigrants flooded the borders. Natural resources abounded for the consumption of the relatively small population and a political system based on liberty and justice for all created an environment in which anyone supposedly could succeed. By the twentieth century the state was established as the primary caretaker for the poor and in this role often overlooked the contributions made by faith-based organizations (Vanderwoerd, 2002).

A prosperous nation or person tends to have little tolerance for those who cannot or do not succeed. Though Judeo-Christian ideology was still a strong undercurrent for most American life at this time, the increasing strength of liberalism, materialism, and capitalism deeply impacted public welfare policy (Dobelstein, 1986). The American ideals of rugged individualism and hard work suggested that the poor simply needed the influence and advice of those who had succeeded. Material relief was viewed as more handicap than aid. Many felt that material relief and ill-informed charity promoted laziness and pauperism (Wilson, 1996).

The Depression of the 1930s presented an occasion to question views that held individuals alone responsible for their poverty. American society confronted the reality that poverty often was a consequence of the condition of the economic system rather than simply believing that poverty resulted from immoral living or unwise personal decisions. Congress responded with the Social Security Act in 1935 and other New Deal legislative acts that addressed economic needs. The Social Security Act assured aid to the elderly, the needy, the blind, and dependent children. The New Deal established responsibility for the poor firmly in the seat of government (Chapin, 2017; Levitan, Mangum, Mangum, & Sum, 2003; Trattner, 1998).

While faith-based groups continued to provide much relief, the ultimate authority in American society for developing social welfare programming was given to government. What had begun to happen in the latter part of the Middle Ages and during the Industrial Revolution with the Poor Laws was complete. Certainly the philosophical basis for society paying attention to the poor still had some connection with the Judeo-Christian tradition of charity, but in reality the principle of stabilizing the economy and maintaining social order guided policy making. Government had decided that poverty would always be an issue and that it was the role of government to give oversight (Levitan, Mangum, Mangum, & Sum, 2003).

Government policies and programs established rigorous means tests to determine a person's eligibility for aid. The presumption persisted that many recipients of aid were out to defraud the generosity of others. The "principle of less eligibility" remained. Aid provided subsistence support but nothing more. Processes for accessing aid were often designed to protect the system rather than serve the needs of the poor. Social welfare had changed quite dramatically from that demonstrated by early Christian believers of the first few centuries after Christ.

Welfare policies since World War II have tended to sway back and forth in levels of generosity. During the Johnson era, the War on Poverty had the lofty vision of eradicating poverty. While its goals were hardly attained, there is some evidence that this era established a safety net for most of the poor (Trattner, 1998). At least most could be assured of having food and basic medical care. In this period, solving the problem of poverty involved adjusting social and economic systems and providing services to support families.

The Reagan/Bush years of the 1980s emphasized different priorities. Poverty was still a problem, but the goal was to eradicate dependency. Programs and services were designed to relieve the federal government of responsibility for the poor and to turn welfare recipients into full participants in the regular market

economy. When Clinton became President, the goal was to “end welfare as we know it.” Welfare reform legislation passed in 1996 with the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). This act essentially ended the federal guarantee of help for poor families with dependent children and signaled massive change in the structure and scale of the American social welfare system (Boyer, 2006; Dolgoff & Feldstein, 2003; Mink, 1999; Ozawa & Yoon, 2005). It shifted the administration of relief from the federal government to states in block grants. The act was predicated on the belief that poor relief could be better managed closer to home. The 1996 welfare reform legislation also assumed that the free market system was a level playing field where the poor could be motivated toward self-sufficiency (Wilson, 1996).

### **The Importance of Social, Political, and Economic Context**

By the 1990s, the years of the Depression that caused the nation to realize the need for a federalized system of public welfare had faded out of memory. Many people believed that the welfare system created in the 1930s spawned a different and dangerous set of values from the American ideals of work, independence, and family. Much in the United States had changed since the earliest European settlements. The economic system was mature and now dominated worldwide markets. Society had evolved from an agrarian one to an industrial one to a technological and global one. Furthermore, the nation that had begun with decidedly Judeo-Christian values had become more and more pluralistic and postmodern. These changes in culture influenced the treatment of the poor and the programs and policies formulated to address their needs. The evangelical Christian focus on personal salvation and holiness reinforced the American belief system that each person must be independent and self-sufficient. Conservative political and economic analysts, such as Charles Murray and Lawrence Mead, ascribed the ills of poverty to the “negative effects of welfare” (Wilson, 1996, p. 164).

The devolution of welfare policy administration from the federal to the state level that occurred in 1996 with PRWORA demonstrates on another level the power of context to influence how people experience the system. Constituent characteristics, such as race, ethnicity and economic well-being, and available resources that vary by state are factors that impact policies and programs of aid. Different approaches by the different states since 1996 reflect a wide range of values and priorities that drive social welfare policy. The combination of variables related to context creates distinct and unique policies and services (Fellowes & Rowe, 2004).

The twentieth century had ushered in welfare states, both in the United States and in Europe. A difference in the social welfare systems is found in the fundamentally different premises of American and European thought and the very different political and economic contexts. The two contexts illustrated by the United States and Europe after World War II demonstrate the power of the political, economic, and social context in shaping social welfare policies. After World War II, Europe was devastated. The entire society needed to be rebuilt.

The United States, in contrast, had not experienced as much loss during the war. The Depression that preceded the war had ended, and American values of independence and productivity dominated. American welfare has tended to focus on particular groups, such as the aged, blind, disabled, or orphaned. The “doctrine of less eligibility” prevails and the valuing of rugged individualism dominates. The European system places more emphasis on a communitarian belief system. Consequently, social welfare in Europe tends to be more generous and more inclusive. Social benefits related to health care, housing, child care, employment, and income support tend to be applicable to the entire population rather than limited benefits targeted to particular groups as in the United States (Wilson, 1996; Pedersen, 2006).

### **Faith-Based Initiatives**

Those with biblical faith have always been concerned for the poor, but with the rise of the modern welfare states in the United States and Europe, the church has not prioritized a corporate responsibility for social welfare policies and programs. Charitable Choice provisions in the welfare reform legislation of 1996 created possibilities for partnerships between church and state that had essentially been closed since the New Deal of the 1930s (Hodge, 1998; Sherwood, 1998; Sherman, 2003; Sider, 2007; Vanderwoerd, 2002). In January 2001, President Bush established the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (OFBCI). President Obama changed the name to the Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships in 2009. These efforts were designed to strengthen the collaboration of government with faith-based and community organizations providing social services. In May 2018, President Trump revoked the executive orders creating the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnership and created a Faith and Opportunity Initiative. The intent of President Trump’s initiative was to safeguard the right of faith-based organizations to exercise their religious liberty and to maintain equal access to government funding (Executive Order No. 13,828, 2018). The emphasis of each president has displayed his particular political orientation, but each appeals to the Judeo-Christian tradition of compassion and care for the poor and to the economic and political view that the poor are often best helped by non-governmental services. The questions arise of who is responsible to care for the poor and how is help best given, and whether the state or faith-based initiatives should be the driving force behind social welfare policy (Belcher, Fandetti, & Cole, 2004).

### **Global Context**

While economic prosperity and tax cuts, education reform, and faith-based initiatives were Bush’s emphases upon taking the oath of office in January 2001, the terrorist events of September 11, 2001, radically changed the political and economic landscape. Global realities and needs took center-stage and displaced concern for domestic social welfare policy. Attention on the war in Iraq and

Afghanistan, extreme poverty in much of the world, and the continuing ravages of AIDS, Ebola, and other diseases has diverted much public attention away from the “compassionate conservatism” directed at domestic policy that carried Bush into office. With Obama’s election in 2008, the American public seemed to be seeking greater balance between concern for safety from terrorism and engagement with world problems and concern for the social and economic well-being of its own citizens in need. With the election of President Trump in 2016, the contentious struggles about health care, economic well-being, angry rhetoric about illegal immigration, the continuing global fight against terrorism, differences in belief about climate change and the inefficiency in response to natural and human disasters all signify the challenges in finding just solutions to problems that affect the United States and extend globally.

Christians who heed the call to follow Jesus should be very concerned about global social welfare and how the actions of the United States impact the rest of the world. For the richest and most powerful nation on earth to be knowledgeable about devastating poverty and disease and war in some nations and continue to live in its ease evokes the prophetic voice of the Old Testament: “Away with your hymns of praise! They are only noise to my ears. I will not listen to your music, no matter how lovely it is. Instead I want to see a mighty flood of justice, a river of righteous living that will never run dry” (Amos 5:23). “I despise the pride and false glory of Israel, and I hate their beautiful homes. I will give this city and everything in it to their enemies” (Amos 6:8).

Biblical faith calls Christians to practice good citizenship by being engaged in the public discourse about social welfare policies and programs and the impact of all policies on the poor in the world. The reality for the twenty-first century is a global economy. It is this political and economic context that will shape U.S. policy in the years ahead. Today, social welfare policies are inevitably linked to the global marketplace. Minimum wage laws, immigration laws, labor and trade laws will all influence how the poor are treated in the United States as well as around the world. The relationship of faith-based organizations and their provision of social services with the government system of social services will also continue to be a dominant theme.

## **Conclusion**

The biblical narrative primarily challenges the non-poor to create conditions for the poor that are just and caring. God does not allow the prosperous to simply wallow in their comfort. In so doing, they become oppressors. Rather, God wants people to have open hands and hearts to the poor, to overflow with generosity and concern. The responsibility is given to family, friends, and community to offer “a liberal sufficiency so that their needs are met” (Sider, 2007, p. 70).

Details of time and place vary dramatically. Social, political, religious, and economic systems create contexts that warrant a variety of methods and approaches to dealing with poverty and influence understanding of the poor. The Bible says that we will have the poor with us always (Deuteronomy 15:11;

Matthew 26:11). The biblical imperative to care for the poor and the weak in a manner that empowers them and values their worth and dignity as persons has not changed. What distinguishes followers of Christ is a fundamental commitment to continually work to support the most vulnerable members of society for all are God's children and made in God's image. Whether it is organizing a soup kitchen or challenging tax policies, the call of God for Christians is to bring good news to the poor. This is the mission for social workers as well.

## References

- Belcher, J. R., Fandetti, D., & Cole, D. (2004). Is Christian religious conservatism compatible with the liberal social welfare state? *Social Work, 49*(2), 269–276.
- Boyer, K. (2006). Reform and resistance: A consideration of space, scale, and strategy in legal challenges to welfare reform. *Antipode 38*(1), 22–40.
- Cairns, E. E. (1986). *An endless line of splendor: Revivals and their leaders from the Great Awakening to the present*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House.
- Chapin, R. K. (2017). *Social policy for effective practice: A strengths approach* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York: Routledge Press.
- Couture, P. D. (1991). *Blessed are the poor? Women's poverty, family policy, and practical theology*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press.
- Dobelstein, A. W. (1986). *Politics, economics, and public welfare*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- Dolgoff, R., & Feldstein, D. (2003). *Understanding social welfare* (6th ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Exec. Order No. 13,828 (April 10, 2018). Reducing Poverty in America by Promoting Opportunity and Economic Mobility, 83 C.F.R. 15941–15944, document #2018-07874.
- Fellowes, M. C., & Rowe, G. (2004). Politics and the new American welfare states. *American Journal of Political Science, 48*(2), 362–373.
- Hoang, B. H., & Johnson, K. D. (2016). *The justice calling: Where passion meets perseverance*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press.
- Hodge, D. R. (1998). Welfare reform and religious providers: An examination of the new paradigm. *Social Work and Christianity 25*(1), 24–48.
- Hugen, B., & Scales, T. L. (Eds.). (2008). *Christianity and social work: Readings on the integration of Christian faith and social work practice* (3rd ed.). Botsford, CT: North American Association of Christians in Social Work.
- Keith-Lucas, A. (1989). *The poor you have with you always: Concepts of aid to the poor in the western world from biblical times to the present*. St. Davids, PA: North American Association of Christians in Social Work.
- Keller, T. (2010). *Generous justice: How God's grace makes us just*. New York: Dutton.
- Levitan, S. A., Mangum, G. L., Mangum, S. L., & Sum, A. M. (2003). *Programs in aid of the poor* (7th ed.). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Lippold, K. (2015). Reducing poverty in the United States: Results of a microsimulation analysis of the community advocates. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.
- Lupton, R. (2007). *Compassion, justice, and the Christian life: Rethinking ministry to the poor*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books.
- Magnuson, N., & Magnuson, B. (2004). *Salvation in the slums: Evangelical social work, 1865–1920*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers.
- Mink, G. (Ed.). (1999). *Whose welfare?* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

- Morris, R. (1986). *Rethinking social welfare: Why care for the stranger?* New York: Longman.
- Myers, B. (2011). *Walking with the poor: Principles and practices of transformational development*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- Ozawa, M. N., & Yoon, H. (2005). "Leavers" from TANF and AFDC: How do they fare economically? *Social Work* 50(3), 239–249.
- Pedersen, S. (2006). *Family, dependence, and the origins of the welfare state: Britain and France, 1914–1945*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Perkins, J. (1993). *Beyond charity: The call to Christian community development*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.
- Piven, F. F., & Cloward, R. A. (1993). *Regulating the poor: The functions of public welfare*. New York: Random House.
- Poe, M. A. (2002). Christian worldview and social work. In D. S. Dockery & G. A. Thornbury (Eds.), *Shaping a Christian worldview: The foundations of Christian higher education* (pp. 317–334). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman.
- Poe, M. A. (2008). Fairness is not enough: Social justice as restoration of right relationships. In B. Huguenot & L. Scales (Eds.), *Christianity and Social Work: Readings on the integration of Christian faith and social work practice* (3rd ed., pp. 161–177). Botsford, CT: North American Association of Christians in Social Work.
- Poppo, P. R., & Leighninger, L. (2005). *Social work, social welfare, and American society* (6th ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Sherman, A. L. (2003). Faith in communities: A solid investment. *Society*, 40(2), 19–26.
- Sherwood, D. A. (1998). Charitable choice: Opportunities and challenge for Christians in social work. *Social Work and Christianity* 25(1), 1–23.
- Sherwood, D. (2016). The Relationship between beliefs and values in social work practice: Worldviews make a difference. In T. L. Scales & M. Kelly (Eds.), *Christianity and social work: Readings on the Integration of Christian Faith and Social Work Practice* (4th and 5th eds.). Botsford CT, North American Christians in Social Work.
- Sider, R. J. (2007). *Just generosity: A new vision for overcoming poverty in America*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.
- Smith, T. L. (2004). *Revivalism and social reform: American Protestantism on the eve of the Civil War*. Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith Publishing.
- Stark, R. (1996). *The rise of Christianity: A sociologist reconsiders history*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Stern, M., & Axinn, J. (2018). *Social welfare: A history of the American response to need* (9th ed.). New York: Pearson.
- Trattner, W. I. (1998). *From Poor Law to welfare state: A history of social welfare in America*. New York: The Free Press.
- Troeltsch, E. (1960). *The social teaching of the Christian churches*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Vanderwoerd, J. R. (Spring, 2002). Is the newer deal a better deal? Government funding of faith-based social services. *Christian Scholar's Review* 31(3), 301–318.
- Wenocur, S., & Reisch, M. (2001). *From charity to enterprise: The development of American social work in a market economy*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Wilson, W. J. (1996). *When work disappears: The world of the new urban poor*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Wolterstorff, N. (2006). Justice, not charity: Social work through the eyes of faith. *Social Work and Christianity*, 33(2), 123–140.

# Twentieth-Century Pioneers: Building a Foundation for the Ethical Integration of Christianity and Social Work

---

*T. Laine Scales and Helen W. Harris*

This chapter highlights the lives and contributions of three prominent social work scholars whose work began the movement back to include the roots of the profession and space for the integration of religious faith and social work practice. This included a new awareness of the religiously affiliated organizations like Lutheran Social Services, Catholic Charities, and Jewish Social Services as well as a plethora of faith-affiliated children's homes. These seminal thinkers and practice innovators developed theoretical frameworks to inform faith and practice and understood the church as a context for the practice of social workers. Alan Keith-Lucas wrote extensively about both the distinctions and the integration of professional practice and religious beliefs and values. His fundamental belief that it was possible for the Christian to be an effective helper for those in need began with his deep valuing of every person. Anne Davis began the first social work education program in a seminary setting with the firm conviction that helping was the legitimate ministry and work of the church. Diana Garland devoted her social work career to defining the calling and vocation of Christians to the work of the profession of social work and the identification of the church as a legitimate context for practice. The vision of these pioneers continues to illuminate our path today.

We owe much to those who dreamed big and thought critically, and prayed deeply. This is especially true in social work, a relatively new profession deeply engaged in the concept of social welfare. While social welfare policy is largely understood to be governmental, the church has been providing social services in the United States for hundreds of years, documented as early as the 1600s (Segal, Gerdes, & Steiner, 2013). Mary Richmond, a social work pioneer of the religiously-focused Charity Organization Society movement, was instrumental in the growing focus on professional knowledge and practice in casework and in professional education. Her contemporary, Jane Addams, was key in the development of the Settlement Movement and a focus on community practice and interventions. Ms. Addams' deep religious beliefs and roots were often expressed both through her pacifism and her commitment to justice. While Addams intentionally did not set up Hull House as a religiously informed or Christian institution, her ecumenical involvement with the Presbyterian church,

Unitarianism, and work with Jewish leaders is one model for the integration of faith and human helping. Notably, many early schools of social work included both social welfare helping and religious education, particularly as it applied to the vocational call of helping (Garland, 2015).

“Social welfare and the social work profession itself are laced with values that stem from religious beliefs and organizations” (Segal, Gerdes, & Steiner, 2013, p. 61). However, as the profession developed a body of knowledge, helping theories, and contexts of practice, the theoretical foundation of the social sciences was separated from religious thought and teaching (Garland, 2015). Social workers struggled with competing values of religious influence and the principle of separation of church and state. While religiously affiliated organizations continued to provide social services, the connections between the profession, churches, and religious organizations diminished and eventually were even disavowed in professional schools of social work. Over time, the assumption seemed to be that social work in the context of church and religious organizations would compromise self-determination for clients or promote the imposition of religious values. For many social workers, this was the message in the profession (Hugen, 2001; Ressler, 2010; Segal et al., 2013). This was true for more than half a century until the profession began to rediscover the importance of the church and religion in social service delivery including contexts from agencies to congregations (Garland & Yancey, 2014). This has begun to change in recent years as religion is now a part of the cultural competence value in social work (Council on Social Work Education, 2015).

The study of our history informs our values and our priorities. In the integration of faith and social work practice, that history includes contributions of women and men whose insights continue to guide the profession. We discuss here the contributions and legacies of two women and one man whose visionary thinking made an indelible mark on both the church and the profession.

In short, History and Herstory matter. Those who came before us began and marked the path ahead for us; in many cases they created new knowledge and new programs. They established foundations upon which we build and theories which we both challenge and refine.

### **Alan Keith-Lucas (1910–1995): Social Work, Christianity, and the Triune God**

Dr. Alan Keith-Lucas (Keith) is one of the earliest and most influential leaders of NACSW and a seminal thinker and writer on the integration of Christian faith and social work practice. Many who knew him were both inspired by his understanding of faith and human behavior and energized by his practice wisdom as he valued every human being. Harris (2019) wrote that for Keith, a fundamental question was what difference it made to social work practice for the practitioner to be a Christian. He focused on “the discipline of love and the purging of pride” (Keith-Lucas, n.d.-a, p. 13) asserting that Christians who are social workers must begin at a place of humility and realization that we are all

human and in need of grace from God and from each other. Keith recognized that social work began as volunteer work associated with religion. “The great social works of the 19th Century that we honor, from [Thomas] Chalmers, Elizabeth Fry and General [William] Booth in Britain, to Charles Loring Brace and C. S. Loch in America, and many others, derived their practice from their religion” (1973, p. 1). In nearly 30 publications with NACSW, Keith provided guidance for effective helping, encouragement for non-judgmental acceptance with loving accountability, and fierce support for the role of group home care in child services. He stood tall, with grizzled face and glasses, professorial in his tweed jacket with leather patches on the elbows, holding his often empty pipe as he contemplated the big questions of helping. What life journey brought such wisdom and care for others?

## **Roots**

Alan Keith-Lucas was born in England in 1910 to a family that valued education. His mother founded the Hilden Oaks School, a residential school for affluent upper-class students in Tonbridge, England. His father was a neurophysiologist at Cambridge who died when Keith was six years old. Keith and his two brothers all grew up to be professors (Ressler, 2010). Keith was an honors scholar at Trinity College of Cambridge University. He attended graduate school in social work at Western Reserve University (later named Case Western Reserve) in Cleveland Ohio and earned his PhD at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina where he was a Phi Beta Kappa (Powell, 2010).

## **Calling**

The story of Keith's calling and journey is complex. His call to work with children was evident throughout his life and, along with a passion for education, was consistent with the vocations of others in his family. He turned down a fellowship in English literature at Trinity College to teach and serve as headmaster at Hidden Oaks. “But although I loved my work, I did not see spending my whole life teaching upper and middle-class children. Volunteer work with a very poor children's home and friendship with some unemployed boys persuaded me that I had more to give to the poor than to the rich” (Keith-Lucas, n.d.-b, p. 2). He left a well-paying job in the United Kingdom (UK) during an economic depression. His service with students in the Hidden Oaks School in the UK was followed by his move to the United States to study social services and led to his work with children's services in the United States. Keith was the State Supervisor of Children's Services in Louisiana. He later joined the faculty in the school of social work at University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, directed the Chapel Hill Workshops, founded the Group Child Care Consultant Services, pioneered an administrative track, and served as Acting Dean of the School of Social Work several times. He was a prolific writer in the area of group child care and was a consultant for more than 100 children's homes over a period of almost twenty years.

## **Wings**

Keith described himself as “adopting much of the thinking and practice of the dissident ‘functional’ school of social work and resisting the more dominant ‘diagnostic’ school of thought” (Keith-Lucas, n.d.-b, p. 3), which became the medical model. This informed and was informed by his increasing sense that it was wrong to use moral superiority and judgment in his work with parents and others in child care. He asserted, “I was the first social worker to question the almost unlimited power over the poor and defenseless of the juvenile or social court” (p. 4). Keith eventually wrote the standards for juvenile and family courts for the U.S. Children’s Bureau. He wrote from the perspective of a Christian approach to social work (Keith-Lucas, n.d.-e). Keith’s journey to faith incorporates his powerful intellect and his listening heart. He was raised as a Quaker and in his adult life, he described himself as an ethical humanist in a Presbyterian church. In the 1950s, he recognized his thinking about effective helping and the three elements of reality, empathy, and support were a direct parallel with the Triune God of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Keith-Lucas, n.d.-d; Harris, 2016). That move from human helping theory development to relational faith may perhaps be an unusual testimony. His understanding of himself as a sinner in need of grace included his recognition that all of us need the reality provided by the Father, the empathy of the Son, and the comfort and support of the Holy Spirit (Keith-Lucas, n.d.-c). During the 1950s, Keith observed that religious agencies for children and families were beginning to adopt social work methodology. At the same time, he began to address the fallacy of social work’s distrust and rejection of religion. He was part of the movement among social workers to examine the social work value base that connects to religious values. At the same time, he found increasing numbers of Christian social service agencies hiring professional social workers and Christian universities with social work programs.

## **Contributions to NACSW and to Social Work**

Many of Alan Keith Lucas’ most significant contributions to the profession were in the area of the integration of faith and practice. Harris (2019) summed up his contribution: “Keith’s reputation and work as a social worker who cared about faith was instrumental to introducing the intellectual possibility that the two could be integrated?” (p. 7). His book, *So You Want to Be a Social Worker?* continues to be a common text in introduction to social work courses in religiously affiliated programs. Keith differentiated social work helping from evangelism. He valued the concrete services of case management and warned against being too caught up in private practice and therapy, particularly if we believe ourselves to have the right to make decisions for others. This social work scholar, teacher, and consultant provided the seminal theoretical framework that effective helping must include the three elements of reality, empathy, and support. Keith defined this theory, found in his book *Giving and Taking Help*, as consistent with our understanding of the Trinity: God as reality in our lives;

Jesus the ultimate examples of empathy; and the Holy Spirit, our constant companion and source of support. Keith reflected on the problem of sin in society by declaring that social workers who are Christians can work with persons who are sinners because we understand ourselves to be sinners in need of God's grace and we understand the power of forgiveness and second chances.

Dr. Keith-Lucas's prescient and transformative thinking led to theoretical concepts and programs that continue to impact social work and children's services more than 40 years later. Keith's contributions to the profession of social work and to the North American Association of Christians in Social Work (NACSW) were featured in a *Social Work & Christianity* special issue tribute to Keith when he would have been 100 years old. In that issue, Kuhlman (2010) identified several areas of influence: organizational contributions, intellectual contributions, and inspirational contributions. "He is one of only two persons to have received both the Award for Distinguished Service to the (then) National Association of Christians in Social Work and the Award for Distinguished Christian Service to the Social Work Profession" (p. 316). He wrote policy, served on the board, contributed presentations and articles for dissemination, and served as book review editor for the journal. In recognition of his support of the organization, his family donated \$13,000 to endow a lectureship in his name, a lecture provided each year at the annual conference. Powell (2010) wrote about Keith's influence on others providing individual stories of colleagues and administrators whose lives were changed by Keith's wisdom and insight.

**Intellectual contributions.** Keith's intellectual contributions to the world of child care services were decades ahead of his time, including his scholarly case for residential child care for children (Harris, 2010). He believed in families and knew that sometimes the strains in families required separation. The group home was a family structure without the relationship intensity that children recently removed from family tension and chaos were not ready to repeat. At the same time, Keith's Family Clarification program was designed for the group home's intensive work with families to facilitate their participation in a co-planning process for the best setting and opportunities for the children. That included return to their own families when possible, long term care with appropriate family interaction when best, and relinquishment and adoption when family of origin involvement in parenting was not possible. Family-centered child care could include everything from supplemental care to behavioral change. Keith also wrote an interesting theoretical framework on children's grief highlighting the importance of protest in achieving mastery of the experience (Harris, 2015). This grief model integrates attachment concepts and mastery of trauma and loss in ways that facilitate growth through grief, an approach increasingly evident in the grief literature.

**Inspiration.** Perhaps his most inspirational work was his focus on Christians of grace in the helping professions including social work. In his 2010 chapter, *Acts of the Loving Imagination*, Sherwood describes Keith-Lucas' paradigm of responses to God's forgiveness. "Christians of Grace are grateful, those who respond to the gospel with gratitude and the desire to share that joy... and try

to emulate it in their dealings with other people” (Sherwood, 2010, p. 285). Christians of Law are those who are fearful; though grateful they are unsure that God has really forgiven them or that they can maintain that forgiveness. Christians of Morality moved from being Christians of Law to being those who believe their role is to prevent others from sinning. He recognized that “all three of these types of Christians care to be found in all branches of the church—and that most of us are not entirely one or the other” (p. 285). Keith believed that the helping process, social work, and Christians of Grace were congruent with one another.

**Scholarship.** Alan Keith-Lucas was a prolific scholar and writer. “He wrote about the role of the church in addressing social problems. He wrote about ways that Christian faith informs social work practice.... he wrote a list of philosophical assumptions and of guidelines for social workers who are also Christians” (Keith-Lucas, n.d.-e; Harris, 2019, p. 7). In his 2010 article, “The Contributions of Alan Keith-Lucas to the North American Association of Christians in Social Work,” Kuhlman included a list of 28 works written by Keith and published by NACSW. Of those, some of the most well-known include *Giving and Taking Help*, which includes his helping paradigm, and *So You Want to Be a Social Worker*, which introduces potential social workers to intersections of the profession and their faith. Keith wrote histories of 11 children’s homes affiliated with Christian denominations. He wrote an edited a practice monograph series including titles “The Client’s Religion and Your Own Beliefs in the Helping Process: A Guide for Believers and Non-Believers” and “Parents as Partners: Supplemental parenting in Group Care.” In his comprehensive bibliography of Alan Keith-Lucas, Ressler (2010) lists 33 books, 30 monographs and pamphlets, 40 chapters, and more than 80 articles. Notably, more than half of his published work was completed after his retirement as he continued to consult and write. Several of his published articles were submitted for publication by his family after his death in 1995. Beyond all of those, Keith’s family donated more than 100 of his unpublished works to the Roberts Wesleyan library who shared them with the Baylor University Library to be digitized and available to scholars everywhere.

In Keith’s own words from his unpublished manuscript, *Social Work Odyssey* (n.d.-b), Keith lists his view of his main contributions to the field:

My chief contributions to the field, if indeed they are contributions, have been (1) the portrayal of the helping process as the triune use of reality, empathy, and support (2) the concept of co-planning as what social workers do or ought to do (3) the concept of “Family Clarification” as the key to working with children in foster care, and with it, the concept of Social Task Programming for Children’s Homes and (4) my classifications of Christians into Christians of Grace, Christians of Ethics, Christians of Law and Christians of (other people’s) Morality.” (p. 11)

### **C. Anne Davis (1937–2006): Bringing Professional Social Work to Ministry**

Cora Anne Davis found her life's work in learning, teaching, and preaching, in a Southern Baptist context that did not always welcome women as teachers and preachers. Educated in the late 1950s at the Carver School of Missions and Social Work, Davis was one of the first female members of the faculty at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, (Louisville, Kentucky). She became founding dean of the Carver School of Church Social Work in 1984 and led her school to be the first social work program within a seminary to be CSWE- accredited. Davis led her social work colleagues to develop the concept of "church social work" and led a generation of Southern Baptists called to church social work through a tumultuous denominational split resulting in the closing of her beloved Carver School of Church Social Work. Meanwhile, she offered her knowledge and skills to North American Christians in Social Work and other social workers seeking to integrate their faith with social work practice.

#### **A Faith-filled Childhood**

Cora Anne Davis was born April 17, 1937 in Baskerville, Virginia, surrounded by a large extended family with over forty aunts and uncles living in her town. "There were just oodles of people to take care of you," she recalled; "we rented farms right straight in a row and I could always find a home; I had seven or eight homes." (Davis, 2005). The young Anne made a commitment to follow Christ at age 13 and, at the same time, to serve in vocational ministry, although she did not have a clear picture at that time in what way she would serve. She did understand one essential truth about her faith that would pull her toward social work: instead of mystical religious encounters, she experienced God's love through relationships. "It did not fall my lot to have too many visions from God" she explained. "What I was going to know about God I had to find inside relationship with other people" (Davis, 1972).

Anne's small rural church, Ebenezer Baptist Church, marked the occasion of her decision to follow Christ with a baptism. For Anne, "life was different from then on." Her vision was limited by Southern Baptists' gender expectations for women. "At that point, all I knew a woman could do was be a missionary to China," she recalled. She did not particularly want to do that, "But I would have, if nothing else had opened up." (Davis, 2005).

These childhood experiences at Ebenezer shaped Anne's views of the church's calling in the world in four important ways. First, early experiences of her rural church sharing its resources and cooperating with neighboring churches (including other denominations) shaped Anne's understanding of how churches could partner for helping ministries. Second, Ebenezer placed a high value on employing a preacher that was "seminary educated," which later influenced Anne's own shaping of the social work curriculum to include a year of theological and seminary training. Third, the part-time preacher only came

to Ebenezer every second Sunday morning and fourth Sunday night. So church members had to lead the ministries the rest of the week. "There were so few of us there was a job for everybody if we wanted to make this thing work." (Davis, 2005). This helped Anne to develop practical experiences with helping but also to appreciate a model for engaging laypersons in the day to day ministries. Finally, the employment of a part time preacher created opportunities for other church members, including Anne, to preach, which she did for the first time at age 17. "They didn't care whether I was a man or a woman. In that part of the country, everybody had to work; everybody had a role." (Davis, 2005). Preaching would continue to be an important aspect of Anne's ministry throughout the rest of the twentieth century as Southern Baptists disagreed over women's roles in ministry, particularly preaching.

### **Becoming a Social Worker**

At age 17, Anne went to Averett College, a Baptist school in Danville, Virginia. She then transferred to Westhampton College, the women's college at Virginia Baptist's University of Richmond. In her junior year she found her life's work when she enrolled in an "Introduction to Social Work course." "It was like somebody was singing my song," she remembered; "I just knew that was what I wanted to do." (Davis, 2005). As graduation from Westhampton was approaching, Anne remembered her commitment to ministry and decided to complete further social work education in a Southern Baptist seminary context. In the fall of 1958, she headed to Carver School of Missions and Social Work in Louisville, Kentucky and chose to focus her studies on social group work. "I just loved social work so much" she recalls, "and thought it was really the type of ministry Jesus would do and wanted us to do. So it fit me well." (Davis, 2005). Anne learned social work skills through practical experiences in her fieldwork courses at the Easter Seals Society as well as two church-related community centers. Theologically, she was considering carefully how to link her Christian faith with social work. For example, in an Old Testament class Anne studied justice issues and she learned about "redemptive relationships" in her New Testament courses; "It just came naturally to me to put the two [theology and social work] together," she recalled in later years. "I would look at a situation, and it would just make an inordinate amount of sense to me what they were saying, the whole thing about relationships, the whole thing about justice, what love really is." (Davis, 2005).

### **Realizing the Church's Mandate to Serve**

In the next phase of her professional development, Anne Davis's work experiences helped her clarify her ideas about the church's call to social ministries. Upon graduation from the Carver School in 1960, she went to work for the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention and was placed in the Baptist Center in Lexington, Kentucky where she worked for six years as

executive director. Volunteers in the Elkhorn Baptist Association bought an old house and created a dynamic Baptist Center under her leadership. The outreach was so successful that the group soon moved into a second building. During this period, Anne came to understand Christian social ministries as the role of every believer and the mandate of every church. Throughout her career, she often repeated, “The church, to be the church, *must* be involved in social ministries.” (Davis, 1988). Davis began to conceptualize the role of the professional social worker as an equipper of church members who carried out the social ministry mandate. She identified herself as both a “minister of the Gospel” and a social worker. She spoke of the first as her calling and the second as her profession (Davis, 1988). The merging of these two identities would be the cornerstone of the curriculum she created for “church social work”. In later years Davis reflected upon three reasons why she gave her life to church social work: 1) she was imitating the life and model of Jesus, 2) she drew from scripture a “justice mandate” and a “priestly mandate” that called Christians to serve other people, and 3) she understood social ministries to be “an integral part of the nature of the church: that Christians were to do what Jesus did until he comes again.” She continued, “I want to do that with the best knowledge I can have with the best skills I can have. When I looked around for a profession that could teach me how to do church, social work seemed to be the one that taught me best from a professional standpoint” (Scales & Rawls, 1992).

### **Integrating Biblical Models and Social Work Principles**

After six years at the Lexington Center, Davis was convinced that social work knowledge and skills were the best resources for “doing” church and that she needed to earn a Master of Social Work (MSW) degree. While her Master of Religious Education degree equipped her somewhat for Baptist Center work, Davis felt her professional work had been hampered because she lacked the credibility brought by MSW credentials. In 1968 she enrolled in the Raymond A. Kent School of Social Work at University of Louisville (Davis, 2005).

At Kent School, Anne continued reflecting upon how to integrate her Christian tradition with what she was learning in social work, although she had to do this integration on her own. She explained in later years, “I was so excited because a profession was meshing with [my] Christian faith.” She found parallels between social work helping models and the life of Jesus (Davis 2005). In fact, her experience of finding theological parallels to social work practice mirrors that of Alan Keith-Lucas.

When I took my textbooks and when I opened up my bible to where Jesus dealt with the woman at the well that it was step by step the very same process, you see there is only one way to redeem in this world and whether you get it out of a psychology book or whether you get it out of a social work textbook you can find it right here (indicating her bible). (Davis 1972)

Another social work principle that Anne described was this: the worker must not assume he or she knows what the client wants or need; rather the client must express his or her wants and needs. “When the blind man approached Jesus and Jesus didn’t assume that the man wanted to be healed of his blindness; do you remember what Jesus asked him? What do you want?” (Davis 1972). Anne continued, describing social work methods of gathering community resources, which reminded her of the biblical story known as the “feeding of the thousands.”

The disciples got so panicky. 5,000 people to feed and no money. Jesus said the very same things to them I had heard in the classroom, he said, “Go out to the crowd that gathered with the need and they also have the resources; and your job as a disciple is to bring those resources and give them to God. They will be blessed and you can redistribute them.” Community resources; just some loaves and fishes! (Davis 1972)

### **Teaching Social Work**

In 1970, after completing the MSW degree, Davis was hired as an assistant professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary to teach social work courses located within the School of Religious Education. The social work program was growing steadily when the chair who hired Davis left in 1973 for a sabbatical. Instead of returning, the chair accepted another position, leaving Davis to assume leadership of the program (Davis, 1985).

For the following two decades Davis would educate a new generation of church social workers. In the classroom, in denominational workshops, in continuing education events, and in sermons, Davis continued to emphasize the importance of helping others in the church’s calling and mission. She reminded her audiences that the Gospel message must be accompanied by an action ethic: “Witness is always word and event,” she noted.

As you read about the life of Christ, something is said and something is done. The word was made flesh and dwelt among us. I do not see as much of the local church becoming flesh in the world as I would like to see.... I am saved, I am being redeemed, I must then demonstrate to the world through doing something, the nature of the effect of that redemption on me. (Davis, 1979)

### **Building Carver School of Church Social Work**

As Anne Davis continued teaching social work, she became concerned, partly due to her own experience, that graduates who earned a Masters of Religious Education degree with a major in social work, “were always going to have one hand tied behind them until they get [a MSW degree with] accreditation” (Davis, 2005). In 1979, Anne and her faculty team began working on a plan to create an

accredited MSW program; the first to be located in a seminary. After conducting a thorough self-study, the faculty team proposed a plan in which the seminary would establish an independent school of social work. Meanwhile, Anne had been earning a Ph.D. in higher education, completing the degree in 1984 at the University of Louisville. That same year, Southern Seminary President, Roy L. Honeycutt, opened the new Carver School of Church Social Work, naming Davis the founding dean. She and her faculty team immediately developed a curriculum that they would submit for accreditation from the Council on Social Work Education. At the core of the new program was the concept of church social work (Scales, 2000).

While Anne Davis shares credit with her faculty for reviving and shaping the concept “church social work,” the term as conceived and promoted at Carver School clearly reflects Anne’s strong influence in two areas: her own ecclesiology, shaped by her work experience with congregations, and her confidence that social work was the best degree for church leaders doing social ministry. Anne and her faculty refined the term as they established the new program. Throughout her career she had identified herself as both a minister of the gospel and a professional social worker. She led students to embrace their callings to church social work, expressing this dual identity (Davis, 1985).

Building on the concept of church social work, Anne Davis led the Carver School faculty to create a unique curriculum for church social workers, called to ministry and credentialed by their profession. The church social worker would need one year of theological preparation coupled with two years of masters-level social work courses. These workers would lead the social ministries of the denomination’s local churches and agencies such as children’s homes, Baptist centers, weekday ministries, and homeless shelter. (Scales & Maxwell, 2019). After achieving accreditation, Anne led the Carver School in an intensive growth period as the school made a significant impact on the denomination and convinced the social work profession to consider the church as a viable context for professional practice. This was no easy task. Carver faculty member Diana Garland remembered social work of the 1970s as “rather allergic to the church... lack[ing] any framework for considering a marriage between the profession and religious organizations” (Garland, 2002). In addition to convincing the social work profession that church social work was a viable pathway for practice, Anne and her faculty made contributions to the organization that would become North American Christians in Social Work (NACSW). Under Anne Davis’s leadership, the Carver School prospered for a decade until new seminary president, R. Albert Mohler, closed the school in a storm of denominational controversy, with Trustees stating that the theological direction of the seminary and social work education were incongruent with one another (Hankins 2002). When she retired from Southern Seminary in 1995, Anne Davis mourned the loss of the school she had resurrected and the SBC’s abandoning its commitment to social ministries, a commitment that Davis had seen flourish in the 1970s and 80s and recede in the 1990s. In honor of her contributions, NACSW presented Davis with an award for Distinguished Christian Service to Social Work in her retirement years (Scales & Garland, 2007).

## **Significant Contributions to the Integration of Christianity and Social Work.**

As Anne Davis departed from Carver School, she found ways to continue serving the church as a consultant to Baptist services groups such as the Woman's Missionary Union and Home Mission Board, and launched a series of bible studies, called *Come Go With Me*. In 1998, she moved to Waco Texas, where a few of her friends and former colleagues had settled. Davis served as Director of Operations for Advocacy Center for Crime Victims and Children and as a consultant to Baylor University School of Social Work, designing a new MSW curriculum with her former colleague Diana Garland (Davis, 2005). Anne Davis lived out her calling to serve until she died in 2006, leaving a tremendous legacy for those concerned about social work and Christianity. She provided insightful theological reflections on what scriptures have to say about helping relationships and a reminder that every Christian is called to minister to other human beings. In addition, her sermons and writings urge churches to take seriously their social responsibility in the world and their obligation to provide community leadership for important social and ethical issues. For social workers called to professional ministry, Anne Davis provided a model for integrating that calling with professional social work preparation and worked to create a unique curriculum for social work preparing to work in churches or church-based organizations. Although the school she worked so hard to build was closed, we must look beyond the events of the Carver School closing to understand its place in history and Davis's influence. As her colleague Diana Garland reminded (2002):

If one puts one's evaluation in human organizations, this [the closing of Carver School] looks like tragedy. But if you look at the leaders for congregations and for church agencies that got their start in the classrooms and mentoring of Anne Davis ... If you look at the baccalaureate and now graduate [social work] programs that have been given courage and vision by the work of Anne Davis and those she led, what a legacy!

### **Diana S. Richmond Garland (1950–2015): Social Work with Congregations and Faith-Based Agencies**

Diana Richmond Garland found her life's work in bringing together professional social work and faith, particular within congregational or faith-based settings. She worked with a broad range of social workers, bringing together Christians in social work with a wider group of social work educators in the Council on Social Work Education. Starting her career in Louisville, Kentucky, alongside Anne Davis, another of our pioneers, Diana became the second dean of the Carver School of Church Social Work and led the school through denominational controversy including to its closing in 1997. After these traumatic events, Diana built a new place of leadership at Baylor University where she

served as the founding dean of the School of Social Work until her death in 2015. Meanwhile, she served faithfully in volunteer leadership with North American Christians in Social Work (NACSW) leaving a legacy of published writings as she helped shaped the organization, serving multiple terms on the board and one term as President. Married to David Garland at age 20, Diana applied her growing expertise in families and family ministry in her own home as she and David raised their children, Sarah and John.

### **Childhood, Youth and Congregational Life**

Diana Richmond was born in Oklahoma City in 1950 and was the oldest of two daughters. Her father worked for IBM and moved the family around to several cities in the Midwest until she returned to Oklahoma for high school. Similar to Anne Davis's experience, Diana's family anchored her to church life and both her parents were active laypersons in their Southern Baptist congregation (Garland, 2002b, p. 2). The Southern Baptists' Woman's Missionary Union provided an inspiration and pathway for young women like Diana who were natural leaders. In a story much like the one told by Anne Davis, Diana recalled in later years the confusion of feeling called to ministry, but having very narrow choices in Southern Baptist life:

In fact, I felt a strong call to ministry, vocational ministry, at GA [Girls Auxiliary, a program of Woman's Missionary Union] camp in Missouri. I remember that distinctly, and coming home and sharing that with my congregation and not knowing what that meant. I grew up in an age when that meant either go as a missionary single, or find somebody to get married and be a pastor's wife. But I didn't know of other ways of women into missions or ministry. (Garland, 2002b, p. 3)

As she considered next steps after high school, Diana visited Baylor University in Waco Texas with a view toward attending college. "But my father did not want me to go that far from home and wanted me to go to school in Oklahoma and marry an Oklahoma boy and stay close to home" (Garland 2002, p. 1). She got a scholarship to attend Oklahoma Baptist University in Shawnee and within a few months she met David Garland, a senior from Maryland who grew up in India with his missionary parents. Since his parents and both sets of grandparents had been Southern Baptist missionaries to India, Diana predicted as she was falling in love with David that they would also go to the mission field (Garland, 2002, p. 3).

### **Professional Social Work and Family Ministry**

After marrying in 1970, the Garlands moved to Louisville Kentucky so that David could complete a degree in social work, a joint degree between the seminary and University of Louisville. David quickly decided that social work was not the right area of study for him. He switched his major to New Testament

and continued at Southern Seminary while Diana finished her final two years of college at the University of Louisville, studying sociology (Garland, 2002, p. 1).

After graduating with her BA in Sociology, Diana worked as a caseworker on a welfare-to-work program while David pastored a small church. "I became all the traditional things that pastors' wives do. I was the church pianist. I led a GA group. I was the WMU [Woman's Missionary Union] president." (Garland, 2002b, p. 2). Diana's love for congregational social work began to take root in these years of church leadership.

While working as a caseworker at Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children in the early 70s, Diana decided to return for graduate work to the University of Louisville, earning a Masters of Social Work degree and starting her Ph.D. in 1973. "It was an interdisciplinary degree, and I was able to put together my own program with the help of faculty consultation," Diana recalled (Garland 2002, p. 5). At the same time, she worked as administrative director of the Shepherdsville Community Mental Health Center and sharpened her counseling and administrative skills. Family counseling and family ministry emerged as her special area of expertise in these years. Diana was earning the Ph.D. to do family therapy and never imagined a career in teaching (Garland 2002, p. 5).

During these years, Diana and David's community was Southern Baptist Theological Seminary where David was continuing his doctoral studies. Through that community, Diana tapped into a group of pastoral counselors and religious educators as she wrote her dissertation on family counseling. Anne Davis, who had begun exploring the feasibility of offering an MSW at Southern Seminary, learned about Diana from a University of Louisville colleague and asked her to teach a statistics course part time. As David completed his PhD, he was hired on faculty and the Garlands settled into Louisville where they would raise their children, Sarah and John. For the next two decades, Diana would become a team member and then leader of what would become the Carver School of Church Social Work.

### **Building the Carver School Legacy**

As a young faculty member, Diana developed expertise in family ministry early in her career. A gifted and prolific writer, she began building a remarkable body of published work, starting with family ministry and expanding into other areas throughout her career. Her early works were scholarly articles, books, church curricula, and lectures to assist congregations with family ministry. Diana loved collaboration, and much of her writing involved a coauthor, such as her husband David, or a team of authors, which she accomplished by bringing together people for writing retreats and conferences. Diana was also a skilled editor and worked hard to encourage and highlight the written work of others, which she was able to do in her role as editor of the *Journal of Family Ministry* after 1993.

When Diana began working full time at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in the early 1980s, the Carver School of Church Social Work was in its infancy, and Diana, along with the other faculty members, worked hard to create the curriculum, recruit students, and graduate the first class in 1986. With

the leadership of another NACSW pioneer, Anne Davis, the vision was to offer a seminary education of three years that enfolded a two-year MSW. The focus was on church social work, a preparation for those called to work in congregations, denominational agencies, and mission organizations tied to the Southern Baptist Convention. Perhaps most remarkable, was that the school achieved accreditation by the Council of Social Work Education in 1987 and became the only accredited MSW program in the nation located within a seminary. The story of the Carver School's growth through the 1980s and controversial closing in 1997 is complex, many-sided, and has been told elsewhere by Diana and others (Garland, 1999; Hankins, 2002; Furness, 2009; Scales & Maxwell, 2019). After teaching and directing the Gheens Center for Family Ministry at Southern Seminary, Diana became the second dean of the Carver School in 1993. From her first year in office she was fighting a losing battle against a tide of conservative Southern Baptist Convention leadership. The conflict came to a head when Diana attempted to hire David Sherwood, a colleague she knew from NACSW circles, who believed that God could call women to lead congregations and worship. This belief was in conflict with the direction of the trustees, the Seminary president, and others in the denomination who also began questioning the Carver School and its mission (Hankins, 2002, Furness, 2009).

A larger conflict was brewing at the seminary around the issue of women in ministry and leadership, and with Carver School employing the only woman dean, gender was bound to be a point of criticism. Yet a second concern was President Mohler's perception that there was an incongruence between social work culture and seminary culture (Scales & Maxwell, 2019). Central to this issue was the National Association of Social Workers' code of ethics, which demonstrated the organization's increasing commitment to inclusion in an era of changing sexual norms. President Mohler believed that the NASW Code of Ethics and accreditation by CSWE would put pressure on the seminary to compromise its conservative theological position on issues such as women's leadership and homosexuality. Carver School students disagreed with the administration's interpretation and began distributing the code on campus. They wanted the seminary community to judge for itself and for people to see the code asked social workers to serve all people without discrimination in providing services such as housing, food, daycare, and counseling. Adherence to the NASW Code of Ethics, they believed, would not force a Christian social worker to violate his or her conscience and this fear among the seminary leaders was a misunderstanding of the nature of social work. A commitment to non-discrimination, as Diana and the Carver faculty understood it, meant providing equal services to all clients, as Christ would have done. For her defense of justice, NASW awarded Diana with its Jack Otis Whistleblower Award (Scales & Maxwell, 2019).

In March of 1995, Diana was fired as dean (though keeping her tenured faculty role) and over the next two years the school was closed in a great storm of public conflict. As she reflected on the Carver School closing in later interviews, she described those days as the most difficult of her life. True to her spirit of resilience and optimism, she turned the experience into one of learning for

others. In her article published in the NACSW journal *Social Work & Christianity*, Diana analyzed ten practice principles from her traumatic experience, hoping that the case study would help other Christian social workers face unethical practices with courage and the support of other Christians (Garland, 1999).

### **Baylor University and Congregational Social Work**

After a brief time working at Louisville Presbyterian Seminary in the area of family ministry, Diana and David Garland were hired at Baylor University in Waco Texas. National media coverage of the closing of the Carver School at Southern Seminary led Baylor's social work chair, Preston Dyer, to notice Diana's story. One of the first universities to establish a BSW program in 1969, Baylor had just begun seeking leadership to establish a new MSW program (Dyer, 2013, p. 34). The Garland family relocated to Waco, Texas, in 1997 and Diana was full of energy and optimism for building a social work program committed to the integration of faith and practice. She relied on her Carver School mentor, Anne Davis, who also relocated to Waco, for consultation on strategies and curriculum planning (Garland, 2002). She served simultaneously as the founding director of Baylor's Center for Family and Community Ministry, which provided an outlet for Diana to continue her contributions in the area of family ministry.

The work of building the Carver School curriculum had prepared Diana well for creating an MSW at Baylor, but with two important differences. First, the new program was in a university, rather than a seminary. Since several social work students had attended, or wanted to attend, Baylor's George. W. Truett Theological Seminary, Diana initiated a dual degree program in partnership with the seminary in 2001. This connection allowed her to continue teaching her family ministry courses as well. The second difference between the Carver School and the Baylor program was how they related to Baptists. The Carver School had been strictly Baptist, with all students called to ministry in the denomination. At Baylor, however, Diana led the faculty to establish broad partnerships with ecumenical Christian groups, as well as secular and governmental affiliations. Over the next two decades Diana and her faculty transformed the small department into a thriving independent school within Baylor University.

### **Leadership in NACSW, CSWE, and NADD**

From her first days at Baylor, Garland worked beyond the Baptist denominations and into broader collaborations. She brought with her a grant from the Lilly Foundation to establish the Center for Family and Community Ministries (CFCM). The grant ensured denominational support, not from Baptists, but from Presbyterians who had employed Garland as a family ministry consultant at their Louisville headquarters after her departure from Southern Seminary. This, along with the fact that the school was located in a university rather than a seminary, allowed Diana to become a leader in social work education and its primary gatekeeper, the Council on Social Work Education. At the same time,

since she was no longer in a denominational seminary, Diana broadened her networks to include social workers of all faiths and no faith affiliation.

North American Association of Christians in Social Work became an important place of connection for Diana from the beginning of her career, and she was a prolific contributor to NACSW's journal, *Social Work & Christianity*. Former editor David Sherwood recalls receiving many manuscripts from Diana:

some as single author, some as co-author with colleagues and students. All of them dealing one way or another with the ethical integration of Christian faith and competent professional social work practice, usually in the context of congregations specifically and the church at large. This was groundbreaking work in social work and family and community ministry (p. 23).

After moving to Baylor, Diana served an important leadership role within NACSW providing several keynote addresses, multiple presentations and workshops, and being elected to the Board of Directors for several terms, including one term as President (North American Association of Christians in Social Work, 2016). In April 2015, NACSW recognized her service commitment by presenting Diana with the award Distinguished Service to NACSW. Because the Carver School experience made such an impact on Diana, she began gathering Carver School alumni and NACSW annual conventions became the venue for these reunions. Her final publication with NACSW, *Why I am a Social Worker: 25 Christians Tell Their Stories* (2015), explored one of Diana's lifelong research interests: calling, faith, and social work practice.

Meanwhile, the new millennium brought changes to the culture of professional social work. After gradually distancing itself from religion for its first 100 years, with peak tensions in the 1970s and 1980s, the profession reconnected with its religious roots. As critics from inside the social work profession examined professional priorities, they began to ask how social work had lost its calling. Garland (2015) wrote:

[Social work leaders] were concerned that the profession was losing its commitment to social justice, public welfare, and to serving persons in situations of poverty, or otherwise disadvantaged and oppressed. In the late decades of the Twentieth Century, increasing numbers of social workers were less interested in care for populations historically of concern to the profession, and more interested in providing clinical services in private practice settings with paying clients. Leaders feared that social work was losing its calling. (p. 12)

As the social work profession was opening to conversations about religion and spirituality, Diana gathered a group of social work scholars in 2000 who were publishing in the area of spirituality and Christianity. The group spent two days in conversation and strategic planning. The outcome was a research agenda for Christian faith and social work practice for the new millennium. Many of these researchers were connected with NACSW and participants met

several new collaborators and co-authors to work with for years to come. This represented one example of Diana's practice of gathering a variety of people for collaborative projects.

Along with her move to Baylor, Diana found a new purpose for her own teaching and scholarship. Years later she said:

At Southern [Seminary] our mission was to prepare persons for missions and ministry and congregations and mission organizations, That's not the mission at Baylor. It is to integrate faith ethically with practice. And what I came to see was that that was just as profoundly important for the social worker working in the public setting as it was for congregational leadership settings, and that we needed to help our profession recognize whenever you're working with clients, you have to work with the spiritual and religious dimensions, the faith dimensions, of their life, or you've done them a disservice. (2013, pp. 30-31)

Diana Garland was respected and even revered among the professional gatekeepers of the National Association of Deans and Directors of Social Work, which elected her to serve on its board from 2009 to 2014. She also served on several commissions and advisory boards of the Council of Social Work Education (Fogelman, 2015).

### **Final season**

In the final decade of her life, Diana and David became known around campus as a "power couple" while they both served as Baylor deans: she in social work and he at Baylor's Truett Seminary. At the pinnacle of their careers, both Diana and David were honored when donors contributed endowed chair positions in their names. From 2008 to 2010, Diana served as the university's first lady when David was interim president of Baylor University. Diana had reached the height of her career, her influence, and her contribution to the integration of faith with social work practice.

In Spring of 2015, Diana received the devastating diagnosis of Stage 4 pancreatic cancer. News of her diagnosis stunned the Baylor family as well as social workers and Baptists across the nation. Carver alumni from the 1980s and 1990s descended upon Waco for the School of Social Work's annual "Family Dinner," a fundraiser and awards ceremony. The event would be a final occasion for friends and colleagues outside Waco to visit with Diana. The evening was a collection of stories of gratitude for her work and at the end of the evening it was announced that the Baylor school would be known henceforth as the Diana R. Garland School of Social Work. Under Diana's leadership the school had grown its BSW program to 125 students, established MSW and Ph.D. programs, and created three joint-degree options with other Baylor degree programs (MSW/Master of Business Administration, MSW/Master of Divinity and MSW/Master of Theological Studies). Diana had published 21 books and over 100 articles

on themes of family ministry, church social work, and congregational health. She had grown the school's endowment to \$14.5 million and shepherded \$7.4 million in grants (Fogelman, 2015).

Diana began tying up her final writing projects as she and David traveled to their vacation home in Colorado where Diana died September 21, 2015 at age 65. As her accomplishments were detailed in the media near the end of her life, Garland continually insisted that she had not achieved these things alone, but that they had been a team effort. In an interview she expressed it this way:

All this School has accomplished has been because God has bound us together, magnifying our strengths and shining through our weaknesses. We have achieved far more than any group of people could have humanly done alone, and most certainly not due to any one person's leadership. I hope that everyone who associates my name with this School will laugh, as I do, that God has once again chosen a flawed but willing character through whom to work. (Eckert, 2015)

### **A Lasting Legacy**

Alan Keith-Lucas, Anne Davis and Diana Garland. All three pioneers believed that the roots of social work were in the faith community and that the profession would always legitimately include services to the whole person and whole community. Keith-Lucas wrote extensively about the nature of helping in a broken world and the role of social workers in addressing the pain of others with reality, empathy, and support. Anne Davis sparked the vision of social work in the context of the church and Diana Garland operationalized that vision and extended it to the importance of faith in all practice contexts. The legacy of these pioneers lives on in the vocational lives of thousands of social workers across the country and in the testimonies of social work students who commit themselves to their clients' well-being including spiritually.

### **References**

- Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) (2015). Educational policy and accreditation standards for baccalaureate and master's social work programs [PDF file]. Retrieved from [https://www.cswe.org/getattachment/Accreditation/Accreditation-Process/2015-EPAS/2015EPAS\\_Web\\_FINAL.pdf.aspx](https://www.cswe.org/getattachment/Accreditation/Accreditation-Process/2015-EPAS/2015EPAS_Web_FINAL.pdf.aspx)
- Davis, C. A. (1972, July 10–14). The Church and Helping Ministries Continuing Theological Education Conference [Audio recording]. Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY.
- Davis, C. A. (1979, May 2). Current Developments in the Field of Social Ministries [Audio recording]. Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville KY.
- Davis, C. A. (1985). A history of Christian ethics, church and community, and social work at Southern Seminary. *Review and Expositor*, 82(1), 89-99.

- Davis, C. A. (1988, April 22). Address to the National Consultation on Community Ministries [Audio recording]. Carver School of Church Social Work. Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY.
- Davis, C. A., (2005, March 15 and 23). Interview by T. L. Scales [Audio recording]. Carver School Project. Baylor University Oral History Institute, Waco, TX.
- Dyer, P. (2013, Aug 27). Interview by K. Cook []. Baylor School of Social Work Collection. Baylor University Institute of Oral History, Waco, TX.
- Eckert, E. (2015, April 26). Baylor Regents vote to name School of Social Work for Diana Garland, *Baptist Standard*. Retrieved from <https://www.baptiststandard.com/news/texas/baylor-regents-vote-to-name-school-of-social-work-for-diana-garland/>
- Fogelman, L. (2015, September 22). Baylor mourns passing of Diana Garland, founding dean of the School of Social Work [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://www.baylor.edu/mediacommunications/news.php?action=story&story=160263>.
- Furness, J. E. (2009). Education for the social work profession: Innovation in three evangelical institutions between 1960 and 1985 (Doctoral dissertation). University of Rochester, Rochester NY.
- Garland, D. R. (1999) When professional ethics and religious politics conflict: A case study. *Social Work & Christianity*, 26(3), 60-76.
- Garland, D. R. (2002a). Interview by T. L. Scales [Audio recording with transcript]. Carver School Project. Baylor University Oral History Institute, Waco, TX.
- Garland, D. R. (2002b, April 4). Tribute to C. Anne Davis (keynote address) Baylor University, Waco, TX.
- Garland, D. R. (2013). Interview by Stephen Sloan [Audio recording with transcript]. Baylor School of Social Work Project. Baylor University Oral History Institute, Waco, TX.
- Garland, D. R. (2015). *Why I am a social worker: 25 Christians tell their life stories*. Botsford, CT: NACSW.
- Garland, D. R., & Yancey, G. I. (2014). *Congregational social work: Christian perspectives*. Botsford, CT: NACSW.
- Hankins, B. (2002). *Uneasy in Babylon: Southern Baptist conservatives and southern culture*. Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press
- Harris, H. W. (2010). A look back for the future: Applying the wisdom of Alan Keith-Lucas for child care services today. *Social Work & Christianity*, 37(3), 292-305.
- Harris, H. W. (2015). Much to do about protest: The Keith-Lucas theory for mourning. *Social Work & Christianity*, 42(4), 413-429
- Harris, H. W. (2016). The helping process and Christian beliefs: Insights from Alan Keith-Lucas. In T. L. Scales & M. Kelly, (Eds.), *Christianity and social work: Readings on the integration of Christian faith and social work practice* (5th ed., pp. ). New York, NY: North American Association of Christians in Social Work.
- Harris, H.W. (2019). Prescience, prophecy, and prayer: Alan Keith-Lucas applied in 2018. *Social Work & Christianity*. 46(4), 3-20. DOI: 10.34043/swc.v46i4.108
- Hugen, B. (2001). Introduction. In M. Van Hook, B. Hugen, and M. Aguilar (Eds.), *Spirituality within religious traditions in social work practice* (pp. ). Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.
- Keith-Lucas, A. (n.d.-a). *A wholly different experience*. Unpublished manuscript I-48, Baylor University, Waco, TX.
- Keith-Lucas, A. (n.d.-b). *Social work odyssey*. Unpublished manuscript N-2, Baylor University, Waco, TX.
- Keith-Lucas, A. (n.d.-c). *Some ideas about the helping process*. Unpublished manuscript L-23b, Baylor University, Waco, TX.

- Keith-Lucas, A. (n.d.-d). *Some new concepts in the helping process*. Unpublished manuscript L-4, Baylor University, Waco, TX.
- Keith-Lucas, A. (n.d.-e). *Some new concepts in the helping process*. Unpublished manuscript L-39, Baylor University, Waco, TX.
- Keith-Lucas, A. (1973). *Toward a Christian view of Social Work*. Unpublished manuscript L-90, Baylor University, Waco, TX.
- Kuhlmann, E. G. (2010). The contributions of Alan Keith-Lucas to the North American Association of Christians in Social Work: A professional and personal memoir and tribute on the centenary of his birth. *Social Work & Christianity*, 37(3), 305-321.
- North American Association of Christians in Social Work. (January 2016). In memoriam: Diana Garland, *The Catalyst* 59(1), 4.
- Powell, J. Y. (2010). Alan Keith-Lucas, Ph.D.: Social worker and Christian, 1910-1956. *Social Work & Christianity*, 37(3), 251-268.
- Ressler, L. E. (2010). Introduction to the life, contribution and inspiration of Alan Keith-Lucas. *Social Work & Christianity*, 37(3), 241-251.
- Scales, T. L. (2000). "All that fits a woman": *Training Southern Baptist women for charity and mission, 1907-1926*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press.
- Scales, T. L., & Garland, D. R. (2007). Remembering Cora Anne Davis, 1937-2006. *Catalyst*, 50(1), 1.
- Scales, T. L., & Maxwell, M. (2019). "Doing the word": *Southern Baptists' Carver School of Church Social Work and its predecessors, 1907-1997*. Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press.
- Scales, T. L., & Rawls, A. (1992). *Church social work in rural America* [VHS]. Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY.
- Segal, E. A., Gerdes, K. E., & Steiner, S. (2013). *An introduction to the profession of social work: Becoming a change agent*. Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole.
- Sherwood, D. A. (2010). Acts of the loving imagination: Central themes of Alan Keith-Lucas. *Social Work & Christianity*, 37(3), 268-292.
- Sherwood, D. A. (2015). The indomitable Diana Garland. *Journal of Family and Community Ministries*, 28 (2), 23-24.

## Endnote

<sup>1</sup> This section was adapted from Scales, T. L. (2007). C. Anne Davis (1938-2006): Shaping an ethic of 'Doing the Word.' In L. Allen & L. McSwain (Eds.), *Twentieth century shapers of Baptist social ethics* (pp. 226-243). Macon, GA, Mercer University Press.



# Good Neighbor House: Reimagining Settlement Houses for 21st-Century Communities<sup>1</sup>

---

*Edward C. Polson and T. Laine Scales*

Over the last several decades, a number of scholars and community leaders have lamented publicly the decline of community in American society (Carney, 2019; Cortright, 2015; Putnam, 2000; Putnam & Campbell, 2010; Wuthnow, 1998). Observers have noted that bonds of trust and reciprocity that once could be counted on to facilitate and strengthen social life in communities seem to be weakening and that the fabric of social life itself has begun to unravel in many communities (Cortright, 2015; Paxton, 1999; Putnam, 2000). Neighbors interact with one another less, trust each other less, and are less likely to collaborate to address community concerns than they were in the past. In addition to declining trust and social capital, communities must deal with issues related to increasing diversity and inter-group conflict, continuing economic and racial segregation, increasing economic inequality, a growing skepticism towards social institutions, and diminishing public resources. Such challenges pose a real threat to the health and well-being of many communities as well as the individuals and families that live in them. In this landscape of social disconnection and community estrangement, Christian community practitioners and faith-based organizations have important contributions to make.

Christian faith emphasizes the values of stewardship, responsibility for the wider community, and hospitality to neighbor and stranger, all of which may be important antidotes to current trends in community life. Still, Christian community practitioners and faith-based organizations must be prepared to draw from and utilize a variety of practice models and strategies in their work. Contemporary approaches to community development, organizing, and social action abound and provide invaluable direction in this regard (Gamble and Weil, 2009; Weil, Reisch, & Ohmer, 2012). In this article, we highlight a unique model for empowering community residents and building social capital, one that draws on the roots of the social work profession itself: the settlement house. Settlement houses, proliferating at the turn of the 20th century, combatted challenges in urban communities that were similar, in some regards, to the challenges communities face today (e.g., low levels of trust, intergroup conflict, increasing segregation). Moreover, many early houses and settlement workers were motivated by religious convictions to reform and strengthen urban communities experiencing drastic social change

(Scales, 2000; Scales & Kelly, 2011; Williams & Maclean, 2015). As such, we suggest the legacy of the settlement house can provide Christian community practitioners and faith-based organizations an additional model of practice that emphasizes the empowerment of community residents and the strengthening of social ties in neighborhoods and communities while providing opportunities to practice Christian values such as hospitality and stewardship.

After reviewing the history and key aspects of the settlement house movement as well as its relationship with Christian community ministry at the turn of the 20th century, we present a case example of one contemporary faith-based settlement in Waco, Texas, the Good Neighbor House. Drawing on experiences of the Good Neighbor model, we highlight lessons learned and potential strategies for community social work practice in 21st-century communities.

### **The Settlement House Experiment**

The profession of social work generally connects its evolution to two social welfare movements: the Charity Organization Society (COS) movement and the Settlement House (SH) movement. Often recounted in an over-simplified narrative, histories of social work may neglect other important threads in the story. Child welfare providers and church-related organizations were also important building blocks of professional social work (Garland, 1994; Scales & Kelly, 2011). In some cases the narrative is distorted to portray COS workers as religiously motivated caseworkers over against the SH workers who are portrayed as secular humanists leading community change. More accurately, many social workers in both COS and SH movements were motivated by their faith, just like today. Moreover, while many settlement houses evolved into what Davis (1984) called “spearheads for reform,” some houses were not focused on social activism but instead provided social services and educational activities. Historical interest in the most famous and most thoroughly documented settlement houses, such as Jane Addams’ Hull House of Chicago, has sometimes led observers to overlook the diverse motivations and activities of settlement houses, including settlement houses with religious affiliations.

Emerging in the latter quarter of the 19th century, both the COS and SH movements were rooted in London, England, where dire poverty of the Victorian era inspired Protestant clergy to suggest new solutions. One group, the COS followers, held three key assumptions: that moral deficiencies of poor people caused urban poverty, that correcting these moral deficiencies would eliminate poverty, and that a network of charity organizations would need to cooperate and document their home investigations of poor people in order to address poverty and prevent duplication of services to the poor (Ginzberg, 1990). In contrast, the SH movement, also initiated by Protestant clergy, experimented with a different method which emphasized not individual reform, but a neighborly approach to establishing communication and relationship between well-to-do volunteer “settlers” and lower-income neighbors. The first experimental SH was Toynbee Hall, founded in London

by a Protestant minister, Samuel Barnett, and his wife Henrietta Barnett. Renting or purchasing a large building, settlers invited neighbors into a common space designed for education, recreation, art, or other types of enrichment previously unavailable in the area. Settlers, often college students or well-educated men and women of means, lived in or near the settlement house as volunteers (Johnson, 2001).

At the forefront of the SH philosophy was a democratic ideal or, as Jane Adams expressed it, settlements were based “on the theory that the dependence of classes on each other is reciprocal” (Davis, 1984, p.19). Settlements focused their energies not on reforming individuals but on addressing social problems and improving neighborhoods. In fact, settlements carried out some of the first sociological studies of immigrant communities, using their insights to initiate reforms in the area of child labor, sanitation, and women’s working conditions (Williams & Mclean, 2015). Education and recreation were important activities of the settlement to improve neighbors’ lives. A network of college extension courses, English language classes, vocational training, and the teaching of domestic skills prepared neighbors for work in the United States while kindergartens and playgrounds enriched the lives of children (Davis, 1984).

### **Mutuality and Reciprocity**

One of the most important foundations of the settlement house movement was that of mutuality. Offering an alternative to charity organizations and churches who participated in almsgiving or sometimes judged the worthiness of an individual to receive aid, the settlement workers took a stance of mutual aid. Settlers saw themselves, not as community saviors, but as learners and recipients. As Toynbee Hall founder, Samuel Barnett emphasized that every resident volunteer must learn as well as teach, and must receive as well as give (Johnson, 2001). Encouraging neighbors to give back to the settlement fostered a sense of community. For example, a child who came to take a bath once a week (a common service offered by settlement houses) might be asked to pay a nickel or to sweep the floor. As Johnson (2001) explains,

The importance of the mutuality of the relationship between people from different backgrounds within the settlement framework cannot be overstated: Through direct personal encounter people were enabled to go beyond appearances and preconceptions and to get to know and value the individuality and humanity of each other, thus leading to greater respect for others and for themselves while building a stronger sense of community. (p.73)

This element of settlement house philosophy may be misunderstood in our 21st-century world of philanthropy and donation. However, the early settlers believed that the feeling of community and mutual uplift that a neighborhood may experience comes from every member contributing in line with what he or she can afford.

## **University Partnerships**

Universities were an integral part of the settlement house model and exposing college students to working class neighbors was an important part of the process. Toynbee Hall recruited Oxford University ministerial students to live among London's poor during school breaks. Oxford faculty members like John Ruskin offered lectures in the neighborhood and inspired student residents with their egalitarian ideals (Horowitz, 1974; Johnson, 2001).

American settlements imitated the Toynbee Hall approach and U.S. settlement leaders such as Stanton Coit and Jane Addams visited London to learn about the model, including the synergistic relationship between settlements and their local universities. Settlement leaders invited faculty to lecture and to volunteer while drawing upon university research in disciplines such as education and sociology (Williams & McLean, 2015). John Dewey provides an excellent example of a fruitful partnership with university faculty. Dewey visited Hull House a few years before joining the faculty at the University of Chicago. He and Addams became good colleagues and discussion partners as each forged new experiments in exploring how people learn. Dewey became a regular lecturer at Hull House where neighbors could learn from his insights. He was a lifetime supporter of the Chicago settlement and served on the advisory board for many years (Vorsino, 2015). Other settlements even carried the word "university" in their name, such as the University Settlements in Boston and New York, indicating a strong partnership with students and faculty (Williams & Mclean, 2015).

## **Serving Immigrant Communities**

Settlement houses proliferated on American soil in numbers far greater than their English counterparts did. At the peak of the movement, over 400 settlement houses had been opened in the U.S., mostly in urban areas (Davis, 1977). Large waves of immigrants moving into U.S. cities shaped the agenda of urban settlement houses, particularly in the early 20th century. In 1889, when Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr opened Hull House in one of one of Chicago's most densely populated neighborhoods they were joining recently-arrived European immigrants including Poles, Italians, Russians, Jews from Eastern Europe, Germans, and Irish. Many were in poverty upon arrival and found severe economic and health challenges in their new American lives (Linn, 1935). As in times past, contemporary settlement houses have the potential to serve today's immigrants. However, due to increasingly strict enforcement of immigration policy in recent years, many immigrants fear deportation and avoid seeking social and government services (Amuedo-Dorantes, Puttitanun, Martinez-Donate, 2013). Contemporary settlement houses can offer a safe place for recreation, learning, and worship for these individuals and families.

## **Segregated by Race and Sex**

The earliest settlement houses were racially segregated. In her important study of African Americans in the settlement movement, Lasch-Quinn (1993) explains that the mainstream settlement movement ignored African American neighbors in spite of its rhetoric of inclusion. In an era of Jim Crow laws, African American volunteers established their own settlements and community centers, often connected to churches and church-related organizations. Early settlement houses also were sex-segregated in terms of their residents, although services were offered to men, women, and children. Toynbee Hall, for example, was for Oxford men and Hull House was a women's community. Interestingly, while both England and the U.S. had houses for male and female workers, England's movement remained primarily masculine, while the U.S. model involved many women seeking opportunities for learning and leadership denied to them in other contexts. In a time when single women did not live alone but stayed with families, in boarding houses, or in religious housing organizations such as the YWCA, the settlement offered to women a perfect opportunity to combine living in a socially acceptable women's community while learning and serving at the same time (Horowitz, 1974; Vorsino, 2015). Much has been written about the empowerment of women residents and leaders.

## **Religiously Motivated Settlers**

Social welfare historian Allen Davis indicates that the majority of American settlement workers were religious. In 1905, a poll of 339 settlement workers showed that 88 percent were active church members and nearly all stated that religion had been a major influence on their lives (Davis, 1984). In fact, some religious groups opened settlement houses for explicitly religious purposes. For example, Methodist women established Wesley Houses with an evangelistic purpose: "The work is evangelical and seeks not only to instruct but to regenerate" (Woods & Kennedy, 1911, p.89). Southern Baptist women of Louisville, Kentucky founded the Baptist Settlement House in 1912 as a means "to give Christ to the neighborhood" and a group of Catholic women in Chicago created the Madonna Center to provide Catholic immigrants a place to receive the sacraments, "to minister to and protect the Catholic traditions" of some of the same neighbors served by Hull House (Scales & Kelly, 2011, pp. 364, 366).

As the settlement experiment evolved, religious workers continued discussions and debates about the place of religion within settlement work. For example, in a paper entitled "Problems of Religion," Arthur Holden (1922) advised that settlements did not need to talk about religion or attempt to teach it. He argued that by simply living a life in service to others, the settlement worker embodied Christian principles. Graham Taylor, Protestant pastor and founder of a settlement house called Chicago Commons, noted that while religious individuals may be involved in settlements, the church and the settlement have two very different purposes. Taylor believed that a church must press the tenets

of its faith, and if it does not, it ceases to be a church of that faith. A settlement, on the other hand, may not embrace any cult or creed lest it forfeit its place as being a common ground for all (Taylor, 1950).

### **Formation of Resident Settlers**

An important part of the settlement house experience was the opportunity for settlers to learn by doing. In some settlements, like Hull House, the “curriculum” for graduate students and young professionals was ad hoc and informal, as women like Alice Hamilton or Florence Kelley practiced their medical and legal skills while helping neighbors. In other cases, the settlement house may have offered a more formal internship experience as students in social work, missions, or ministry worked with neighbors and tried out the skills they were learning in the classroom. For example, Baptist women of the Woman’s Missionary Union Training School at Louisville, Kentucky volunteered in their own settlement house called Good Will Center. They offered educational and recreational activities as well as Bible study for immigrant women and children. The pedagogical benefits of working “hands on” and receiving immediate feedback from teachers contributed to the students’ learning (Scales & Kelly, 2011). As volunteers turned into paid professional social workers throughout the 20th century, these Baptist women became a part of the workforce. Alumni were hired by churches around the Southern United States to establish Good Will Centers in cities like Birmingham or Atlanta (Maxwell, 2011). These settlement workers were precursors to “church social workers,” a label that would enter the vocabulary of Baptists later, during the 1960s and 1970s.

### **Good Neighbor House: A 21st-Century Settlement**

The Good Neighbor model draws on many of the classic principles of the settlement house movement described above while also incorporating new elements intended to meet the 21st-century needs of both neighbors and settlers in a particular context. Below, we provide a brief history of the Good Neighbor House and discuss key aspects of the model.

### **History of Good Neighbor House**

In 2011, when a vacant 90-year-old home in the Sanger Heights neighborhood of Waco, Texas was determined to be unsafe for occupancy, one neighboring homeowner recognized an opportunity to make an impact in her community (Smith, 2012). A professor of higher education and social work, Dr. Laine Scales had long been a student of the 19th-century settlement house movement and wondered if a contemporary version of the settlement house might be beneficial or even possible in the Sanger Heights neighborhood. Dr. Scales’ initial idea led to the purchase of the vacant home in 2011 and five years later the establishment of the Good Neighbor Settlement House and Worship Cen-

ter, a faith-based, nonprofit organization that exists to strengthen and support community among residents in the Sanger Heights neighborhood. Soon after establishment, board members and settlers began referring to the house simply as the Good Neighbor House.

Home to prominent Waco families in the early 1900s, the Sanger Heights neighborhood is today one of the most diverse neighborhoods in the city. In 2010, over half of neighborhood residents identified as Hispanic or Latino, approximately 23 percent identified as white, and 20 percent identified as African-American (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Moreover, there is significant diversity in income, age, and life experience represented among households in the neighborhood. Sanger Heights is home to young professionals, college educators, blue collar and service workers, as well as a significant number of families that fall below the poverty level. While residents are proud of the diversity that exists in the neighborhood, demographic change and population churn over the past several decades have left many residents feeling disconnected from their neighbors and other community members. The Good Neighbor House seeks to address this issue and strengthen neighborhood social ties by following many of the principles of the early settlement house movement in the U.S. and Europe.

After the initial purchase of the house in 2011, Dr. Scales set out to establish the Good Neighbor House as a nonprofit organization and to put together a board of directors to guide the organization's development. She partnered with a dynamic and engaged MSW student living in the neighborhood, Morgan Caruthers, to brainstorm and share tasks. Together they learned about the neighborhood and the process of applying for 501(c)(3) or nonprofit status. To maximize visibility and community involvement, Scales and Caruthers created an executive board to meet weekly and an advisory board to meet monthly. Advisors included community representatives from organizations and churches: Habitat for Humanity, the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Baylor University, Texas State Technical College, a volunteer fundraising expert, along with several neighbors and an elected city council representative. The executive board was composed of five members including both neighborhood residents and faculty and students from local universities.

During the first three years, the executive board and advisory board focused primarily on applying for 501(c)(3) status which drove efforts to develop a specific and clear mission for the organization. In this phase board members read historical documents about settlement houses, visited the Hull House museum and the Birmingham Settlement in England, and explored questions about what made a settlement successful and why the movement peaked in the 1920s but was greatly diminished by the 1940s. They also researched modern settlement houses through the International Federation of Settlements and Neighborhood Centers (<https://ifsnetwork.org>). This was an important time of learning and teaching.

Board members also engaged in discussion about the particularities of faith-based settlement houses and the complex relationship between local churches and neighborhood residents who embody many faiths. In this phase board members created statements in the organization's by-laws emphasizing

hospitality over the impulse to evangelize. Drawing on social work scholar David Sherwood's essay on the dangers of evangelizing vulnerable populations, board members determined to emphasize the virtues of inclusion and hospitality as primary faith expressions of the Good Neighbor House (Sherwood, 2002).

After two years, once 501(c)(3) status was granted, the advisory board was dissolved and the executive board was transformed into the board of directors. During this time, board members worked diligently to engage neighbors in creating a vision for GNH. They held informal meetings in neighbors' homes, spoke at churches, engaged the Sanger Heights Neighborhood Association, and held individual meetings with non-profits in the area. Board members discovered that the phrase "settlement house" was unfamiliar to many neighbors. Some incorrectly believed it would be a place for homeless people to "settle." This idea upset some neighbors, and much of the board's energy was spent explaining and correcting misunderstandings about the purpose of the house. This provided further opportunities for board members to gather input from neighbors about what they wanted to see in the house. This process revealed that while homeowners in the area often preferred the home remain a single-family residence, many were open to the idea of a settlement house. The perception among many was that having residents living and working in the house would be preferable to the house remaining vacant, as it had been for two years before Scales purchased it.

Between 2011 and 2016, board members and volunteers worked diligently to raise funds, rehabilitate the house, develop a community garden in the previously rock-filled back yard, and continue engaging residents in the neighborhood through planned events. Refurbishing the house was the most urgent matter as the City of Waco had placed the building on a list to be demolished, or "red tagged." Multiple meetings with city planners and inspectors, resulting in extensions, provided reprieve long enough for the board to raise money for refurbishment. While the majority of funds came from one donor, smaller amounts raised from neighbors and local groups provided a tangible buy-in from community members. For example, two sisters, ages seven and nine living a few blocks away hosted a lemonade stand, bringing a profit of \$5 dollars. Their gift moved and inspired board members to continue fundraising, even in challenging times.

Another motivator for the board was the decision to move forward and begin using the grounds, even while the house itself was red tagged. Board members and volunteers hosted outdoor concerts, a community garage sale, and Halloween and Cinco de Mayo festivities on the premises. These events helped the Good Neighbor House to establish and nurture important relationships with neighbors. In 2014 and 2015, the board rented a neighboring house allowing three settlers to move in next door into a building known as "the cottage" to start building social capital in the neighborhood. Settlers walked around the neighborhood, engaged neighbors in conversation, asked for community input on the vision, and helped with fundraising and hosting outdoor events. These years allowed the board to focus on settler formation and learn about the joys and struggles of supervising young people as they establish community life together with a specific purpose of neighborhood improvement.

After five years of work and significant preparation, Good Neighbor House opened in 2016 with three live-in settlers. Since then, the organization has sought to fulfill a unique mission in the Sanger Heights neighborhood and in Waco, Texas:

Building on the Christian mandate to love our neighbors and on the ideals of the early settlement houses, Good Neighbor House facilitates social integration and worship among diverse Wacoans as we invest our knowledge, faith, and experiences in community life together.

We:

- Create and maintain a safe and welcoming community space for all neighbors: individuals, families, and groups.
- Organize minimal, flexible programming to build community among neighbors (e.g. gardening, worship, arts, lending library).
- Host non-profit community groups aligning with our mission (e.g. language classes, worship groups, arts and crafts groups, 12-step programs).
- Participate in the spiritual, intellectual and social formation of settlers and other volunteers as they experience the joys and challenges of daily life in a diverse neighborhood.
- Honor the traditional settlement idea by partnering with Waco's churches, college and university groups, businesses, and others in support of our mission. (Good Neighbor House, n.d.)

## **The Good Neighbor Model**

**Community space.** One of the most significant contributions that settlement houses made in urban neighborhoods of the 19th century was the provision of community space where residents from diverse backgrounds, many of whom were immigrants, could come together to learn, socialize, and address common problems (Davis, 1984). The need for organizations and spaces that foster such social connection and integration continues to exist in contemporary communities (Putnam 2000; Putnam, Feldstein, & Cohen, 2003). A central component of Good Neighbor House's mission in the Sanger Heights neighborhood is to provide community space where neighbors come together in ways that strengthen social connection and contribute to the development of social capital in the neighborhood. The house serves as a place in the community where bridges can be built between residents and where neighbors can come together to address shared needs and community issues. The organization welcomes community members and groups to use the common spaces of the house and the grounds to host community events and programming. The common spaces include a living room, library, multi-purpose room, and kitchen. The board of directors has developed specific building use policies and a process for reserving space that ensures facilities are both accessible and safe for visitors and settlers alike. Over the past four years, a wide range of community groups have utilized space

in the house and yard to host activities such as reading groups, Girl Scout troop meetings, tai-chi classes, Spanish language classes, Bible studies, and music and arts events. These events, made possible through the simple provision of space and hospitality, have begun to nurture new and meaningful connections in the neighborhood and community.

**Settlers.** It is impossible to understand the Good Neighbor model without a discussion of the key role of settlers. Similar to the way that early settlement houses were organized (Johnson, 2001), a team of settlers lies at the heart of the work of Good Neighbor House. Indeed, the settlers are the actors that bring the vision and mission of the organization to life. Settlers may be adult women, men, or couples who volunteer to live and work at the house for a period of at least 12 months. Settlers live on site, in living quarters that are separate from the house's common spaces. In return for reduced rent, each settler volunteers seven to ten hours of his or her time per week to carry out the day-to-day operations of the house. Settler responsibilities include such things as planning and managing events, tending the community garden, cleaning, providing basic maintenance, publicizing events, fundraising, producing a newsletter, and other daily administrative tasks. Settlers interact regularly with board members by serving on a "cluster," a committee group that leads various functions such as community engagement, fundraising, and maintenance of the house and grounds. Through the volunteer work of the board, the settlers, and other community volunteers, Good Neighbor House is able to serve its neighborhood with no paid staff members. This arrangement keeps the organization agile and cost-effective with utilities and house maintenance being the primary expenses. It also mirrors the 19th-century model, a pre-professional model when settlers were unpaid volunteers. In essence, settlers are the staff and the public face of Good Neighbor.

In addition to house management, settlers have opportunities to interact with neighbors as they serve as hosts to each event. Just as with early settlements, Good Neighbor House seeks to be a place where settlers and neighborhood residents enjoy a relationship of reciprocity, learning from one another (Johnson, 2001). The Good Neighbor model also taps into some of the early traditions of religious settlement houses as discussed above (Scales & Kelly, 2011). Settler training and orientation emphasizes the Christian virtue of hospitality and settlers are able to form relationships with neighbors who frequent the building. Settlers are encouraged to walk the neighborhood and attend neighborhood events so that they may become acquainted with and invest directly in the lives of neighbors and community members while they are serving at Good Neighbor House. These characteristics, drawn from early settlement houses, makes the Good Neighbor model distinct from other community service agencies in the neighborhood. In contrast to traditional models of community service, where outsiders enter the community for short periods, settlers are expected to become a part of the neighborhood in which they are serving. They are encouraged to view their role as that of a "good neighbor" working alongside others to enhance and strengthen the life of the community around them. What settlers' investment looks like differs for each cohort of settlers that serve at the house.

Some have invested through their work in the community garden. Others have invested by offering art classes to neighborhood youth or inviting neighbors into the house for shared meals and fellowship. What has been consistent across cohorts is that, drawing on the concept of Christian hospitality; settlers have found creative and meaningful ways to build relationships with the diverse individuals and families living in the neighborhood. Because the mission of Good Neighbor House is centered in a commitment to Christian ideals of hospitality and inclusion, settlers are expected to identify as Christian and to be a part of a local congregation. In addition, to supporting the mission of the organization, this requirement fosters mutually beneficial relationships between Good Neighbor House and congregations in the community. Settlers are able to share with their local congregations what is happening at the settlement house, and congregations are invited to utilize the space. Several settlers' congregations have begun to use space at the house in recent years because of their personal connection to the work of Good Neighbor House.

Over the past five years, 19 settlers have volunteered their time and gifts at Good Neighbor House. Each spring, prospective settlers go through an application and interview process facilitated by the board of directors. Depending on current house needs and the qualifications of applicants, the board typically selects several new settlers each year to serve terms of 12 months. Settlers may continue serving beyond this initial term if the board is supportive. Each year, the board strives to form a team of settlers that is composed of some new and some experienced settlers. Settlers attend a half-day training at the beginning of their service in August and participate in a mid-year retreat with members of the board. In the first years, three settlers served at a time. However, as the organization has grown and the workload increased, so has the number of settlers needed to carry out the work of the house. Today, there are six settlers living and working at Good Neighbor House.

In addition to serving in the house and serving the neighborhood, settlers are required to contribute to each other's well-being in specific ways. Settlers participate in weekly team meetings as well as activities focused on personal and spiritual formation. They also agree to work together to manage shared living space, agree to treat settlers and neighbors with respect as equals, and contribute to the various projects of Good Neighbor House. Initially, the board planned to identify a lead settler in each cohort who would be responsible for coordinating the work of the settlers and overseeing the functioning of the house. However, early on board members determined this would be a significant responsibility to place on a volunteer settler. Instead, the board identifies a board member to fulfill this role each year. The designated board member meets with settlers weekly and coordinates both the work and the formation of the team of settlers. In the past, this board member has been someone with ministry and/or social work training. The board has also developed a Settler Handbook that provides information settlers may need for carrying out the work of the Good Neighbor House on a daily basis.

A distinctive element of the Good Neighbor model is an emphasis on the personal and spiritual formation of settlers. This was characteristic of some of the

early religious settlement houses in the U.S. (Scales & Kelly, 2011). Recognizing that most settlers will serve for a limited period, the goal of this aspect of the Good Neighbor model is to support settlers' personal development and to have a lasting impact on the way that they understand their responsibility as neighbors and community members when they leave Good Neighbor House. In addition to their commitment to carrying out the work of the house, settlers are required to participate in weekly formation activities with other settlers and board members. In the past, formation activities have included opportunities for Bible study, worship, team building, fostering self-awareness, learning more about community development, and meeting members of the neighborhood. These events typically occur at Good Neighbor House or in the home of a neighbor or supporter in the community. Settlers are also expected to develop specific learning goals for their year, to engage a local congregation, and to grow in how they live with other settlers in community and how they engage the neighborhood.

In contrast to many of the early settlement houses that were segregated by sex, the most famous of which relied on the volunteer labor of young white women who were studying at university, in this 21st-century model, men and women serve together as settlers while living on separate floors or in different buildings. Good Neighbor House also welcomes married couples, which was rare in the 19th-century settlements (although Toynbee Hall's Samuel and Henrietta Barnett provide an early example). Settlers also represent a diversity of ages and personal backgrounds. Settlers have ranged in age from 20s to 50s and come from a variety of different socioeconomic and educational backgrounds. The application asks that all settlers be at least 21, but notes that exceptions can be made in some circumstances. While most settlers have been full-time students at one of the nearby universities, a few have been working in other fields while serving. The synergy of an intergenerational community of both men and women, single and married serves Good Neighbor well in its daily life. Importantly, settlers are socialized as an egalitarian community in terms of gender roles. Both men and women do a variety of domestic chores and yard work; men and women serve in leadership roles, without discrimination.

**Empowering neighbors.** Another unique aspect of the settlement house tradition was its emphasis on the empowerment of neighborhood residents. While many houses did provide direct services to the community, they also sought to develop grassroots leaders and to encourage a sense of ownership of the programs and services offered. As discussed above, a sense of reciprocity was encouraged between settlers and residents (Johnson, 2001). In addition to providing services for neighbors, early settlers learned from neighborhood residents. Drawing on this idea, the Good Neighbor model emphasizes the value of creating space and opportunity for neighbors and community members to come together to develop new and innovative programs and events to enhance the community. In contrast to more traditional community organizations, Good Neighbor House offers little in the way of direct programming or services. Rather, community members have led the majority of events occurring at the house since it opened in 2016. If a group of neighbors determines there is a need for

education on nutrition or healthy living, a weekly Bible study, or a bi-weekly grief group, Good Neighbor House provides an accessible, safe environment within which community members can pursue such ends. Settlers are available to help to schedule events, ensure that spaces are clean and set up appropriately, and provide assistance for groups using the house. They may participate in such groups if invited. Leadership, however, remains in the hands of neighbors and community members. In essence, neighbors are both teachers and learners. They develop valuable transferable civic skills as they plan and organize such events. In this way, Good Neighbor House is a catalyst for the development of grassroots leadership and programming.

In addition to serving as a space for community-led programming, Good Neighbor House does provide minimal programming each year to engage the surrounding community. Over the past five years, board members and settlers have held back-yard concerts, arts events, and open houses to raise financial support for the organization and to showcase the facilities. In recent years, settlers have organized and managed a community garden that provides fresh produce for community members and organizations. Each fall, settlers and board members participate in a community-wide Halloween block party to support neighborhood families and children.

**University relationships.** Many early settlement houses enjoyed a close relationship with educational institutions and universities (Williams & Maclean, 2015). As described above, settlers were often female university students who worked and lived in the houses while pursuing education. Settlement houses provided affordable housing in exchange for these women's investment in the surrounding neighborhoods. In the same way, Good Neighbor House has sought to leverage connections with local colleges and universities to recruit both settlers and community supporters. While settlers come from diverse backgrounds and ages, the majority have been students attending nearby colleges and universities. The Sanger Heights neighborhood is fortunate to be in close proximity to several institutions of higher education including McLennan Community College, Texas State Technical College, and Baylor University, a large religiously affiliated university. Additionally, the organization's founder and early board members included faculty, students, and alumni of these institutions. Over the past five years, students studying in programs as varied as social work, visual arts, business, environmental science, law, and theology have served as settlers at Good Neighbor House. Each of these settlers brings with them a unique vocational perspective and set of skills that contribute to the work of the house. For instance, one settler studying environmental science volunteered to install rain barrels for water harvesting and a drip irrigation system for the garden. Another settler with a background in arts and music planned opportunities for local artists and musicians to gather and share their work.

Another way that the organization has leveraged its unique connection to colleges and universities is through the mentoring of interns and service learning students from various academic programs. For example, an intern from one university's English department worked with board members to improve the orga-

nization's public communications and social media presence. Likewise, students in business and communications have helped the organizations to strengthen its fundraising strategy, and a doctoral student in sociology helped the board of directors develop a community profile of the Sanger Heights neighborhood using census data. Colleges and university organizations such as sororities, fraternities, and service clubs have donated volunteer time for building projects, cleaning, and fundraising. In 2017, as a part of a class assignment, a group of philanthropy students was instrumental in helping Good Neighbor House obtain grant funding to build a new outdoor patio for staging community concerts and events. In these ways and more, the connections that the organization has fostered with faculty, students, and alumni of local educational institutions benefit the organization and the neighborhood. These relationships contribute to the development of social capital in the community and create avenues through which students and faculty share their valuable knowledge and resources with the wider community.

**Practicing Christian hospitality.** While early settlement houses had roots in 19th-century religious reform movements, many of the houses that emerged did not have specifically religious missions or affiliations. In this way, the Good Neighbor model is somewhat distinct from many of the early settlement houses. While Good Neighbor House does not affiliate with any specific religious body or institution, the organization has chosen to root its mission in a distinctively Christian understanding of hospitality and responsibility for the community. Indeed, Good Neighbor House views the creation of space where neighbors and community members come together informally and where community connections are strengthened as an important way of practicing the Christian virtue of hospitality. In essence, Good Neighbor House and the settlers who live there open up their home to be used by the wider community. Settlers and board members do not engage in proselytization or evangelism but welcome all community groups, irrespective of religious belief or practice, to use the space. Moreover, since the house opened, groups from several different religious groups including Baptists, Mennonites, and Quakers have used the house for hosting religious meetings or worship services.

In addition to being a space for Christian hospitality in the neighborhood, the Good Neighbor model emphasizes developing relationships with the diverse religious congregations that are present and active in the Sanger Heights community. Over the past several decades, the neighborhood has experienced an influx of new religious congregations including ethnic Christian congregations, charismatic and Pentecostal churches, and non-Christian religious groups. Settlers and board members have sought to engage and build supportive relationships with these groups by inviting them to use space at Good Neighbor House and by offering to speak about Good Neighbor House in their congregations. Additionally, one of the board's goals has been to increase support for the organization by inviting neighborhood congregations to collaborate with Good Neighbor House and support it through both funding and service. This has been a challenging area of work but one that is central to Good Neighbor House's mission. Local congregations have been supportive of Good Neighbor

House in many ways—providing volunteers to help with construction projects, utilizing space for meetings, and publicizing Good Neighbor events. However, commitments of financial support from congregations have been less common.

### **Lessons for Christians in Social Work**

As we stated in the opening of this article, Christian community practitioners and faith-based organizations must be prepared to draw from and utilize a variety of practice models and strategies in order to help neighborhoods and communities address the many challenges they face in the 21st century. Moreover, we suggest that Christians in social work have much to learn from history. While standard narratives of social work history may ignore or distort the influence of Christian volunteers on social welfare history, sharing these rich stories not only corrects our historical record, but also provides inspiration for practice today. Our professional grandmothers and grandfathers were not perfect human beings and, like us, they made mistakes. Social workers of the 21st century have the benefit of historical lenses to examine and evaluate the pros and cons of models like the settlement house experiment. Using these models and improving upon them, Christian community practitioners may find much about the settlement house model to imitate while at the same time revising the model for 21st-century communities. We suggest that the following summary of lessons learned from the experiences of those instrumental in establishing Good Neighbor House may be helpful for Christian community social work practitioners seeking to utilize the settlement house model and to integrate a Christian perspective in their work:

*Choose your location carefully while examining census data.* Good Neighbor House board members chose a residential community that was unusually diverse for a city comprised of mostly segregated neighborhoods. The location can easily be reached by many neighbors by walking or biking and has many churches nearby that may be engaged in the work of the organization. A strong neighborhood association already established enhanced the settlement's work and offered a starting point for developing partnerships. Location and proximity to neighbors, resources, and local churches can have an important effect on facility use and support.

*Meet with neighbors early and let them drive the agenda.* Early supporters and board members solicited ideas in neighborhood meetings and in informal conversations with neighbors. Though they planned to refurbish the run-down building more quickly, it turned out to be an advantage to have had two years of settlement operations with settlers living in a neighboring building. This time of preparation provided an opportunity for continuing neighborhood conversations and ensuring that neighbors had plenty of time to express their desires for the house. When Good Neighbor House opened, board members were able to invite groups that already existed to use the space, rather than having to plan new uses. This basic principle of listening to neighbors and facilitating activities they have already determined they want is a hallmark of community organizing.

Further, it allowed settlers and board members to demonstrate in concrete ways the organization's commitment to the Christian principals of hospitality and incarnational service in the community. Seeking to accomplish organizational priorities first would have been an error and perhaps would have undermined an important principle of Christian community practice.

*Immigrant populations are still important neighbors for settlement houses.* Settlement houses arose at a time when industrialization, immigration, and urbanization coalesced in the United States. While marginalization of immigrants was common then as now, today's immigrant populations face unprecedented threat. A safe space for neighbors, native born or immigrant, is essential in the 21st century. Drawing on the rich Biblical tradition of God's concern for immigrants and strangers (Deuteronomy 10:19; Matthew 25:35), faith-based settlements like Good Neighbor House can reclaim this role of providing a non-government sponsored place of hospitality, learning, and recreation. As America's communities grow increasingly diverse, this is a vital role for faith-based and religiously affiliated organizations to play. According to census data, the block in which Good Neighbor House is located is 50 percent Latinx, which often indicates a hidden immigrant population that may benefit from traditional settlement house services for immigrants. In 2016, one month after Good Neighbor House opened its doors; the settlement began to provide office space to an immigration lawyer from *American Gateways*, a Christian organization providing free legal assistance to immigrants. Families in crisis discreetly and safely entered through an unmarked door to seek help and advice. The organization soon outgrew its offices in the house. However, the partnership inspired an immediate tie to immigrant families in the community.

*Connect with local universities and colleges, while still maintaining a separate identity.* The Good Neighbor House has striven to establish meaningful connections with faculty and staff of local universities. Unfortunately, universities often have histories of discrimination and elitism in college towns, which can color neighbors' impressions of college-sponsored programs. While many board members and settlers have formal connections to a large, Christian university in town, they determined early on that the settlement must be community-owned, not university owned. As a result, the board chose as their first partners the local technical college. An architecture class helped design Good Neighbor House's refurbishment. Intentionally steering away from the impression that the house is a university-owned effort, the board made sure to include settlers who attended local community or technical colleges as well. As Good Neighbor House became more established and its approach to community-ownership more well known, the organization embraced university partnerships more fully, particularly with student groups that wanted to connect with communities outside the university bubble. Many student groups enjoy using the house's meeting space for retreats and off-campus projects while also attending concerts and events. Board members observed that facilitating an off-campus link between students and a diverse community was a worthy learning experience for university students, just as it was 125 years ago for the privileged men of Toynbee

Hall. As a faith-based organization, Good Neighbor House also recognized that partnerships with student groups offered many students of faith an important opportunity to demonstrate their religious commitments to service and justice in new and formative ways.

*A building is both an asset and a liability.* Operation of a settlement house is not possible without a house. In the case of Good Neighbor House, choosing a red-tagged building scheduled for demolition made the property purchase affordable, yet this decision also created many challenges. An old building with many problems required many hours of labor and much expense to refurbish. An unanticipated increase in property taxes and insurance due to the city's recent growth brought unanticipated financial challenges for the organization. Despite such challenges, board members feel the Good Neighbor House and its adjacent cottage for settlers has been a fruitful location. Still, settlement leaders and board members must be realistic about the costs of maintaining a building, both financially and in terms of energy from the board and settlers.

*Establish a culture of mutuality and reciprocity.* A settlement house must be egalitarian. This means that every neighbor, whatever their advantages or disadvantages have been, has something to give and something to receive. Settlers and board members must maintain a stance of generosity, while also being willing to receive gifts. This model of reciprocity and "buy in" from neighbors provides funding for utilities and operations without over taxing lower income neighbors. Neighbors participating in the settlement house activities may receive services or entertainment, but they are also expected to contribute something, whether it be a small amount of money, an art piece to hang on the wall, or an afternoon mowing the lawn. This stance of reciprocity preserves the dignity and worth of neighbors and settlers as they work together on community improvement. At Good Neighbor House, formal fundraising and grant writing is reserved for special projects. For example, the board applied for and received a grant to build an outdoor stage and deck, which accommodates outdoor theatre, concerts, and a "Porch Tales" storytelling event. This emphasis on mutuality permeates the settlement house culture and is designed to instill a sense that one group does not own Good Neighbor House, but it belongs to the neighborhood.

*Carefully decide the role of religion in a settlement house.* Traditional settlement houses maintained many different stances in terms of their explicit ties to religion. Some, like the Baptist Good Will Center were places of missionary zeal with a goal to convert all visitors to the center while others practiced religion quietly and separately from their settlement work. Varieties of possibilities are legitimate ways of Christian service. The key lesson is that all participants, board members, settlers, volunteers, and neighbors must understand the intent. This takes a great deal of discussion, training, and media messaging. At Good Neighbor House, all board members and settlers declare their Christian faith at the application stage. Christian affiliation is made clear in the organization's by-laws and on the website as well as in the daily life of the organization. At the same time, board members and settlers strive to be clear that any person of any faith or no faith will be included and accepted at the settlement house. Inspired by the social gospel pastor

and Christian sociologist Graham Taylor, Good Neighbor House maintains that the functions of a settlement house and a congregation are different. At times, this means that a particular settler or volunteer may not be a good fit for Good Neighbor House if they wish to use the house as a home base for proselytizing. While evangelism may be an important role of Christian congregations, conversion it is not the primary goal of the Good Neighbor House. Maintaining this stance requires much discussion, training, and prayer as the board and settlers work together to provide a safe space that is welcoming for all.

*Plans and Prayers for settler formation.* The role of forming a person who chooses to spend a year in the settlement house is a holy privilege. Settlers are not simply volunteer laborers; rather they are learners who have a tremendous opportunity for experiential learning about their faith, their neighbors, and Christ's incarnation. The historical record is very thin in terms of what formal activities early settlement houses may have conducted to promote learning for the settlers. Early settlers and their supervisors had a tendency to look outward, toward their clients in their essays and other writings. Diaries and other records they left behind have little reflection on how the settler may have been transformed by the experience. However, Good Neighbor House board members recognized that contemporary settlers, many of whom are students in social work, ministry, or education, are stepping into roles with daily opportunities for learning. Settlers are asked to articulate their learning goals for the year during the application process as well as in their initial orientation. Intentionality and planning for settler formation ensure they have time for training, reading, and reflection. For example, when settlers read together Christine Pohl's (2012) *Living into community: Cultivating practices that sustain us*, they have weekly opportunities to discuss the inward and outward communities they are creating. In other words, the book opened up discussion about life together as settlers while also challenging the group to look outward at the Good Neighbor community they were creating. Some settlers have journaled about their experiences, reflecting a variety of transformations over time. In the busyness of daily tasks, board members and settlers may be tempted to neglect being intentional about the learning opportunity. However, settlement house leaders must take seriously their role in settler formation.

In summary, we suggest that the legacy of the settlement house movement provides Christian community practitioners and faith-based organizations a unique model of practice that has the potential to address some of the most pressing challenges facing 21st-century communities (i.e., social isolation, declining trust, etc.). Indeed, the settlement house model emphasizes the empowerment of community residents and the strengthening of social ties in neighborhoods and communities, and it corresponds well with Christian ideals of stewardship, community responsibility, and inclusiveness. Establishing a settlement in 21st-century communities is not without its challenges, as is seen in the experience of the Good Neighbor House. Nevertheless, this classic model, central to the development of the social work profession, has much to offer neighborhoods, communities, and the community practitioners that serve them.

## References

- Amuedo-Dorantes, C., Puttitanum, T., & Martinez-Donate, A. P. (2013). How do tougher immigration measures affect unauthorized immigrants? *Demography*, 50, 1067-1091.
- Carney, T. P. (2019). *Alienated America: Why some places thrive while others collapse*. New York, NY: Harper Collins.
- Cortright, J. (2015). *Less in common*. Portland, OR: City Observatory.
- Davis, A. F. (1977). Settlements: History. In J. B. Turner (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Social Work* (pp. 1266-1271). Washington, DC: National Association of Social Workers.
- Davis, A. F. (1984). *Spearheads for reform: The social settlements and the Progressive Movement 1890-1914*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Gamble, D. N., & Weil, M. (2009). *Community practice skills: Local to global perspectives*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Garland, D. S. R. (1994). *Church agencies: Caring for children and families in crisis*. Washington, DC: Child Welfare League of America.
- Ginzberg, L. (1990). *Women and the work of benevolence: Morality, politics, and class in the nineteenth century United States*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Good Neighbor House. (n.d.). What we do. Retrieved from <http://goodneighborwaco.org/about-2/what-we-do/>
- Horowitz, H. L. (1974). Varieties of cultural experience in Jane Addams' Chicago. *History of Education Quarterly*, 14(1), 69-86.
- Johnson, C. (2001). Strength in community: Historical development of settlements internationally. In R. Gilchrist & T. Jeffs (Eds.), *Settlements, social change, and community action: Good neighbours* (pp. 69-90). London, UK: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Lasch-Quinn, E. (1993). *Black neighbors: Race and the limits of reform in the American settlement house movement, 1890-1945*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
- Linn, J. W. (1935). *Jane Addams: A Biography*. New York, NY: Appleton-Century Publishing.
- Maxwell, M. (2011). "We are happy to co-operate": The institutionalization and control of Birmingham's Baptist Good Will Center, 1909-1928. *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, 38(3), 249-265.
- Paxton, P. (1999). Is social capital declining in the United States? A multiple indicator assessment. *American Journal of Sociology*, 105(1), 88-127.
- Pohl, C. (2012) *Living into community: Cultivating practices that sustain us*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans.
- Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.
- Putnam, R. D., & Campbell, D. E. (2010). *American grace: How religion divides and unites us*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.
- Putnam, R. D., Feldstein, L. M., & Cohen, D. (2003). *Better together: Restoring the American community*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Scales, T. L. (2000). "All that fits a woman": Training Southern Baptist women for charity and mission, 1907-1926. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press.
- Scales, T. L. & Kelly, M. S. (2011). "To give Christ to the neighborhood": A corrective look at the settlement movement and early Christian social workers. *Social Work and Christianity*, 38(3), 356-376.
- Sherwood, D. A. (2002). Ethical integration of faith and social work practice: Evangelism. *Social Work & Christianity*, 29(1), 1-12.
- Smith, J. B. (2012, February 20). Baylor professor hopes to turn Colcord Avenue eyesore into neighborhood hub. *Waco Tribune Herald*. Retrieved from <https://www.wacotrib.com>

- Taylor, G. (1950). The Settlement's Distinctive Future. In L. M. Pacey (Ed.), *Readings in the development of settlement work*. New York, NY: Association Press.
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2010). *2010 American community survey, 5-year estimates, census tract 10, McLennan County*. Retrieved from [https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?t=Race%20and%20Ethnicity&table=B03002&tid=ACSDT5Y2010.B03002&q=&g=1400000US48309001000&y=2010&d=ACS%205-Year%20Estimates%20Detailed%20Tables&hidePreview=true&vintage=2010&layer=state&cid=B01001A\\_001E&lastDisplayedRow=20](https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?t=Race%20and%20Ethnicity&table=B03002&tid=ACSDT5Y2010.B03002&q=&g=1400000US48309001000&y=2010&d=ACS%205-Year%20Estimates%20Detailed%20Tables&hidePreview=true&vintage=2010&layer=state&cid=B01001A_001E&lastDisplayedRow=20)
- Vorsino, M. (2015). Re-reading Dewey through a feminist lens. *Educational Perspectives*, 47(1-2), 50-54.
- Weil, M., Reisch, M., & Ohmer, M. L. (2012). *The handbook of community practice* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Williams, J. E., & Maclean, V. M. (2015). *Settlement sociology in the progressive years: Faith, science, and reform*. Leiden: Brill.
- Woods, R. A. and Kennedy, A. J. (1911). *Handbook of settlements*. New York, NY: Charity Publication Committee.
- Wuthnow, R. (1998). *Loose connections: Joining together in America's fragmented communities*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

### Endnote

<sup>1</sup> This chapter is adapted from an article with the same title in the Fall 2020 issue of *Social Work and Christianity*, Vol 47, no. 3.

# Is There More to This Story? Christianity in Social Work History and Implications for Social Justice<sup>1</sup>

*James R. Vanderwoerd and Esther R. van der Woerd*

It has been said that “Christianity has been like the family silver, an acknowledged but rarely examined major premise of the Anglo-American social work tradition” (Bowpitt, 1998, p. 676). Virtually every history of social work and social welfare mentions something about the Christian influences and connections of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, as in Bowpitt’s metaphor of the “family silver,” most references to these Christian influences are portrayed as something from the past that has little, if any, current relevance to social work and social welfare today. What story do social workers tell about their profession’s history and who tells the story? Scholars of social welfare and social work history not only make pleas for historical content to be strengthened or maintained in social work education and social work scholarship (Fisher, 1999; Leighninger, 2012; Sloane, David, Davies, Stamper, & Woodward, 2018), but more specifically urge that these histories take into account the experiences and perspectives of groups that have often been under-represented or marginalized (Carlton-LaNey & Brice, 2007; Coles, Netting, & O’Connor, 2018; Day & Schiele, 2013; Reisch & Andrews, 2002; Reisch & Staller, 2011). Accordingly, the history of social welfare is included as a curricular component of social work education in both the USA (Competencies #1 and #5, Council on Social Work Education, 2015), and Canada (Core Learning Objective #8, Canadian Association of Social Work Education, 2014). However, while much of the historical literature, especially in social welfare history textbooks, acknowledges the influence of Christianity on social work’s origins, this literature often minimizes, or worse, distorts the role of Christians, Christian organizations, and Christian world views (Cnaan, Wineburg, & Boddie, 1999; Hodge, Baughman, & Cummings, 2006; Marty, 1980).

In this chapter, we use the concept of narrative (Smith 2003a) to explore contemporary social work’s uneasy and ambivalent relationship with its Christian origins. By placing the conventional social work narrative of professionalization within the larger narrative of modernization—and its offspring, secularization—this article shows that the “story” of the social work profession is not, in fact, a neutral recounting of historical facts, but rather, a version of events that intentionally emphasizes scientific, humanistic accomplishments at the expense of Christian influences and actors (Smith, 2003b). As others have

noted regarding other groups (Day & Schiele, 2013; Estes, 2007; Graham, 1996; Jansson, 2005), the story of social work is a contested story. Regarding religion, and more specifically Christianity, the story of social work in part represents a contest of worldviews in which the modern, professional, secularized version has won the day by minimizing, ignoring, and dismissing the part of the story informed by Christian worldviews.

We will build our argument by weaving together a number of distinct strands of scholarship that, for the most part, have remained unconnected. One consequence of this approach is that, for the sake of brevity, we will only be able to skim across the surface of these strands. A deeper exploration of each area is needed, as well as identifying additional neglected topics. We also will draw from various bodies of literature, since much of the scholarship on social work and social welfare history has been confined to a narrow range of sources from within a handful of social sciences, primarily social work, sociology, and social welfare. We contend that telling the story only within these disciplines has resulted in an account that privileges a modern, secularist understanding that neglects—or worse, distorts—important elements of the story told by others that are relevant to social work's narrative. In particular, we draw upon scholarship in the sociology of religion and in the history of religion that provides alternative accounts of the social work profession's development.

The chapter is organized in three parts: first, we use the concept of narrative to describe the dominant secularization story in social work and identify some of the emerging alternative narratives. Second, we describe examples from historical literature that challenge the interpretations and assumptions contained in the dominant secularization narratives of social work. Even though these accounts are not directly about social work, their historical evidence reveals the limits of social work's conventional narratives and gives rise to alternative interpretations of the profession's history. Third, we briefly discuss the implications of these alternative narratives in one particular area that is currently relevant to social work—social justice—and show how it has become captive to the secular narrative. We conclude with raising challenges both for Christians and non-Christians in social work.

### **Contested Narratives in Social Work and Social Welfare**

As sociologist Christian Smith (2003a) makes clear, telling stories and using them as a way of understanding who one is and how one ought to live is a fundamental characteristic of virtually every human community. According to Smith (2003a),

The stories we tell are not mere entertainment. Nor do they simply suggest for us some general sense of our heritage. Our stories fully encompass and define our lives. They situate us in reality itself, by elaborating the contours of fundamental moral order.... It is by finding ourselves placed within a particular drama that we come

to know ... how we are to act, why, and what meaning that has in the larger scheme of reality (p. 78).

As Smith rightly notes, it is not just that social scientists use the concept of narratives to understand others, but that they themselves also come to their inquiry through their own interpretive narrative which shapes how and what they observe. In other words, social scientists must be self-reflective and become aware of the narrative within which they make sense of the world. This insight draws from the now-familiar post-modernist position which criticized the modern narratives that privileged and justified the assumptions inherent in Euro-centric, humanist, rationalist, and secular viewpoints (Middleton & Walsh, 1995).

The interpretive power of narratives has been recognized by social work scholars who have argued for including other marginalized voices in social work (Graham, 1996; Moffatt, 2001; Payne, 2005). Despite this recognition of multiple narratives, a modern, secular, progressive view that minimizes religion remains the prevalent viewpoint undergirding most approaches to social work and social welfare history in Canada and the USA. As religious historian Martin Marty (1980), in a seminal article in the influential journal, *Social Service Review*, observed: "The literature of the profession genially and serenely ignores religion" (p. 465).

Subsequent analyses of social work literature in textbooks, journals, conference presentations and course syllabi bear out Marty's observation. Cnaan et al. (1999) conducted a systematic review of the literature and concluded that "religious issues and religious-based social services have been ignored" (p. 67). Similarly, Hodge, Baughman, and Cummings (2006) conducted a content analysis of over 70 of the most recommended diversity textbooks used by the top ten social work schools in the USA. They compared references to several vulnerable groups—African Americans, Latinos, persons who are gay and lesbian, and women—with two specific religious groups: evangelical Christians and Muslims. As they noted, "...the results indicate that faith groups are largely invisible in influential social work textbooks as subjects of direct interest" (p. 221). Overall, then, conventional accounts of social work history appear to be limited by an invisibility bias in which religion, especially Christianity, is minimized, ignored, or regarded as only peripherally relevant.

Based on the explanation of the secularization narrative described above, a principal reason for this bias is the underlying narrative that influences these textbook authors' interpretation of religion, specifically, Christianity. Christian Smith's (2014) analysis of sociology as a "sacred project" sheds some light on the tendency for sociology to fail to take into account adequately religious perspectives. While Smith focuses specifically on sociology, his analysis has been applied to social work (Vanderwoerd & Wolfer, 2016), and Smith's own history of the secularization of sociology (2003b) demonstrates that sociology and social work in North America arose out of the same soil of the Progressive Era.

According to this narrative, it is perfectly reasonable—indeed inevitable—that religion would give way to science, progress, and technology. But this narra-

tive is based on a distinctly modern understanding of the very concept of religion itself—a concept that has become so entrenched that it has taken on mythical proportions and is accepted without testing any of its underlying assumptions. In the field of international relations, both Thomas (2005) and Joustra (2009) point out that the modern understanding of religion harks back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century Wars of Religion. The modern, individualistic, and liberal analysis of this conflict is based on understanding religion primarily as a set of personally-held private beliefs. However, this understanding represents a distinct break from a much longer tradition in which religion was understood as a community of people living together out of their shared beliefs. The liberal modern view sees religion as private, personal, and increasingly irrelevant; this is the viewpoint embodied in the secularization thesis. From this point of view, a person who acts out his or her faith in public is seen to violate the social norms in which religion is best kept safe at home. No wonder, then, that secularization needed to write Christianity out of the social work story; it had no language or conceptual framework to understand how religion could be brought into the public world of social work without transgressing the barrier from private to public.

Overall, then, the story of the social work profession and its history has been told by those who either intentionally or unconsciously have accepted the dominant secularization story of the social sciences. From within that narrative framework, social work is widely portrayed as originating from religiously-motivated amateurs who moralized the destitute and the poor in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, according to this narrative, social workers in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, armed with new social scientific methods, developed advanced methods that eliminated religion, increased effectiveness, and therefore opened the way to advancement into full-fledged professionalization. The dominant narrative equates religion with being moralistic, which is often seen as negative (Day & Schiele, 2013; Guest, 2003; Stern & Axxin, 2018; Trattner, 1999).

Nevertheless, as part of the broader trend in recognizing multiple narratives in social work and social welfare, new attention is being given to spirituality and religion, in keeping with a widespread increase in the importance of spirituality in the health and human services and social sciences (Canda & Furman, 2010; Koenig, 2004; Thomas, 2005). The recognition of alternative narratives provides the space for reconsidering social work's history and development. The following section takes advantage of that space by presenting examples of how Christianity has had a much greater influence on social work's story than the predominant secular narrative would suggest.

### **Social Welfare History as if Christianity Mattered**

Historical scholarship, both in other disciplines, and by Christians in social work, reveals that Christianity played a more important role in societal responses to social needs than what is typically described in conventional social work histories. When we look outside the social work literature, or explore historical scholarship by Christians in social work, we find compelling examples

of Christians being at the forefront of activities to offer help and assistance to those suffering from a wide variety of social problems. In this second section we highlight examples that demonstrate that Christianity had a more substantial role in addressing social problems than is generally acknowledged in mainstream social work literature.

The dual roots of the social work profession in Charity Organization Societies (COS) and settlement houses have generated a substantial literature—and longstanding debates—within social work (Haynes & Mickelson, 2010; Reamer, 1993; Specht & Courtney, 1994). This narrative often uses these two contexts as key sites where the profession navigated its shift from a religious to a secular basis. One key aspect of this narrative equates religion with moralism, which is typically regarded by social work authors as anathema to professional social work. Specht and Courtney (1994), for example, characterize morality as “an embarrassment,” claiming that “the idea of a professional’s being committed to such values as morality, virtue, community good, and altruism is considered by many to be maudlin and intellectually unsophisticated” (p. 64). Accounts of social work history often associate this religious moralistic approach with charity organization societies, while posing settlement houses as focused less on moralism and more on social reform (Reid & Popple, 1992). But, this characterization of settlement houses as more secular than the allegedly more religious charity organization societies is oversimplified. Even though scholars acknowledge that, in general, Canadian settlement houses were more likely to be Christian than their American counterparts (Lundy, 2011), there was still a significant Christian presence in settlement houses in the USA. For example, Thomas Evans, who served as Head Resident of University Settlement House in Philadelphia (Hansan, n.d.), proclaimed:

Our position is that morality is the basis of settlement work and all social work, that religion is the basis of morality, that Christianity is the final religion, and that constant conscious fellowship with the living Lord Jesus is the sum total of Christianity and life.... Therefore, the only complete settlement is the Christian settlement (Evans, 1907, p. 485).

Evans did not shy away from morality as the basis of settlement house work, but, contrary to some observers, this does not mean that Evans promoted an approach focused only on “saving souls”:

It is, therefore, most desirable that all Christian settlement workers should have, in addition to the fundamental equipment of an earnest Christian spirit, a thorough training in the most up-to-date methods of social work. Mere enthusiasm to “save souls” is not sufficient (p. 489).

The description of the University Settlement House that is included in the 1911 *Handbook of Settlements* (Woods & Kennedy, 1911) elaborates on how Christian theology was viewed as central to the work of settlement houses:

The Settlement idea and method is foremost and fundamentally religious and Christian. It really originated in the residence of God Himself among His people on earth in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.... A complete settlement must touch the people physically, morally, socially, mentally and religiously. It stands for the spiritual solution of the problems of society (p. 280).

These descriptions of the nature of Christian settlement house work belie the stereotypical distinctions often made in secular social work accounts in which COS work is portrayed as religious and moralistic, compared to the secular social reform focus of settlement houses.

As another example, Scales & Kelly (2011) re-examined the legacy of the settlement house movement on the professionalization of social work. Their investigation of Christian settlement houses in Chicago (Catholic) and Louisville (Baptist) led them to conclude:

...these diverse approaches to Christian and secular social work practice show how hard it was in those early years to draw strong distinctions between Christian and secular social workers in what they did, why they did it, and how they explained their work to others” (p. 357).

Scales' and Kelly's investigation exposes a central assumption of social work histories in which religion (i.e., Christianity) is characterized as supporting a moralistic and individualistic understanding of social problems, while secular approaches focused more on institutional and structural factors. These assumptions rest on accepting that the settlement house movement was primarily secular, which Scales and Kelly demonstrate is not borne out by the historical record.

Many accounts of the history of social work and social welfare minimize the influence of Christianity, but when it is mentioned, Christians are often portrayed as being socially conservative and opposing the advance of social justice (Day & Schiele, 2013; Guest, 2003; Stern & Axxin, 2018; Trattner, 1999). Accounts by historians in other disciplines, however, do not bear out this interpretation. For example, recent research by labor historians on the beliefs and behaviors of working-class Christians demonstrates that in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, these blue collar workers were influential in mobilizing churches to side with workers against exploitive corporate employers (Cantwell, Carter, & Drake, 2016). The social gospel movement of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the mobilization of many Christians who challenged the unregulated profits of industrialists at the expense of working-class people. Historian Heath Carter (2015) shows how working-class churches rallied to support the union movement in Chicago in pursuit of improved working conditions, explicitly drawing on biblical teaching to advocate for worker's rights. Although Carter's analysis focuses only on Chicago, he observes that similar patterns of church support for labor were evident in other major industrialized hubs. More importantly, widespread mobilization of working-class Christians and their churches had a significant impact

on important questions of social policy in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, particularly in harnessing the power of democratic movements to curb the excesses of unbridled capitalism (Carter, 2015, pp. 6-8). Furthermore, Carter's investigation of social Christianity in Chicago's labor movement in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century proved influential for much of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially during the years of the Great Depression and the New Deal presidency of Franklin Roosevelt.

Conventional social welfare history also portrays Christian influence on social welfare as being limited to its European origins from earlier centuries, but having little current relevance (see for example, Day & Schiele, 2013; Guest, 2003; Stern & Axxin, 2018; Trattner, 1999). Here, too, however, historical research from other disciplines demonstrates that Christians continued to have an influence on social welfare well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For example, church historian Ellen Blue (2011) documents the extensive influence of the Methodist women in St. Mark's settlement house in New Orleans, and notes that her motivation was driven in part because of "the dismissal of religious settlements by social historians and non-sectarian settlement workers of the time" (p. 2). Women of St. Mark's Methodist Church founded the settlement house in 1909, and as Blue documents, St. Mark's has had an enduring and influential presence in the French Quarter of New Orleans through the Depression and the New Deal, the Civil Rights era, all the way to the 21<sup>st</sup> century as a refuge for survivors of Hurricane Katrina.

Michel (1999) describes the role of explicitly religious women's organizations in the creation of America's child care policies. She notes that the earliest institutional child care was formed by a group of female Quaker philanthropists. They designed and ran a nursery that was created as part of the Philadelphia House of Industry, founded to counter poverty and support employment. Seeking to keep families together, the nursery provided relief and help for single working mothers who, with no other alternative, were forced to leave their children in the care of over-crowded orphanages. The Female Society for the Relief and Employment of the Poor was also founded by Quaker charity efforts, taking a substantial step forward to protect women specifically in acknowledging the gendered nature of poverty in 1795. Also noted during the time period between the 1880s and the 1890s, The Women's Christian Temperance Union, represented by president Frances Willard, established "a chain of free urban kindergartens that also offered a day nursery or crèche services to the children who needed full-day care and served as sites for teacher training" (Michel, p.34). Each of these examples acted as models that were influential in shaping responses by social work and other women-led professions in raising awareness of the rights of children and working mothers throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Scales' (2011) description of the Buckner Orphan's Home in Dallas, Texas provides another example of the pioneering efforts of Christians to address the social needs of the day, and how these efforts influenced the social work profession both historically and currently. The multi-service agency of today, Buckner International, was founded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Reverend R. C. Buckner, a Baptist minister with a heart for children. Reverend Buckner, motivated by his

Christian concern for the “least of these,” established an orphanage and a school to care for unwanted children. The program was thoroughly religious in all aspects, but eventually, as Scales shows, fell out of favour with the secularizing trends in the social work profession of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, which turned away from religious institutions and shifted care for children to professionally educated social workers. That part of the story is better known in conventional social work textbooks, but Scales also demonstrates that Buckner did not just disappear but continued to evolve as a key organization serving children and families throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, all the while staying true to its Christian roots and mission. Thus, Scales’ contribution is to show that explicitly Christian organizations continued to play prominent roles, even in a social welfare system that had allegedly left its religious roots in the past.

A final area where Christianity has played a central role in shaping both the historical and contemporary responses to social welfare problems can be found in African American communities (Estes, 2007). For example, Brice (2011) describes the work of African American women who, in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, provided services for a population which was multiply disadvantaged: African American girls who were in trouble with the law, and as often as not, were regarded by the dominant White culture as inherently sexually immoral. Brice chronicles how African American women, motivated by their Christian faith, reached out to young girls who were seen as “untouchable.” Christian women served leadership roles in organizations such as the National Association of Colored Women and its North Carolina state chapter, the North Carolina Federation of Colored Women. Spurred by their Christian convictions, they established homes and schools to give these young girls a second chance. As important as these efforts were for the delinquent African American girls, Brice also demonstrates that the greater impact was the way in which the methods and practices developed by these Christian African American organizations influenced the development of social work and related professions.

Regarding the Civil Rights movement, African American churches have been the “springboards for social, political, and economic gain for both the African American community and society at large” with a legacy that spans over 200 years of history (Morris & Robinson, 1996, p. 61). Social change was nurtured in the growth and development of the independent African American Church, formed as a revolt against exclusion from society. In Christianity, the hope and unity birthed from the ideal of equality for all drove the African American community to seek political and societal change. Their religious convictions not only allowed them to rise above and realize the equality they deserved, but also equipped them with the community and empowerment needed to revolutionize the treatment of African Americans in American society. Morris and Robinson (1996) state that “the African American church has served as an oasis in a country that has overtly and legally attempted to dehumanize African Americans” (p. 62).

Overall, these histories reveal that faith, specifically Christianity, has had a formative and enduring influence on social work and related professions. On this point, Ebaugh’s (2006) conclusion is apt:

The tenets of all faith traditions have helped shape the social values and the institutions that are the foundation of modern social service provision in the secular and religious arenas. Provision of services to the poor, orphans and widows, sick and disabled, prisoners and captives, travelers, and neighbors in times of calamities were both emphasized and fostered in the sacred texts, and this spirit of faith-based service remains strong among modern-day followers of these faith traditions (p.69).

### **Contemporary Social Work: Whose Social Justice?**

How do these differing narratives matter today? What difference does it make that Christianity's role in the history and development of social welfare has been minimized or regarded as mostly negative? We argue that it does matter, and we affirm the contribution of others (Cnaan et al., 1999; Canda & Furman, 2010; Coates, Graham, Swartzentruber & Ouellete, 2007; Hodge, 2009) who have already called for recovering the importance of religion to social work. Rather than repeating their calls for greater "cultural competence" with regard to specific areas of practice, we conclude by briefly showing how the dominance of a secular perspective has shaped one central emphasis in social work and social welfare: social justice.

Social justice is included as a foundational value and principle of social work, both in codes of ethics and accreditation standards (Hodge, 2010; Reamer, 2018). The importance of social justice is reflected in the fact that there are at least four books in the past 15 years emphasizing the importance of social justice to social work (Austin, 2014; Ferguson, 2008; Finn, 2016; Lundy, 2011). In addition to these books, social justice is highlighted as a central value in other recent works calling for social work to emphasize more structural approaches, such as anti-oppressive practice (Dumbrill & Yee, 2019; Morgaine & Capous-Desyllas, 2015; Mullaly & West, 2018) critical social work (Fook, 2016; Pease, Goldingay, Hosken, & Nipperess (2016), and structural social work (Mullaly & Dupré, 2019). Most of these works make little or no mention of Christianity or any other religion and how such faith-based perspectives might be relevant to social justice and social work.

We want to acknowledge that the recent resurgence in religion and spirituality appears to have spurred some authors to provide more balanced accounts of the Christian contribution to social justice (Sheridan, 2013). For example, Dumbrill and Yee (2019) admit that Christianity has been unfairly accused by several anti-oppressive theorists of being primarily a *source* of oppression; in response, they point out that Christianity has also been a factor in *reducing* oppression. Similarly, Austin (2014) includes a chapter on social justice and religion in which Jewish, Islamic, and Catholic contributions to social justice are affirmed (Accomazzo, Moore, & Sirojudin, 2014).

Nevertheless, these examples are still exceptions. More commonly, contemporary discussions of social justice downplay or ignore the religious founda-

tions of social justice (Hodge, 2012; Hosack, 2014). When religious actors are included in accounts about social justice, their religious beliefs are minimized or ignored. A typical example is when social workers invoke Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as a civil rights advocate for social justice, but fail to acknowledge the Christian faith that motivated him. For example, even though Austin (2014) includes in his edited book *Social Justice and Social Work* a chapter on “Social Justice and Religion” (Accomazzo, Moore, & Sirojudin, 2014), and his introduction to the book concludes with seven quotations from King, neither of them make any mention of how King’s views on social justice were inseparable from his Christianity. As Marsh (2009) observes, the failure of activists and academics to engage the Christian roots of the Civil Rights movement led to a stunted understanding of the driving vision of leaders like King, and was a significant factor in the movement’s fragmentation and decline in the 1970s and beyond.

Greater awareness of the religious and spiritual roots of social justice can illuminate some of the limitations of secular conceptions of social justice. One such limitation is to conceive of social justice in a narrow or restrictive way that excludes other viewpoints (Hodge, 2010, 2012; Hosack, 2014). Social psychologist Jonathan Haidt’s (2012) research on moral reasoning sheds light on how western, secular notions of social justice tend to focus mostly on principles of care/harm and fairness, but much less on loyalty, authority, or sanctity. Haidt’s research builds on the work of Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan (2010), who showed that people from cultures that they described with the acronym WEIRD—that is, western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic—not only differ in cognitive reasoning and visual perceptions, but also on moral reasoning. As Haidt (2012) explains,

If you live in a non-WEIRD society in which people are more likely to see relationships, contexts, groups, and institutions, then you won’t be so focused on protecting individuals. You’ll have a more *sociocentric* morality, which means that you place the needs of groups and institutions first, often ahead of the needs of individuals (p. 114, emphasis original).

Social work authors who discuss social justice often appear to be doing so from a WEIRD vantage point, and therefore limit their understanding of social justice in terms of western, secular philosophical foundations (Reamer, 2018), or to argue for a “liberal-egalitarian” approach as the most suitable for social work, as opposed to “conservative” or “utilitarian” (Gasker & Fischer, 2014). By contrast, Hodge (2010) argues that a posture of epistemic pluralism—recognizing different ways of knowing and understanding—would allow social work to make greater space for conceptions of social justice that differ from notions that are typical of secular perspectives. As an example, McCracken (2014) identifies five different perspectives that Christians tend to take on social justice: libertarian, political liberalism, liberation theology, feminist, and virtue ethics. A review of literature on social work and social justice (already identified above: Austin, 2014; Ferguson, 2008; Finn, 2016; Lundy, 2011; Reamer, 2018), and publications that posit

social justice as a central tenet of anti-oppressive social work (Dumbrill & Yee, 2019; Morgaine & Capous-Desyllas, 2015; Mullaly & West, 2018), critical social work (Fook, 2016; Pease, Goldingay, Hosken, & Nipperess, 2016), and structural social work (Mullaly & Dupré, 2019) reveal that social justice is overwhelmingly understood in a narrower sense that focuses on liberation, egalitarianism, and individual autonomy, and downplays, or outright rejects notions of social justice that limit the role of the state (i.e., libertarian) or emphasize individual and civic responsibility (i.e., virtue ethics) (Hosack, 2014).

Yet there is ample literature, often outside social work, that showcases broad, influential, and multi-faceted examples of Christians (as well as other religious groups) actively involved in the pursuit of social justice. It would appear that many social workers either are not aware of these religiously-motivated social justice efforts, or they reject or ignore them because such efforts do not fit the profession's typically narrow definition of social justice. From within the social work literature, the late Diana Garland and her colleague Gaynor Yancey (Garland & Yancey, 2014), have been at the forefront of documenting the extent of congregational and church-based social work practice, which includes not just individual practice, but also many examples of Christians engaged in a wide variety of social justice activities. Similarly, Hutchinson (2012) observes that, "The social movement literature has paid little attention to the role of religion in progressive social movements.... And yet, it is clear that religious organizations have been major players in a number of such movements" (p. 123).

Another example from within social work literature is the exploration of social justice as a virtue (Adams, 2013; Novak & Adams, 2015; Donaldson & Mayer, 2015). Donaldson and Mayer (2015), in their review of the roots of social justice in both classical and Christian elements of western civilization, show that social justice has long had both a personal and social character. However, they note that the social work profession has almost exclusively emphasized the social nature of social justice (particularly realized in economic and political activities) largely confined to the macro end of the social work practice continuum (see also Hosack, 2014). However, "there is virtually nothing in the social work literature that discusses *justice* as a personal virtue" (p. 110). The exception is Christianity. Donaldson and Mayer (2015) argue that Catholic notions of social justice have always emphasized the personal and the social aspects of social justice. Similarly, Adams (2013) suggests that social work has been resistant to Catholic notions of social justice as a personal virtue because of the concern that clients will be blamed for their problems and that structural solutions will be ignored. Adams contends, however, that Catholic social teaching, properly understood, does not reject the role of the state in favor of individual responsibility, but rather takes a 'both/and' approach focusing on the common good. The emphasis on the common good is a key feature of a Catholic understanding of social justice that bridges the personal-social divide. Novak and Adams (2015), in their provocatively titled book *Social Justice Isn't What You Think It Is*, survey the rich history of Catholic social thought to challenge definitions of social justice that focus on the expansion of the state, and shift the focus back

to social justice as a virtue. At its simplest, they argue that social justice is the virtue of working *with* others, *for* others. As they elaborate,

Social justice can be defined as the virtue that inclines individuals to work with others for the common good. It is justice in directing the virtues to giving others their due, and social ... in a double sense. First, it aims at the common good, rather than at what is due another individual.... Second, it involves joining with others to achieve a common purpose that individuals cannot achieve on their own (Novak & Adams, 2015, p. 225).

Building on that understanding, Novak & Adams go on to suggest ways in which social work can incorporate the formation of social justice as a virtue in its practice and education.

One consequence of social work's narrow conception of social justice is a failure to recognize empirical evidence and its own admonitions for evidence-based practice in favor of positions that align with a secular view of social justice. For example, Novak and Adams (2015) show that the dominant view of marriage and family taught in social work textbooks emphasizes the restrictive aspects of traditional perspectives on marriage and family and thus advocates that social workers need to learn how to overcome the injustices allegedly endemic to traditional marriage and family. Not only are these texts "riddled with errors" about marriage and family (Novak & Adams, 2015, p.222; see also Glenn, 1997), this view stands in stark contrast to unequivocal empirical evidence that marriage provides extensive benefits for individuals and societies. For example,

Reams of social science and medical research convincingly show that children who are raised by their married, biological parents enjoy better physical, cognitive, and emotional outcomes, on average, than children who are raised in other circumstances.... [R]esearchers have been able to make a strong case that marriage has causal impacts on outcomes such as children's schooling, their social and emotional adjustment, and their employment, marriage, and mental health as adults (Ribar, 2015, p. 12).

Similarly, researchers have shown that marriage is an important factor in reducing inequality and poverty, but is declining more among lower income populations compared to middle and upper income groups (Wilcox & Wang, 2017; Wilcox, 2010). It is difficult to imagine how a profession committed to evidence-based practice dedicated to protecting vulnerable populations (Dulmus & Sowers, 2012) consistently posits marriage as a problem to be overcome as a matter of social justice when the overwhelming evidence is that marriage is an important factor in protecting vulnerable groups from a wide assortment of social problems.

Literature outside social work is also replete with examples of Christians engaged in a wide variety of social justice activities. Space limitations permit us only to note that recent works highlight evangelicals involved in movements addressing social problems such as HIV/AIDS, immigration and refugees, global and domestic

poverty, human trafficking, violence, racial injustice, and more (Gasaway, 2014; Gordon & Perkins, 2013; Haugen & Boutros, 2013; Offut, Bronkeman, Murphy, K.V., Davis, & Okesson, 2016; Raboteau, 2016; Rah & Vanderpol, 2016).

It would seem that a secular bias prevents many social work authors from being able to see—let alone account for—the substantial contribution made by Christians to social justice. Even when such accounts are clearly available, they appear not to be considered when social workers discuss social justice and its implications for social work practice. Hodge (2010) notes that a failure to take into account a diverse range of perspectives on social justice risks violating social workers' ethical obligations to recognize and respect differing systems of belief including religious beliefs, as well as violating the human rights of others who hold perspectives that differ from the majority. As he concludes, “dominant groups often construct understandings of social justice that advance their own interests, sometimes in ways that contravene the basic human rights of groups without sufficient power” (p. 209).

## **Conclusion**

We have argued that the narrative framework of secularization has so captivated the social work profession that it has failed to take fully into account the Christian influences in its own history (Bowpitt, 2000). Secularization assumes that religion is irrelevant, biased, private, and unscientific; these assumptions relegate religion to a minor part in the story. What we have shown, however, is that Christianity is central to social work's history and development as a profession. The social work profession bears the marks of the Christian imprint clearly, yet the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century tellers of social work history barely mention it.

Our argument—that Christianity's role in social work's history has been minimized—also poses challenges for Christians in social work. Wolterstorff (2006) urged Christians in social work to recapture the Christian story and get in the habit of telling and re-telling it. But how do Christians in social work engage in respectful dialogue with their social work colleagues who live by different stories? Here we appeal to what Christian Smith calls a “civil pluralism.” As he puts it,

confronting the inescapably enstoried nature of our lives does not have to lead to violent and oppressive tribal power struggles of utter relativism. While fully living within our truly different narratives, we might still draw on our narratives to learn to live together in some measure of peace (2003a, p. 93).

As Christians, we need to speak with conviction from within our own narrative in such a way that others can hear us (Mouw, 2010). We also, however, have to be respectful enough of others to listen to their story, and to engage in the tough work of nurturing relationships that foster respectful dialogue in which we seek common ground among our different stories. Anything less than that is a failure to love our neighbours as ourselves.

## References

- Accomazzo, S., Moore, M., & Sirojudin, S. (2014). Social justice and religion. In M. Austin (Ed.), *Social justice and social work: Rediscovering a core value of the profession* (pp. 65-82). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Adams, P. (2013). Practicing social justice: A virtue-based approach. *Social Work & Christianity*, 40, 287-307.
- Austin, M. (Ed.) (2014). *Social justice and social work: Rediscovering a core value of the profession*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Blue, E. (2011). *St. Mark's and the social gospel: Methodist women and civil rights in New Orleans, 1895-1965*. Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press.
- Bowpitt, G. (1998). Evangelical Christianity, secular humanism, and the genesis of British social work. *British Journal of Social Work*, 28(5), 675-693.
- Bowpitt, G. (2000). Working with creative creatures: Towards a Christian paradigm for social work theory, with some practical implications. *British Journal of Social Work*, 30(3), 349-364.
- Brice, T. (2011). Faith as a protective factor against social misconceptions of black girls: A historical perspective. *Social Work & Christianity*, 38, 315-331.
- Canadian Association of Social Work Education (2014). *Standards for accreditation*. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Association of Social Work Education.
- Canda, E. R. & Furman, L. D. (2010). *Spiritual diversity in social work practice: The heart of helping* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Cantwell, C.D., Carter, H., & Drake, J.G. (Eds.). (2016). *Between the pew and the picket line: Christianity and the American working class*. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Carlton-LaNey, I. & Brice, T. (2007). Introduction to the special issue, *Arete*, 31(1-2), pp. 1-4.
- Carter, H.W. (2015). *Union made: Working people and the rise of social christianity in Chicago*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Cnaan, R., Wineburg, R. & Boddie, S. (1999). *The newer deal: Social work and religion in partnership*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Coates, J., Graham, J. R., Swartzentruber, B. & Oulette, B. (Eds.). (2007). *Spirituality and social work: Selected Canadian readings*, Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholar's Press.
- Coles, D.C., Netting, F.E., O'Connor, M. K. (2018). Using prosopography to raise the voices of those erased in social work history. *Affilia: Journal of Women & Social Work*, 33, 85-97.
- Council on Social Work Education. (2015). *Educational policy and accreditation standards*. Washington, DC: Council on Social Work Education.
- Day, P. J. & Schiele, J. (2013). *A new history of social welfare* (7<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York, NY: Pearson.
- Donaldson, L.P., & Mayer, L.M. (2015). Justice as a core virtue for social work practice. In T. Wolfer & C. Brandsen (Eds.). *Virtues and character in social work practice*, (pp. 99-124). Botsford, CT: North American Association of Christians in Social Work.
- Dulmus, C.N. & Sowers, K.M. (Eds.). (2012). *The profession of social work: Guided by history, led by evidence*. Somerset, NJ: Wiley.
- Dumbrill, G. C., & Yee, J., Y. (2018). *Anti-oppressive social work: Ways of knowing, talking, and doing*. Toronto, ON: Oxford University Press.
- Ebaugh, H.R. (2006). *Handbook of religion and social institutions*. New York, NY: Springer.
- Estes, D. (2007). Black churches in Canada: Vehicles for fostering community development in African-Canadian communities—A historical analysis. In J. Coates, J. R. Graham, B. Swartzentruber & B. Oulette (Eds.). *Spirituality and social work: Selected Canadian readings* (pp. 299-322). Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholar's Press.

- Evans, T.S. (1907). The Christian settlement. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, 30, 483-489.
- Ferguson, I. (2008). *Reclaiming social work: Challenging neo-liberalism and promoting social justice*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Finn, J. L. (2016). *Just practice: A social justice approach to social work*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Fisher, R. (1999). "Speaking for the contribution of history": Context and the origins of the Social Welfare History Group, *Social Service Review*, 73, 2, 191-217.
- Fook, J. (2016). *Social work: A critical approach to practice*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Garland, D.R. & Yancey, G.I. (2014). *Congregational social work: Christian perspectives*. Botsford, CT: NACSW.
- Gasaway, B. (2014). *Progressive evangelicals and the pursuit of social justice*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press
- Gasker, J.A., & Fischer, A.C. (2014). Toward a context-specific definition of social justice for social work: In search of overlapping consensus. *Journal of Social Work Values & Ethics*, 11, 42-53.
- Glenn, N. (1997). *Closed hearts, closed minds: The textbook story of marriage*. New York, NY: Institute for American Values.
- Gordon, W., & Perkins, J.M. (2013). *Making neighborhoods whole: A handbook for Christian community development*. Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Graham, J. (1996). An analysis of Canadian social welfare historical writing, *Social Service Review*, 70(1), 140-158.
- Guest, D. (2003). *The emergence of social security in Canada*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Vancouver, BC: UBC Press.
- Haidt, J. (2012). *The righteous mind: Why good people are divided by politics and religion*. New York: Vintage.
- Hansan, J. (n.d.). University Settlement House, Philadelphia, PA — 1898-1963, Virginia Commonwealth University VCU Libraries Social Welfare History Project. Retrieved from <https://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/settlement-houses/university-settlement-house-of-philadelphia/>.
- Haugen, G., & Boutros, V. (2013). *The locust effect: Why the end of poverty requires the end of violence*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Haynes, K.S., & Mickelson, J.S. (2010). *Affecting change: Social workers in the political arena*, 7<sup>th</sup> Ed. New York, NY: Pearson.
- Henrich, J., Heine, S.J., & Norenzayan, A. (2010). The weirdest people in the world? *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 33, 61-83.
- Hodge, D. R. (2009). Secular privilege: Deconstructing the invisible rose-tinted sunglasses. *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work*, 28(1-2), 8-34.
- Hodge, D. R. (2010). Social justice as a unifying theme in social work education: Principles to realize the promise of a new pedagogical model. *Journal of Comparative Social Welfare*, 26, 201-213.
- Hodge, D.R. (2012). The conceptual and empirical relationship between spirituality and social justice: Exemplars from diverse faith traditions, *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work*, 31, 32-50.
- Hodge, D. R., Baughman, L. M., & Cummings, J. A. (2006). Moving toward spiritual competency: Deconstructing religious stereotypes and spiritual prejudices in social work literature. *Journal of Social Service Research*, 32(4), 211-231.
- Hosack, L. (Winter 2014). Who owns "social justice?" *Comment*, pp. 20-27. Retrieved from <https://www.cardus.ca/comment/article/who-owns-social-justice/>.

- Hutchinson, E.D. (2012). Spirituality, religion, and progressive social movements: Resources and motivation for social change. *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work*, 31, 1-2, 105-127.
- Jansson, B. (2005). *The reluctant welfare state: American social welfare policies*. (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole.
- Joustra, R. (2009). Globalization and religious fundamentalism. In M. Goheen & E. G. Glanville (Eds.). *The gospel and globalization: Exploring the religious roots of a globalized world* (pp. 247-268). Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing.
- Koenig, H. G. (2004). Religion, spirituality, and medicine: Research findings and implications for clinical practice. *Southern Medical Journal*, 97(12), 1194-1200.
- Leighninger, L. (2012). The history of social work and social welfare. In C.N. Dulmus & K.M. Sowers (Eds.). *The Profession of Social Work: Guided by History, Led by Evidence*, (pp. 1-34). Somerset, NJ: Wiley.
- Lundy, C. (2011). *Social work, social justice & human rights: A structural approach to practice*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.
- Marsh, C. (2009). The unfinished business of the civil rights movement. In C. Marsh & J. Perkins (Eds.). *Welcoming justice: God's movement toward beloved community* (pp. 15-34). Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Books.
- Marty, M. (1980). Social service: Godly and godless. *Social Service Review*, 54(4), 463 - 481.
- McCracken, V. (Ed). (2014). *Christian faith and social justice: Five views*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Michel, S. (1999). *Children's interests/mothers' rights: The shaping of America's child care policy*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Middleton, R., & Walsh, B. (1995). *Truth is stranger than it used to be: Biblical faith in a postmodern age*. Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Moffatt, K. (2001). *A poetics of social work: Personal agency and social transformation in Canada, 1920-1939*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.
- Morgaine, K., & Capous-Desyllas, M. (2015). *Anti-oppressive social work practice: Putting theory into action*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Morris, J., & Robinson, D. (1996). Community and Christianity in the black church. *Counseling and Values*, 41(1), 59-69.
- Mouw, R. (2010). *Uncommon decency: Christian civility in an uncivil world*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Books.
- Mullaly, B., & Dupré, M. (2019). *The new structural social work: Ideology, theory, and practice*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed. Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press.
- Mullaly, B., & West, J. (2018). *Challenging oppression and confronting privilege: A critical approach to Anti-oppressive and Anti-privilege theory and practice*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press.
- Novak, M., & Adams, P. (2015). *Social justice isn't what you think it is*. New York, NY: Encounter Books.
- Offut, S., Bronkeman, F.D., Vaillancourt Murphy, K., Davis, R., & Okesson, G. (2016). *Advocating for justice: An evangelical vision for transforming systems and structures*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.
- Payne, M. (2005). *The origins of social work: Continuity and change*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Pease, B., Goldingay, S., Hosken, N., & Nipperess, S. (Eds). (2016). *Doing critical social work: Transformative practices for social justice*. Crows Nest, NSW, Australia: Allen & Unwin.
- Raboteau, A. J. (2016). *American prophets: Seven religious radicals and their struggle for social and political justice*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

- Rah, S-C., & Vanderpol, G. (2016). *Return to justice: Six movements that reignited our contemporary evangelical conscience*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press.
- Reamer, F. (1993). *The philosophical foundations of social work*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Reamer, F. (2018). Pursuing Social Work's Mission: The Philosophical Foundations of Social Justice. *Journal of Social Work Values & Ethics*, 15, 1, 34-42.
- Reid, P.N., & Popple, P.R. (Eds). (1992). *The moral purposes of social work: The character and intentions of a profession*. Chicago, IL: Nelson-Hall.
- Reisch, M., & Andrews, J. (2002). *The road not taken: A history of radical social work in the United States*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Reisch, M., & Staller, K. M. (2011). Teaching social welfare history and social welfare policy from a conflict perspective, *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, 31, 2, 131-144.
- Ribar, D. (2015). Why marriage matters for child wellbeing, *The Future of Children*, 25 (2), 11-28.
- Scales, T.L. (2011). "Accepting a trust so responsible": Christians caring for children at Buckner Orphan's Home, Dallas, Texas, 1879-1909. *Social Work & Christianity*, 38,332-355.
- Scales, T.L., & Kelly, M. (2011). "To Give Christ to the Neighborhood": A corrective look at the settlement movement and early Christian social workers. *Social Work & Christianity*, 38, 356-376.
- Sheridan, M. (Ed). (2013). *Connecting spirituality and social justice: Conceptualizations and applications in macro social work practice*. New York, NY: Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group.
- Sloane, H.M., David, K., Davies, J., Stamper, D., & Woodward, S. (2018). Cultural history analysis and professional humility: Historical context and social work practice *Social Work Education*. 37, 1015-1027.
- Smith, C. (2003a). *Moral, believing animals: Human personhood and culture*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Smith, C. (2003b). *The secular revolution: Power, interests and conflict in the secularization of American public life*. Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.
- Smith, C. (2014). *The sacred project of American sociology*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Specht, H. & Courtney, M. (1994). *Unfaithful angels: How social work abandoned its mission*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Stern, M., & Axxin, J. (2018). *Social welfare: A history of the American response to need, 9th ed*. New York, NY: Pearson.
- Thomas, S. M. (2005). *The global resurgence of religion and the transformation of international relations: The struggle for the soul of the twenty-first century*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Trattner, W.I. (1999). *From poor law to welfare state: A history of social welfare in America*. (6th ed.). New York, NY: The Free Press.
- Vanderwoerd, J.R. (2011a). Reconsidering secularization and recovering Christianity in social work history. *Social Work & Christianity*, 38, 244-266.
- Vanderwoerd, J.R. (2011b). Who tells social work's story? *Social Work & Christianity*, 38, 237-243.
- Vanderwoerd, J.R. & Wolfer, T. (November 2016). *The Sacred Project of American Sociology: Comparison with social work and implications*. Presented at the North American Association of Christians in Social Work Annual Convention, Cincinnati, OH.
- Wilcox, W.B. (2010). *When marriage disappears: The retreat from marriage in middle America*. Charlottesville, VA: National Marriage Project and Institute for American Values. Retrieved from <http://www.stateofourunions.org/2010/SOOU2010.php>.

- Wilcox, W.B., & Wang, W. (2017). *The marriage divide: How and why working class families are more fragile today*. Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute. Retrieved from <http://www.aei.org/publication/the-marriage-divide-how-and-why-working-class-families-are-more-fragile-today/>.
- Wolterstorff, N. (2006). Justice, not charity: Social work through the eyes of faith, *Social Work & Christianity*, 33(2), 123-140.
- Woods, R.A., & Kennedy, A.J. (1911). *Handbook of settlements*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation / Charities Publication Committee. Retrieved from <https://archive.org/details/handbooksettle00woodgoog/page/n9>.

### Endnote

<sup>1</sup>This chapter is based on and contains excerpts from Vanderwoerd, J.R. (2011a). Reconsidering secularization and recovering Christianity in social work history. *Social Work & Christianity*, 38, 244-266, and Vanderwoerd, J.R. (2011b). Who tells social work's story? *Social Work & Christianity*, 38, 237-243.

## SECTION 2

# Christians Called to Social Work: Scriptural Basis, Worldviews and Ethics

---



# The Relationship Between Beliefs and Values in Social Work Practice: Worldviews Make a Difference

---

*David A. Sherwood*

In some circles (including some Christian ones) it is fashionable to say that what we believe is not all that important. What we do is what really counts. I strongly disagree. The relationship between what we think and what we do is complex and it is certainly not a simple straight line, but it is profound. Social work values, practice theories, assessments, intervention decisions, and action strategies are all shaped by our worldview assumptions and our beliefs.

I believe that a Christian worldview will provide an interpretive framework which will solidly support and inform commonly held social work values such as the inherent value of every person regardless of personal characteristics, self-determination and personally responsible freedom of choice, and responsibility for the common good, including help for the poor and oppressed. And a Christian worldview will challenge other values and theories, such as might makes right, exploitation of the weak by the strong, and extreme moral relativism. At the same time, other worldviews, including materialism, empiricism, and postmodern subjectivism can lead to quite contrasting conclusions regarding social work values.

## **Worldviews Help Us Interpret Reality**

### **What is a “Worldview?”**

Worldviews give faith-based answers to a set of ultimate and grounding questions. Everyone operates on the basis of some worldview or faith-based understanding of the universe and persons—examined or unexamined, implicit or explicit, simplistic or sophisticated. One way or another, we develop functional assumptions that help us to sort through and make some sort of sense out of our experience. And every person’s worldview will always have a faith-based component (even belief in an exclusively material universe takes faith). This does not mean worldviews are necessarily irrational, unconcerned with “facts,” or impervious to critique and change (though unfortunately they might be).

It matters greatly how conscious, reflective, considered, or informed our worldviews are. The most objectivity we can achieve is to be critically aware of

our worldview and how it affects our interpretations of “the facts.” It is far better to be aware, intentional, and informed regarding our worldview than to naively think we are (or anyone else is) completely objective or neutral, or to be self-righteously led by our biases which we may think are simply self-evident truth.

These worldviews affect our approach to social work practice, how we understand and help people. What is the nature of persons—biochemical machines, evolutionary products, immortal souls, all of the above? What constitutes valid knowledge—scientific empiricism only, “intuitive” discernment, spiritual guidance (if so, what kind)? What kinds of social work theories and practice methods are legitimate? What are appropriate values and goals—what is healthy, functional, optimal, the good?

### **Worldviews and the Hermeneutical Spiral: A Beginning Place**

I like to use the concept of the “*hermeneutical spiral*” (the term is not original with me, cf. Osborne, 1991, Wood, 1998). We always come to the world, including social work practice, with our faith (worldview assumptions)—wherever we got it, however good or bad it is, and however embryonic it may be. This worldview faith strongly affects what we perceive (or even look for). But the world (God’s creation, in the Christian worldview) is not a totally passive or subjective thing. So, we run the risk of coming away from any encounter with the world having our faith and our categories somewhat altered, perhaps even corrected a bit. Then we use that altered faith in our next encounter with the world.

So, for me, the starting place for integration of my beliefs and social work practice is always at the level of basic faith, worldview assumptions. What are the implications of my core beliefs? And what are the implications of the idea, theory, interpretation, or practice that I am examining? To use a currently fashionable phrase, how do they “interrogate” each other? What kinds of assumptions about the nature of the world lie behind Freudian theory? Behavioral theory? The scientific method? The strengths perspective? The social work belief that all persons have intrinsic value (a radical notion not particularly supported by either modernism or postmodernism in their materialist, subjectivist versions)?

To put it another way, we all form stories that answer life’s biggest questions. As I become a Christian, I connect my personal story to a much bigger story that frames my answers to these big questions. For Christians, the biblical story of God’s nature and action in human history, culminating in Jesus Christ, is the “meta-narrative” that frames our personal stories and within which the meaning of our stories is rooted. Middleton and Walsh (1995, p. 11) summarize the basic worldview questions this way (with my illustrative additions):

**1. Where are we? What is the nature of the reality in which we find ourselves?** Is the nature of the universe meaningful or absurd? Created or accidental? Materialistic only, or also spiritual?

**2. Who are we? What is the nature and task of human beings?** What does it mean to be a person? What is human life? What is its source and value? Is there such a thing as freedom or responsibility?

**3. What's wrong? How do we understand and account for evil and brokenness?** And how do we account for our sense of morality, love, and justice? Is evil only stuff I happen not to prefer? Or are some things really good and other things really wrong? Is love only lust or well-disguised selfcenteredness? Does justice have a claim on us and what we call "ours"?

**4. What's the remedy? How do we find a path through our brokenness to wholeness?** What kinds of things will help? Do we need a Savior or just a positive (or cynical) attitude? Will chemicals or incarceration do the trick?

### **Interpreting the Facts**

"Facts" have no meaning apart from an interpretive framework. "Facts" are harder to come by than we often think, but even when we have some "facts" in our possession, they have no power to tell us what they mean or what we should do.

That human beings die is a fact. That I am going to die would seem to be a reliable prediction based on what I can see. In fact, the capacity to put those observations and projections together is one of the ways we have come to describe or define human consciousness. But what do these "facts" mean and what effect should they have on my life?

One worldview might tell me that life emerged randomly in a meaningless universe and is of no particular value beyond the subjective feelings I may experience from moment to moment. Another worldview might tell me that somehow biological survival of life forms is of value and that I only have value to the extent that I contribute to that biological parade (with the corollary that survival proves fitness). Another worldview might tell me that life is a gift from a loving and just Creator and that it transcends biological existence, that death is not the end of the story. Different worldviews lend different meanings to the same "facts."

The major initial contribution of a Christian worldview to an understanding of social work values and ethical practice is not one of unique, contrasting, or conflicting values. Rather, a Christian worldview gives a coherent, solid foundation for the basic values that social workers claim and often take for granted (Holmes, 1984; Sherwood, 1993, 2000, 2007). Subsequently, a Christian worldview will shape how those basic values are understood and how they interact with one another. For example, justice will be understood in the light of God's manifest concern for the poor and oppressed, so justice can never be defined only as a procedurally "fair" protection of individual liberty and the right to acquire, hold, and transfer property that a libertarian worldview might hold (Lebacqz, 1986; Mott, 1982; Wolterstorff, 1983, 2006).

### **The Interaction of Feeling, Thinking, and Behavior**

Persons are complex living ecological systems—to use a helpful conceptual model common in social work—systems of systems, if you will. Systems within our bodies and outside us as well interact in dynamic relationships with each other. For example, it is impossible to meaningfully separate our thinking, feel-

ing, and behavior from each other and from the systems we experience outside ourselves, yet we quite properly think of ourselves as separate individuals.

The lines of influence run in all directions. What we believe affects what we experience, including how we define our feelings. For example, does an experience I might have of being alone, in and of itself, *make* me feel lonely, or rejected, or exhilarated by freedom, for that matter? Someone trips me, but was it accidental or intentional? I have had sex with only one woman (my wife Carol) in my life. How does this “make” me feel? Are my feelings not also a result of what I tell myself about the meaning of my experience? But it works the other way too.

All this makes us persons harder to predict. And it certainly makes it harder to assign neat, direct, and one-way lines of causality. The biblical worldview picture is that God has granted us (at great cost) the dignity and terror of contributing to causality ourselves through our own purposes, choices, and actions. We have often used this freedom to hurt others and ourselves, but this also means that we are not mechanistically determined and that significant change is always possible.

And change can come from many directions—thinking, emotions, behavior, experience. We are especially (compared to other creatures) both gifted and cursed by our ability to think about ourselves and the world. We can form purposes and act in the direction of those purposes. Our beliefs about the nature of the world, other persons, and ourselves interact in a fundamental way with how we perceive reality, how we define our own identity, and how we act.

If this is true in our personal lives, it is equally true as we try to understand and help our clients in social work practice. And it is no less true for clients themselves. What we believe about the nature of the world, the nature of persons, and the nature of the human situation is at least as important as the sheer facts of the circumstances we experience.

## **Worldviews Help Construct Our Understanding of Values**

### **Cut Flowers: Can Values Be Sustained Without Faith?**

One significant manifestation of the notion that beliefs aren't all that important is the fallacy of our age that assumes fundamental moral values can be justified and sustained apart from their ideological (ultimately theological) foundation. Take, for example, the fundamental Christian and social work belief that all human beings have intrinsic dignity and value.

Elton Trueblood, the Quaker philosopher, once described ours as a “cut-flower” generation. He was suggesting that, as it is possible to cut a rose from the bush, put it in a vase, and admire its fresh loveliness and fragrance for a short while, it is possible to maintain the dignity and value of every human life while denying the existence or significance of God as the source of that value. But the cut rose is already dead, regardless of the deceptive beauty that lingers for a while. Even uncut, “The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the Word of the Lord endures forever” (1 Peter 1:24–25).

Many in our generation, including many social workers, are trying to hold onto values—such as the irreducible dignity and worth of the individual—while denying the only basis on which such a value can ultimately stand. We should be glad they try to hold onto the value, but we should understand how shaky such a foundation is. A secular generation can live off its moral capital only so long before the impertinent questions (Why should we?) can no longer be ignored (Sherwood, 2007).

### **Doesn't Everybody “Just Know” That Persons Have Dignity and Value?**

But doesn't everybody “just know” that human beings have intrinsic value? You don't have to believe in God, do you? In fact, according to some, so-called believers in God have been among the worst offenders against the value and dignity of all persons (sadly true, in some cases). After all, a lot of folks, from secular humanists to rocket scientists to New Age witches to rock stars, have declared themselves as defenders of the value of the individual. Isn't the worth of the person just natural, or at least rational and logically required? The plain answer is, “No, it's *not* just natural or rational or something everyone just knows.”

I received a striking wake-up call in regard to this particular truth many years ago when I was a freshman at Indiana University. I think the story is worth telling here. I can't help dating myself—it was in the spring of 1960, the time the Civil Rights movement was clearly emerging. We were hearing of lunchroom sit-ins and Freedom Riders on buses. Through an older friend of mine from my hometown I wound up spending the evening at the Student Commons talking with my friend and someone he had met, a graduate student from Iran named Ali. I was quite impressed. My friend Maurice told me Ali's father was some sort of advisor to the Shah (the ruling despot at that point in Iran's history).

The conversation turned to the events happening in the American South, to the ideas of racial integration, brotherhood, and social justice. Ali was frankly puzzled and amused that Maurice and I, and at least some other Americans, seemed to think civil rights were worth pursuing. But given that, he found it particularly hard to understand what he thought was the wishy-washy way the thing was being handled. “I don't know why you want to do it,” he said. “But if it's so important, why don't you just *do* it? If I were President of the United States and I wanted integration, I would do it in a week!” “How?” we asked. “Simple. I would just put a soldier with a machine gun on every street corner and say ‘Integrate.’ If they didn't, I would shoot them.” (Believable enough, as the history of Iran has shown).

Naive freshman that I was, I just couldn't believe he was really saying that. Surely he was putting us on. You couldn't just do that to people. At least not if you were moral! The conversation-debate-argument went on to explore what he really did believe about the innate dignity and value of the individual human life and social responsibility. You don't just kill inconvenient people, do you?

I would say things like, “Surely you believe that society has a moral responsibility to care for the widows and orphans, the elderly, the disabled, the

emotionally disturbed.” Incredibly (to me at the time), Ali’s basic response was not to give an inch but to question *my* beliefs and values instead.

“Society has no such moral responsibility,” he said. “On the contrary. You keep talking about reason and morality. I’ll tell you what is immoral. The rational person would say that the truly *immoral* thing is to take resources away from the strong and productive to give to the weak and useless. Useless members of society such as the disabled and mentally retarded should be eliminated, not maintained.” He would prefer that the methods be “humane,” but he really did mean eliminated.

It finally sunk into my freshman mind that what we were disagreeing about was not facts or logic, but the belief systems we were using to interpret or assign meaning to the facts. Ali was a thoroughly secular man; he had left Islam behind. If I were to accept his assumptions about the nature of the universe (e.g. that there is no God, that the material universe is the extent of reality, that self-preservation is the only given motive and goal), then his logic was flawless and honest. As far as he was concerned, the only thing of importance left to discuss would be the most effective means to gain and keep power and the most expedient way to use it.

In this encounter I was shaken loose from my naive assumption that “everybody knows” the individual person has innate dignity and value. I understood more clearly that unless you believed in the Creator, the notion that all persons are equal is, indeed, *not* self-evident. The Nazi policies of eugenics and the “final solution” to the “Jewish problem” make a kind of grimly honest (almost inevitable) sense if you believe in the materialist worldview.

### The “Is-Ought” Dilemma

Not long afterward I was to encounter this truth much more cogently expressed in the writings of C. S. Lewis. In *The Abolition of Man* (1947) he points out that both the religious and the secular walk by faith if they try to move from descriptive observations of fact to any sort of value statement or ethical imperative. He says,

From propositions about fact alone no *practical* conclusion can ever be drawn. “This will preserve society” [let’s assume this is a factually true statement] cannot lead to “Do this” [a moral and practical injunction] except by the mediation of “Society ought to be preserved” [a value statement]. (p. 43)

“Society ought to be preserved” is a moral imperative that no amount of facts alone can prove or disprove. Even the idea of “knowing facts” involves basic assumptions (or faith) about the nature of the universe and human beings.

The secular person (social worker?) tries to cloak faith by substituting words like natural, necessary, progressive, scientific, rational, or functional for “good,” but the question always remains—For what end? And why? The answer to this question always smuggles in values from somewhere else besides the facts.

Even the resort to instincts such as self-preservation can tell us nothing about what we (or others) *ought* to do. Lewis (1947, p. 49) says:

We grasp at useless words: we call it the “basic,” or “fundamental,” or “primal,” or “deepest” instinct. It is of no avail. Either these words conceal a value judgment passed *upon* the instinct and therefore not derivable *from* it, or else they merely record its felt intensity, the frequency of its operation, and its wide distribution. If the former, the whole attempt to base value upon instinct has been abandoned: if the latter, these observations about the quantitative aspects of a psychological event lead to no practical conclusion. It is the old dilemma. Either the premise is already concealed in an imperative or the conclusion remains merely in the indicative.

This is called the “Is-Ought” dilemma. Facts, even when attainable, never have any practical or moral implications until they are interpreted through the grid of some sort of value assumptions. “Is” does not lead to “Ought” in any way that has moral binding, obligation, or authority until its relationship to relevant values is understood. And you can’t get the values directly from the “Is.” We always come down to the question—what is the source and authority of the “Ought” that is claimed or implied?

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics refers to values such as the inherent value of every person, the importance of social justice, and the obligation to fight against oppression. It is a fair question to ask where those values come from and what gives them moral authority and obligation.

### **A Shaky Consensus: “Sexual Abuse” or “Intergenerational Sexual Experience?”**

For an example of the “Is-Ought Dilemma,” is child sexual abuse a fact or a myth? Or what is the nature of the abuse? Child sexual abuse is an example of an area where there may seem to be more of a consensus in values than there actually is. In any event, it illustrates how it is impossible to get values from facts alone. Some intervening concept of “the good” always has to come into play.

Fact: Some adults have sexual relations with children. But so what? What is the practical or moral significance of this fact? Is this something we should be happy or angry about? Is this good or bad? Sometimes good and sometimes bad? Should we be encouraging or discouraging the practice? Even if we could uncover facts about the consequences of the experience on children, we would still need a value framework to help us discern the meaning or practical implications of those facts. And to have moral obligation beyond our own subjective preferences or biases, this value framework must have some grounding outside ourselves. What constitutes negative consequences? And even if we could agree certain consequences were indeed negative, the question would remain as to what exactly was the cause.

In the last few years there has been a tremendous outpouring of attention to issues of child sexual abuse and its effects on adult survivors. I must say that this is long overdue and much needed. And even among completely secular social workers, psychologists, and other therapists there currently appears to

be a high degree of consensus about the moral wrong of adult sexual activity with children and the enormity of its negative consequences on the child at the time and in later life. As a Christian I am encouraged, especially when I recall the self-described “radical Freudian” professor I had in my master’s in social work program who described in glowingly approving terms high levels of sexual intimacy between children and each other and children and adults as “freeing and liberating” (that was the early 1970s).

However, if I look more closely at the worldview faith underlying much of the discussion of sexual abuse and its effects, the result is not quite so comforting to me as a Christian. The moral problem tends not to be defined in terms of a well-rounded biblical view of sexuality and God’s creative design and purpose or an understanding of the problem of sin. Rather, it tends to be based on a more rationalistic and individualistic model of power and a model of justice that pins its faith on reason. Sexual abuse grows out of an inequity in power which a person rationally “ought not” exploit. Why not, one might ask.

But what if we take away the coercive element and get rid of the repressive “body-negative” ideas about sexual feelings? What if much or all of the negative effects of non-coercive sexual activity between adults and children is the result of the misguided and distorted social attitudes that are passed on to children and adults? Defenders of “non-exploitive” sexual activity between adults and children can (and do) argue that any negative consequences are purely a result of sex-negative social learning and attitudes. Representatives of a hypothetical group such as P.A.L. (Pedophiles Are Lovers!) would argue that what needs to be changed is not the “intergenerational sexual behavior,” but the sexually repressive social values and behavior which teach children the negative responses. These values are seen as the oppressive culprits. Then, the argument might go, should we not bend our efforts to eradicating these repressive sexual values and attitudes rather than condemning potentially innocent acts of sexual pleasure? Indeed, why not, if the only problem is exploitation of power?

You should also note that this argument in favor of intergenerational sexual behavior is not exclusively scientific, objective, or based only on “facts.” It has to make faith assumptions about the nature of persons, the nature of sexuality, the nature of health, and the nature of values. By the same token, my condemnation of adult sexual activity with children is based on faith assumptions about the nature of persons, sexuality, health, and values informed by my Christian worldview. It is never just “facts” alone that determine our perceptions, conclusions, and behavior.

Right now, it happens to be a “fact” that a fairly large consensus exists, even among secular social scientists and mental health professionals, that adult sexual activity with children is “bad” and that it leads quite regularly to negative consequences. Right now you could almost say this is something “everyone knows.” But it would be a serious mistake to become complacent about this or to conclude that worldview beliefs and faith are not so important after all.

First, not everyone agrees. Although I invented the hypothetical group P.A.L. (Pedophiles Are Lovers), it represents real people and groups that do exist.

The tip of this iceberg may be appearing in the professional literature where it is becoming more acceptable and common to see the “facts” reinterpreted. In preparing bibliography for a course on sexual issues in helping some time ago, I ran across a very interesting little shift in terminology in some of the professional literature. One article was entitled “Counterpoints: Intergenerational sexual experience or child sexual abuse” (Malz, 1989). A companion article was titled “Intergenerational sexual contact: A continuum model of participants and experiences” (Nelson, 1989). Words do make a difference.

Second, we shouldn’t take too much comfort from the apparent agreement. It is sometimes built on a fragile foundation that could easily come apart. The fact that Christians find themselves in wholehearted agreement with many secular helping professionals, for example, that sexual activity between adults (usually male) and children (usually female) is exploitive and wrong may represent a temporary congruence on issues and strategy, much more so than fundamental agreement on the nature of persons and sexuality.

But back to the “Is-Ought” dilemma. The fact that some adults have sexual contact with children, by itself, tells us *nothing* about what, if anything, should be done about it. The facts alone can never answer those questions. The only way those questions can ever be answered is if we interpret the facts in terms of our faith, whatever that faith is. What is the nature of the world? What is the nature of persons? What is the meaning of sex? What constitutes health? What is the nature of justice? And most important—why should I care anyway?

## **Worldviews Help Define the Nature and Value of Persons**

### **So—Worldviews Have Consequences**

Your basic faith about the nature of the universe has consequences (and everyone, as we have seen, has some sort of faith). Faith is consequential to you personally, and the content of the faith is consequential. If it isn’t *true* that Christ has been raised, my faith is worthless (1 Corinthians 15:14). And if it’s *true* that Christ has been raised, but I put my faith in Baal or the free market or the earth goddess (big in some circles) or Karl Marx (not so big these days) or human reason, then *that* has consequences, to me and to others. What are we going to *trust*, bottom-line?

In 1 Corinthians 15, the apostle Paul said something about the importance of what we believe about the nature of the world, the *content* of our faith. He said, “Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith is also in vain. . . . If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. . . . If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied” (12–14, 17, 19).

I’ve been a student, a professional social worker, and a teacher of social work long enough to see some major changes in “what everyone knows,” in

what is assumed or taken for granted. “What everyone knows” is in fact part of the underlying operational *faith* of a culture or subculture—whether it’s Americans or teenagers or those who go to college or social workers—or Southern Baptists, for that matter.

When I went to college, logical positivism was king, a version of what C. S. Lewis called “naturalism,” a kind of philosophical materialism. It said that the physical world is all there is. Everything is fully explainable by materialistic determinism. Only what can be physically measured or “operationalized” is real (or at least relevantly meaningful). In psychology it was epitomized in B. F. Skinner’s behaviorism.

I remember as a somewhat bewildered freshman at Indiana University attending a lecture by a famous visiting philosophy professor (a logical positivist) from Cambridge University (whose name I have forgotten) entitled “The *Impossibility* of any Future Metaphysic” (his take-off on Kant’s title “Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysic”). I can’t say I understood it all at the time, but his main point was that modern people must permanently put away such meaningless and potentially dangerous ideas as spirituality, the supernatural, and any notion of values beyond subjective preferences. We now know, he said, that such language is meaningless (since not empirical) except, perhaps, to express our own subjective feelings.

In a graduate school course in counseling, I had an earnest young behaviorist professor who had, as a good behaviorist, trained (conditioned) himself to avoid all value statements that implied good or bad or anything beyond personal preference. When faced with a situation where someone else might be tempted to make a value statement, whether regarding spaghetti, rock and roll, or adultery, he had an ideologically correct response. He would, with a straight face, say, “I find that positively reinforcing” or, “I find that negatively reinforcing.” (I don’t know what his wife thought about this kind of response). Notice, he was saying “I” (who knows about you or anyone else?) “find” (observe a response in myself at this moment; who knows about five minutes from now) “that” (a particular measurable stimulus) is “positively reinforcing” (it elicits this particular behavior now and might be predicted to do it again).

Above all, the idea was to be totally scientific, objective, and *value-free*. After all, values were perceived to be purely relative, personal preferences, or (worse) prejudices induced by social learning. And “everyone knew” that the only thing real was physical, measurable, and scientific. If we could only get the “facts” we would know what to do.

But this was, and is, a fundamental fallacy, the “Is-Ought” fallacy we discussed earlier. Even if facts are obtainable, they have no moral power or direction in themselves. If we say they mean something it is because we are interpreting them in the context of some values that are a part of our basic faith about the nature of the world.

## **Shifting Worldviews: The Emperor Has No Clothes**

In the meantime we have seen some rather amazing shifts in “what everyone knows.” I am old enough to have vivid memories of the 1960s and the “greening of America” when “everybody knew” that people under 30 were better than people over 30 and that human beings are so innately good all we had to do was to scrape off the social conventions and rules and then peace, love, and total sharing would rule the world. An astounding number of people truly believed that—for a short time.

In the ‘70s and early ‘80s “everybody knew” that personal autonomy and affluence are what it is all about. Power and looking out for Number One became the articles of faith, even for helping professionals like social workers. Maximum autonomy was the obvious highest good. Maturity and health were defined in terms of not needing anyone else (and not having any obligation to anyone else either). Fritz Perls’ “Gestalt Prayer” even got placed on romantic greeting cards:

I do my thing, and you do your thing.  
I am not in this world to live up to your expectations.  
And you are not in this world to live up to mine.  
You are you and I am I,  
And if by chance we find each other, it's beautiful.  
If not, it can't be helped.

If you cared too much, you were labeled enmeshed, undifferentiated, or at the very least co-dependent.

And here we are in the 21st century and, at least for awhile, it looks as though values are in. *Time* magazine has had cover stories on ethics. We have had occasion to feel betrayed and outraged at the exposure of unethical behavior on the part of corporate executives, accountants, stockbrokers, and especially government officials. Even more amazing, philosophy professors and social workers are not embarrassed to talk about values and even character again. “Family Values” are avowed by the Republicans and Democrats. The books and articles are rolling off the presses.

But we should not be lulled into a false sense of security with this recovery of values and ethics, even if much of it sounds quite Christian to us. The philosophical paradigm has shifted to the opposite extreme, from the modern faith in the rational and empirical to the postmodern faith in the radically subjective and relative, the impossibility of getting beyond our ideological and cultural horizons. Our culture now despairs of any knowledge beyond the personal narratives we make up for ourselves out of the flotsam of our experience and fragments of disintegrating culture (Middleton & Walsh, 1995). Postmodernism says each person pieces together a personal story through which we make sense out of our lives, but there is no larger story (meta-narrative) which is really true in any meaningful sense and which can bind our personal stories together.

It is remarkable, as we have seen, how rapidly some of these assumptions can shift. The seeming consensus may be only skin-deep. More importantly, unless

these values are grounded on something deeper than the currently fashionable paradigm (such as a Christian worldview), we can count on the fact that they will shift, or at least give way when they are seriously challenged. It's amazing how easy it is to see that the emperor has no clothes when a different way of looking is introduced to the scene. Remember, both enlightenment empiricism and postmodern subjectivity agree that values have no transcendent source.

### **What Is a "Person?"**

Controversies regarding abortion and euthanasia illustrate the profound consequences of our worldview faith, especially for worldviews that deny that values have any ultimate source. Even more fundamental than the question of when life begins and ends is the question: What is a person? What constitutes being a person? What value, if any, is there in being a person? Are persons owed any particular rights, respect, or care? If so, why?

If your worldview says that persons are simply the result of matter plus time plus chance, it would seem that persons have no intrinsic value at all, no matter how they are defined.

From a purely materialist point of view, it may be interesting (to us) that the phenomena of human consciousness and agency have emerged which allow us in some measure to transcend simple biological, physical, and social determinism. These qualities might include the ability to be self-aware, to remember and to anticipate, to experience pleasure and pain, to develop caring relationships with others, to have purposes, to develop plans and take deliberate actions with consequences, and to have (at least the illusion of) choice. We may choose to define personhood as incorporating some of these characteristics. And we may even find it positively reinforcing (or not) to be persons. But then what? In this materialist worldview there are no inherent guidelines or limits regarding what we do to persons.

Do such persons have a right to life? Only to the extent it pleases us (whoever has the power) to say so. And what in the world could "right" mean in this context? But what if we do choose to say that persons have a right to life? What degree or quality of our defining characteristics do they have to have before they qualify? How self-conscious and reflective? How capable of choice and action?

It is common for people to argue today that babies aren't persons before they are born (or at least most of the time before they are born) and thus that there is no moral reason for not eliminating defective ones, or even just unwanted or inconvenient ones. And there are already those who argue that babies should not even be declared potential persons until they have lived long enough after birth to be tested and observed to determine their potential for normal growth and development, thus diminishing moral qualms about eliminating "wrongful births" (Singer, 1996). After all, what is magic about the birth process? Why not wait for a few hours, days, or weeks after birth to see if this "fetal material" is going to measure up to our standards of personhood? And at any point in life if our personhood fails to develop adequately or gets lost or seriously diminished through accident, illness, mental illness, or age, what then? Was my college

acquaintance Ali right? Is it immoral to take resources from the productive and use them to support the unproductive? Do these “fetal products” or no-longer-persons need to be terminated?

### **A Solid Foundation**

If I balk at these suggestions, it is because I have a worldview that gives a different perspective to the idea of what constitutes a person. I may agree, for example, that agency—the capacity to be self-aware, reflective, remember and anticipate, plan, choose, and responsibly act—is a central part of what it means to be a person. But I also believe that this is a gift from our creator God that in some way images God. I believe that our reflection, choice, and action have a divinely given purpose. This purpose is summarized in the ideas of finding and choosing God through grace and faith, of growing up into the image of Jesus Christ, of knowing and enjoying God forever. All of this says that persons have a special value beyond their utility to me (or anyone else) and that they are to be treated with the care and respect befitting their status as gifts from God. Even when something goes wrong.

Having a Christian worldview and knowing what the Bible says about God, the world, and the nature of persons doesn't always give us easy answers to all of our questions, however. And having faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ doesn't guarantee that we will always be loving or just. But it does give us a foundation of stone to build our house on, a context to try to understand what we encounter that will not shift with every ideological or cultural season. I can assert the dignity and worth of every person based on a solid foundation, not just an irrational preference of my own or a culturally-induced bias that I might happen to have. What “everybody knows” is shifting sand. Even if it happens to be currently stated in the NASW Code of Ethics for social workers.

### **Some Basic Components of a Christian Worldview**

Space does not permit me to develop a detailed discussion of the components of a Christian worldview here, but I would at least like to try to summarize in the most basic and simple terms what I perceive to be quite middle-of-the-road, historically orthodox, and biblical answers to the fundamental worldview questions I posed at the beginning (cf. Middleton & Walsh, 1995). This suggests the Christian worldview that has informed me and has been (I would hope) quite evident in what has been said. This little summary is not the end of reflection and application, but only the beginning.

- 1. Where are we?** We are in a universe that was created by an eternal, omnipotent, just, loving, and gracious God. Consequently the universe has built-in meaning, purpose, direction, and values. The fundamental values of love and justice have an ultimate source in the nature of God which gives them meaning, authority, and content. The universe is both natural and supernatural.

2. **Who are we?** We are persons created “in the image God” and therefore have intrinsic meaning and value, regardless of our personal characteristics or achievements. Persons are both physical and spiritual. Persons have been given the gift of “agency”—in a meaningful sense we have been given both freedom and responsibility. Persons created in the image of God are not just autonomous individuals but are relational—created to be in loving and just community with one another. Persons are objects of God’s grace.
3. **What’s wrong?** Oppression and injustice are evil, wrong, an affront to the nature and desire of God. Persons are finite and fallen—we are both limited in our capacities and distorted from our ideal purpose because of our selfishness and choice of evil. Our choice of selfishness and evil alienates us from God and from one another and sets up distortion in our perceptions, beliefs, and behavior, but we are not completely blind morally. Our self-centeredness makes us prone to seek solutions to our problems based on ourselves and our own abilities and accomplishments. We can’t solve our problems by ourselves, either by denial or our own accomplishments.
4. **What’s the remedy?** Stop trying to do it our way and accept the loving grace and provisions for healing that God has provided for us. God calls us to a high moral standard but knows that it is not in our reach to fulfill this standard completely. God’s creative purpose is to bring good even out of evil, to redeem, heal, and grow us up—not by law but by grace. “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.” (Ephesians 2:8–10)

## Why Should I Care? Choosing a Christian Worldview

### Moral Obligation and Faith: Materialism Undermines Moral Obligation

To abandon a theological basis of values, built into the universe by God, is ultimately to abandon the basis for any “oughts” in the sense of being morally bound other than for purely subjective or cultural reasons. Normative morality that is just descriptive and cultural (“This is what most people in our society tend to do”), subjective (“This is what I happen to prefer and do,” or “It would be convenient for me if you would do this”), or utilitarian (“This is what works to achieve certain consequences”) has no power of moral *obligation*.

Why should I care? On materialist or subjective grounds, I “should” do this or that if I happen to feel like it or if I think it will help me get what I want. But this is using the word “should” in a far different and far more amoral sense than we ordinarily mean by it. It is a far different thing than saying I am *morally obligated or bound* to do it.

Many will argue that reason alone is enough to support moral obligation. This is the argument used by Frederic Reamer in his excellent book on social

work ethics, *Ethical dilemmas in social services* (2013), based on Gewirth, *Reason and morality* (1978). If, for example, I understand that freedom is logically required for human personal action, then this theory says I am logically obligated to support freedom for other persons as I desire it for myself. But I have never been able to buy the argument that reason alone creates any meaningful moral obligation for altruistic behavior. Why *should* I be logical, especially if being logical doesn't appear to work for my personal advantage? Any idea of moral obligation beyond the subjective and personally utilitarian seems to lead inevitably and necessarily to God in some form or to nowhere (Evans, 2004, 2006; Sherwood, 2007; Smith, 2003, 2010).

### **The “Method of Comparative Difficulties”**

Although it is logically possible (and quite necessary if you believe in a materialist or postmodernist universe) to believe that values are only subjective preferences or cultural inventions, I have never been able to completely believe that is all our sense of values such as love and justice amounts to. There are, in all honesty, many obstacles in the way of belief in God as the transcendent source of values. But can we believe, when push comes to shove, that all values are either meaningless or totally subjective? Elton Trueblood calls this the “Method of Comparative Difficulties” (1957, p. 13; 1963, p. 73;).

It may often be hard to believe in God, but I find it even harder to believe in the alternatives, especially when it comes to values. It's easy enough to say that this or that value is only subjective or culturally relative, but when we get pushed into a corner, most of us find ourselves saying (or at least *feeling*), “No, *that* (say, the Holocaust) is really wrong and it's not just my opinion” (Lewis, 1948).

Dostoevsky expressed the idea that, if there is no God, all things are permissible. C. S. Lewis (1947, pp. 77–78) said, “When all that says ‘it is good’ has been debunked, what says ‘I want’ remains. It cannot be exploded or ‘seen through’ because it never had any pretensions.” Lust remains after values have been explained away. Values that withstand the explaining away process are the only ones that will do us any good. Lewis concludes *The abolition of man* (1947):

You cannot go on “explaining away” forever: you will find that you have explained explanation itself away. You cannot go on “seeing through” things forever. The whole point of seeing through something is to see something through it. It is good that the window should be transparent, because the street or garden beyond it is opaque. How if you saw through the garden too? It is no use trying to “see through” first principles. If you see through everything, then everything is transparent. But a wholly transparent world is an invisible world. To “see through” all things is the same as not to see. (p. 91)

## Looking for Christian Implications

A Christian worldview is not going to give us simple answers to all of our questions. It is not as though there is a simple translation of Christian values and principles into practice implications, or that there is a unitary “Christian” version of every human activity from French cooking to volleyball to politics.

Even though we may agree on fundamental values and principles, such as love and justice, as fallen and finite human beings, the more specific we get in terms of translating love and justice into particular attempts to solve concrete problems the more we are likely to honestly and conscientiously disagree with one another in our interpretation of what the problem is or what, in fact, might actually do more good than harm in attempting to deal with it (Sherwood, 1999).

I assume, for example, that if we are Christians and we have read the Bible, we have been impressed with our obligation to work for social justice and to help the poor. But what are the causes of poverty and what can we do to help the poor that will do more good than harm? Not simple and not obvious.

May I be so bold as to say that there is *no* simple, single “Christian” answer to those questions? We are going to be working to deal with poverty (and conscientiously disagreeing about how to do it) until Jesus returns. And I will submit that there is *no* policy or program to help the poor, individually or collectively, privately or publicly that will not *advance some* of the legitimate values that we have at the *risk or cost of some* of our other legitimate values.

So, everything we do will be a compromise of sorts and will need to be adapted as much as possible to the unique situation. But what we do needs to be an imperfect solution shaped both by our Christian faith and by our professional social work values, knowledge, and skills.

A Christian perspective is not always totally unique or different in every respect from what another perspective might offer, but it always informs and critiques these perspectives. An example from social work is the National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics (2017). Even some Christian social workers may be laboring under the impression that it somehow contradicts Christian values. Far from it. Anyone who has this impression should take a closer look at the Code of Ethics. There is no principle in the Code that a Christian cannot strongly affirm. In fact, I would argue that a Christian worldview is quite compatible with the social work Code of Ethics, and in fact is the soil out of which much of the Code has sprung (Sherwood, 2000, 2002, 2007).

As we have discussed before, one of the core social work values in the Code is the inherent dignity and value of every person. Now, what in modernism or postmodernism gives such a value ground to stand on and to claim obligation over us? Not much. When push comes to shove, the inherent dignity and value of every person is pretty hard to sustain under assumptions of relativism, subjectivism, material determinism, and survival of the fittest.

At the same time that a Christian worldview upholds this core social work value, it also informs and critiques it. For example, a Christian perspective might say that individual freedom is not the only or necessarily always the highest value

when legitimate values come into tension with each other in a given situation. The good of others and the community (deriving from both love and justice) has a powerful moral claim in every situation. Yet individual freedom tends to be granted privileged status in most social work ethical thinking.

So, not all social workers, Christian or otherwise, will necessarily agree on how to prioritize legitimate values when they come into conflict with one another, which they inevitably do in complex cases. One of the admirable virtues of the current Code of Ethics is its clear recognition in the preamble and throughout that legitimate values *do* come into tension with one another in actual practice situations, that professional judgment will *always* be required to prioritize them, and that conscientious and competent professionals will *not always* be in agreement.

Furthermore (given the hermeneutical spiral), it must be remembered that other perspectives may inform and critique our Christian perspectives. Many contemporary Christians seem to need to be reminded, for example, that individual peace and prosperity do not necessarily rank high in the list of biblical virtues compared to sacrifice for the common good (Sherwood, 1999).

### **Seeing Through a Mirror Dimly: Real Values But Only a Limited, Distorted View**

So, I believe in God as the ultimate source and authenticator of values. I believe that real values exist beyond myself. And I believe these values put us under real moral obligation. To believe otherwise, it seems to me, ultimately makes values and moral obligation empty shells, subjective and utilitarian, with no real life or content. It may be true that this is all values are, but I find it very hard to believe. Belief in a value-less world, or one with only “human” (that is to say, purely subjective) values, takes more faith for me than belief in God.

But (and this is very important) this understanding of values as having ultimate truth and deriving from God is a very far cry from believing that I fully comprehend these values and the specific moral obligations they put me under in the face of a particular moral dilemma when these values come into tension with one another and priorities have to be made. Much humility is required here, an appropriate balance. At any given moment, my (or your) understanding of these values and what our moral obligations are is very limited and distorted. In fact our understandings are in many ways subjective, culturally relative, and bounded by the interpretive “language” available to us. And any particular place where I can stand to view a complex reality at best only yields a partial view of the whole. Remember the story of the blind men and the elephant (“It’s like a snake,” “It’s like a wall,” “It’s like a tree”).

We can see, but only dimly. God has given us light but we will only be able to see completely when we meet God face to face (1 Corinthians 13:8–13). In the meantime we are on a journey. We are pilgrims, but we are not wandering alone and without guidance. We see through a mirror dimly, but there is something to see. There is a garden beyond the window.

Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love. (1 Corinthians 13:8–13)

Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual. Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of the Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. Those who are spiritual discern all things, but they are themselves subject to no one else's scrutiny. "For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ. (1 Corinthians 2:12–16)

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:17–18)

## References

- Evans, C. S. (2004). *Kierkegaard's ethic of love: Divine commands and moral obligations*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Evans, C. S. (2006). Is there a basis for loving all people? *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 34(1), 78–90.
- Gewirth, A. (1978). *Reason and morality*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Holmes, A. (1984). *Ethics: Approaching moral decisions*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Lebacqz, K. (1986). *Six theories of justice: Perspectives from philosophical and theological ethics*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House.
- Lewis, C. S. (1947). *The abolition of man*. New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Company.
- Lewis, C. S. (1948). *Mere Christianity*. New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Company.
- Malz, W. (1989). Counterpoints: Intergenerational sexual experience or child sexual abuse. *Journal of Sex Education and Therapy*, 15, 13–15.
- Middleton, J. R., & Walsh, B. J. (1995). *Truth is stranger than it used to be: Biblical faith in a post-modern age*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

- Mott, S. (1982). *Biblical ethics and social change*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- National Association of Social Workers. (2017). *Code of ethics*. Washington, DC: National Association of Social Workers. Retrieved from <https://www.socialworkers.org/About/Ethics/Code-of-Ethics/Code-of-Ethics-English>
- Nelson, J. A. (1989). Intergenerational sexual contact: A continuum model of participants and experiences. *Journal of Sex Education and Therapy*, 15, 3–12.
- Osborne, G. R. (1991). *The hermeneutical spiral: A comprehensive introduction to biblical interpretation*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Reamer, F. G. (2013). *Ethical dilemmas in social service* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Sherwood, D. A. (1993). Doing the right thing: Ethical practice in contemporary society. *Social Work & Christianity*, 20(2), 140–159.
- Sherwood, D. A. (1999). Integrating Christian faith and social work: Reflections of a social work educator. *Social Work & Christianity*, 26(1), 1–8.
- Sherwood, D. A. (2000). Pluralism, tolerance, and respect for diversity: Engaging our deepest differences within the bond of civility. *Social Work & Christianity*, 27(1), 1–7.
- Sherwood, D. A. (2002). Ethical integration of faith and social work practice: Evangelism. *Social Work & Christianity*, 29(1), 1–12.
- Sherwood, D. A. (2007). Moral, believing social workers: Philosophical and theological foundations of moral obligation in social work ethics. *Social Work & Christianity*, 34(2), 121–145.
- Singer, P. (1996). *Rethinking life and death: The collapse of our traditional ethics*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press.
- Smith, C. (2003). *Moral, believing animals: Human personhood and culture*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Smith, C. (2010). *What is a person? Rethinking humanity, social life, and the moral good from the person up*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Trueblood, D. E. (1957). *Philosophy of religion*. New York, NY: Harper and Row.
- Trueblood, D. E. (1963). *General philosophy*. New York, NY: Harper and Row.
- Wolterstorff, N. (1983). *When justice and peace embrace*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Wolterstorff, N. (2006). Justice, not charity: Social work through the eyes of faith. *Social Work & Christianity*, 33(2), 123–140.
- Wood, W. J. (1998). *Epistemology: Becoming intellectually virtuous*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.



# Calling: A Spirituality Perspective for Social Work Practice

---

*Beryl Huguen*

In making a career choice, many Christian students find the social work profession a good fit with their religious faith. Or at least at first glance it appears so. For example, as part of the application process for the social work program I taught in, students are asked to explain why they have chosen social work as a major. What motivates them to enter this field of study? Some answer the question by relating past experiences with social work services or role models who were social workers, but almost all describe a moderate or fairly strong religious impulse to serve people and society.

Many specifically relate their faith to their choice of social work—stating something like this: in being loved by God, they in turn wish to share some of this love with those who are poor or hurting or are in need of help of some kind. Some of these students believe that to be a Christian in social work they must work in an agency under religious auspices, whereas others plan to work in programs that do not have a specific religious base or affiliation, but are part of the larger community of governmental social welfare responses to those in need. Despite these differences, almost all are interested in finding ways to integrate their faith and their newly chosen field of study.

But it doesn't take long in their social work studies for these students to begin to recognize the complex tensions between their religious faith, agency auspices, and the secular values of the social work profession. This discovery is not surprising; social work is, after all, a secular profession. At times, students find the profession very critical of religion, even suspicious of anyone who claims to have religious motives for helping others.

This feeling is understandable, for in the last 40 to 50 years, the social work profession has simply ignored religious insights and accepted the principle of separating the sacred and secular. Religion came to be seen as having no particular insight to offer or relevance for everyday professional practice. Because of this attitude, the recent professional literature does not offer much help to students in thinking through the relationship of religious faith and professional practice. It is ironic that social work, which claims as its unique focus the “whole person” in the whole environment, has for so long neglected the religious dimension of life.

Not only do students continue to come to the profession with religious motivations, but the roots of social work are largely grounded in religious faith

(Devine, 1939). Social work originated and came of age under the inspiration of the Judeo-Christian traditions and the philanthropic and service motivation of religious people. As Leiby (1985) indicates, the Christian biblical command to love God and to love one's neighbor as oneself was directly translated into a sense of moral responsibility for social service. As the social work profession secularized in the 20th century, these earlier religious rationales and models for service were replaced by doctrines of natural rights, utilitarianism, and humanistic ideology.

Dealing with human need apart from religious motives and methods is actually a very recent development in the history of charity and philanthropy. The notion of a secular profession focused on responding to human suffering would have struck many of our professional ancestors as quite inconsistent and confusing. Many of them were religiously motivated and expressed their faith by means of social work as a vocation, a calling from God to serve their brothers and sisters who were in need. With their perception of social work as a calling, a vocation, they formalized a link between their religious faith and social work practice.

What is meant by viewing social work as a calling? Several articles have addressed this "old fashioned" concept of calling or vocation, sensing its power and value for current social work practice (Gustafson, 1982; Reamer, 1992). However, these writers essentially have attempted to take the religious concept of calling and use it in a secular fashion. They have done so in order to provide a moral purpose for the profession—to counteract what they perceive to be the focus on self-interest inherent in the social work profession which has become increasingly professionalized, specialized and bureaucratic.

My intent in this chapter is to explain, or more accurately to reintroduce, the religious model of calling as used by Christian social workers, past and present, in linking Christian faith and professional social work practice. Both its attractiveness and shortcomings as a model will be addressed. My purpose is not only to help social workers and the profession understand or correct misunderstandings related to this model, but also help social workers better understand the broader issues related to the spirituality of social work practice, in that other religious models and spiritual traditions address many of the same integration of faith and practice questions. Also, reintroducing the model of calling will lead us to see the significance of how the perspectives and writings of our religiously motivated social work ancestors—of which there are many—can contribute to the profession's current discussions regarding spirituality and social work practice.

### **Religion, Faith, and Spirituality**

Before discussing the model of calling, it is helpful to define what is meant by the terms spirituality, religion, belief and faith. The profession has long struggled with this definitional dilemma. The dilemma has focused on how to reintroduce religious or spiritual concerns into a profession which has ex-

panded beyond specific sectarian settings and ideologies to now include diverse sources of knowledge, values and skills, and how to respond to the needs of a much more spiritually diverse clientele. Addressing this dilemma, Brower (1984) and Siporin (1985) advocated for an understanding of spirituality that includes a wide diversity of religious and non-religious expressions, with such an inclusive understanding of spirituality encouraging social workers to reflect upon their clients, both within and outside of particular institutional religious settings and ideologies.

From this beginning, Canda (1988a, 1988b) further developed a concept of spirituality for social work that incorporates insights from diverse religious and philosophical perspectives. He identifies three content components to spirituality—values, beliefs and practice issues—“all serving the central dynamic of a person’s search for a sense of meaning and purpose, developed in the context of interdependent relationships between self, other people, the nonhuman world, and the ground of being itself” (Canda, 1988a, p. 43).

In the same vein, the work of James Fowler, known more for his model of faith development, is particularly instructive. Fowler (1981) states that to understand the “human quest for relation to transcendence,” the key phenomenon to examine is not religion or belief, but faith (p. 14). According to Fowler, who draws upon the ideas of religionist Wilfred Smith, *religions* are “cumulative traditions,” which represent the expressions of faith of people in the past (p. 9). Included in a cumulative tradition are such elements as “texts of scripture, oral traditions, music, creeds, theologies,” and so forth. *Belief* refers to “the holding of certain ideas” or “assent to a set of propositions” (p. 13). *Faith* differs from both religion and belief. Fowler describes faith as a commitment, “an alignment of the will ... in accordance with a vision of transcendent value and power, one’s ultimate concern” (p. 14). One commits oneself to that which is known or acknowledged and lives loyally, with life and character being shaped by that commitment. Defined in this way, faith is believed to be a universal feature of human living, recognizably similar everywhere, and in all major religious traditions.

What does faith consist of then? Fowler describes three components of what he calls the contents of faith. The first he terms *centers of value*, the “causes, concerns, or persons that consciously or unconsciously have the greatest worth to us.” These are what we worship, things that “give our lives meaning” (p. 277). The second component of faith is described as our *images of power*, “the power with which we align ourselves to sustain us in the midst of life’s contingencies” (p. 277): these powers need not necessarily be supernatural or transcendent. Finally, faith is comprised of “the *master stories* that we tell ourselves and by which we interpret and respond to the events that impinge upon our lives.” Essentially, our master stories reveal what we believe to be the fundamental truths, “the central premises of [our] sense of life’s meaning” (p. 277).

In discussing spirituality and faith, Fowler and Canda both emphasize its pervasive, all encompassing nature in an individual’s life. Faith or spirituality is not a separate dimension of life or compartmentalized specialty, but rather an orientation of the total person. Accordingly, the three components of faith—

centers of value, images of power, and master stories (Fowler, 1981)—and spirituality—values, beliefs, and practices (Canda, 1988a)—exert “structuring power” in our lives, shaping our characters and actions in the world, including our work. Faith and spirituality are defined here as the essence of religion. Faith and spirituality take on a Christian religious meaning when the centers of value, images of power, and master stories of one’s faith, the central dynamic of one’s search for a sense of meaning and purpose, are grounded in the creeds, texts of scripture, and theology of the Christian tradition. I will attempt to present the Christian religious concept of calling within these more inclusive frameworks of spirituality and faith.

### Calling in Action

Perhaps the best way to develop an understanding of the religious concept of calling is to start with an illustration. Robert Coles, in his book *The Call to Service* (1993), tells of a 6-year-old black girl who initiated school desegregation in the South in the early 1960s. Tessie, a first grader, each day facing an angry and threatening mob, was escorted by federal marshals to school. The mob almost always greeted her with a litany of obscenities. Tessie’s maternal grandmother, Martha, was the family member who usually got Tessie up and off to school each morning.

Coles reports that one day Tessie was reluctant to go to school—claiming to feeling tired, having slipped and fallen while playing in a nearby back yard, and having a difficult time with a current substitute teacher. Tessie suggested to her grandmother that she might stay home that day. Her grandmother replied that that would be fine if Tessie truly wasn’t well, but if she was more discouraged than sick, that was quite another matter. She goes on to say:

It’s no picnic, child—I know that, Tessie—going to that school. Lord Almighty, if I could just go with you, and stop there in front of that building, and call all those people to my side, and read to them from the Bible, and tell them, remind them that He’s up there, Jesus, watching over all of us—it don’t matter who you are and what your skin color is. But I stay here, and you go—and your mamma and your daddy, they have to leave the house so early in the morning that it’s only Saturdays and Sundays that they see you before the sun hits the middle of its traveling for the day. So I’m not the one to tell you that you should go, because here I am, and I’ll be watching television and eating or cleaning things up while you’re walking by those folks. But I’ll tell you, you’re doing them a great favor; you’re doing them a service, a big service.

You see, my child, you have to help the good Lord with His world! He puts us here—and He calls us to help Him out. You belong in that McDonogh School, and there will be a day when everyone knows that, even those poor folks—Lord, I pray for them!—those

poor, poor folks who are out there shouting their heads off at you. You're one of the Lord's people; He's put His Hand on you. He's given a call to you, a call to service—in His name! There are all those people out there on the street. (pp. 3–4)

Later Coles questions Tessie whether she understood what her grandmother meant by “how you should be of service to those people out there on the street.” She replies:

If you just keep your eyes on what you're supposed to be doing, then you'll get there—to where you want to go. The marshals say, ‘Don't look at them; just walk with your head up high, and you're looking straight ahead.’ My granny says that there's God, He's looking too, and I should remember that it's a help to Him to do this, what I'm doing; and if you serve Him, then that's important. So I keep trying. (pp. 4–5)

The heart of what Tessie had learned was that for her, service meant serving, and not only on behalf of those she knew and liked or wanted to like. Service meant an alliance with the Lord Himself for the benefit of people who were obviously unfriendly. Service was not an avocation or something done to fulfill a psychological need, not even an action that would earn her any great reward. She had connected a moment in her life with a larger ideal, and in so doing had learned to regard herself as a servant, as a person called to serve. It was a rationale for a life, a pronouncement with enormous moral and emotional significance for Tessie and her grandmother. This call was nurtured by the larger black community, her pastor, family, and the biblical values of love and justice—the stories of exile and return, of suffering and redemption—the view of the powerful as suspect and the lowly as destined to sit close to God, in His Kingdom.

Coles himself recounts how ill-prepared professionally he was to understand this family and their sense of calling:

I don't believe I could have understood Tessie and her family's capacity to live as they did, do as they did for so long, against such great odds, had I not begun to hear what *they* were saying and meaning, what *they* intended others to know about their reasons and values—as opposed to the motivations and reactions and “mechanisms of defense” I attributed to them. Not that there wasn't much to be learned by a psychoanalytic approach. Tessie and her companions, like human beings everywhere (including those who study or treat other human beings), most certainly did demonstrate fearfulness and anxiety; she also tried to subdue those developments by not acknowledging them, for instance, or by belittling their significance. Mostly, though, she clung hard to a way of thinking in which she was *not* a victim, *not* in need of “help” but someone picked by fate to live out the Christian tradition in her life. “I'm trying to think of the way Jesus would want me to

think,” she told me one evening. When I asked how she thought Jesus wanted her to think, she replied, “I guess of others, and not myself, I’m here to help the others.” (p. 26)

### **Calling: The Meaning of Work**

For some Christians, like Tessie and her grandmother, connecting one’s work to the divine intentions for human life gives another dimension to the meaning and purpose of one’s work and life. Certainly, adequate pay, financial stability, social status and a sense of personal fulfillment remain significant criteria in choosing a career, but they are not the central motivation. The central motivation is the means by which one’s Christian religious tradition has tied one’s work and faith together, this concept of vocation, or calling.

Martin Luther originally formulated the notion of vocation or calling largely in reaction to the prevailing attitude toward work in medieval society. Medieval thinkers devalued work. They believed that in and of itself, work had little or no spiritual significance. They held, like the Greeks earlier, to the idea that the highest form of life, the form in which humans can realize their noblest potential, is the contemplative life of the mind. By thinking, we liken ourselves to God. Work was thus a hindrance to an individual’s relation to God, which could be cultivated only in the leisure of contemplation. Because peasant serfs did most of the work in medieval society, and because the earthly character of their occupations prevented them from participating directly in the religious life, they received grace through the church by means of the sacraments.

Not only the life of productive work, but also the practical or active life, consisting of doing good to one’s neighbor, was viewed by many medieval persons as an impediment to the true goals of the religious life. The activity given precedence was always the contemplative life. An early church father, St. Augustine (1950) wrote: “the obligations of charity make us undertake virtuous activity, but if no one lays this burden upon us, we should give ourselves over in leisure to study and contemplation” (p. 19). The need for the active or charitable life was temporary, whereas contemplation of God was eternal.

Luther’s concept of vocation or calling fits neatly within the compass of this thought since he draws a basic theological distinction between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of earth. To the kingdom of heaven belongs our relationship to God, which is to be based on faith; to the kingdom of earth belongs our relationship to our neighbor, which is to be based on love. A vocation, properly speaking, is the call to love my neighbor that comes to me through the duties attached to my social place or *station* within the earthly kingdom. A station in this life may be a matter of paid employment, but it need not be. Luther’s idea of station is wide enough to include being a wife or a husband, a mother or a father, a judge or politician, as well as a baker, truck driver, farmer or social worker. Thus, the call to love one’s neighbor goes out to all in general. All of these callings represent specific and concrete ways of serving my neighbor, as I am commanded to do by God Himself.

What do we accomplish when we discharge the duties of our stations in life, when we heed the call of God to serve our neighbor in our daily tasks? Luther believed the order of stations in the kingdom of earth has been instituted by God Himself as His way of seeing to it that the needs of humanity are met on a day-by-day basis. Through the human pursuit of vocations across the array of earthly stations, the hungry are fed, the naked are clothed, the sick are healed, the ignorant are enlightened, and the weak are protected. That is, by working we actually participate in God's providence for the human race. Through our work, people are brought under His providential care. Far from being of little or no account, work is charged with religious significance. As we pray each morning for our daily bread, people are already busy at work in the bakeries.

Luther conceived of work as a way of serving others. He never recommended it as either the road to self-fulfillment or a tool for self-aggrandizement. We, of course, find it natural to assess the attractiveness of a particular job on the basis of what it can do for us. But Luther saw quite clearly that work will always involve a degree of self-sacrifice for the sake of others, just as Christ sacrificed himself for the sake of others.

During the time of Luther, and for many centuries preceding him, people thought of human society to be stable, static, and as incapable of change, as the order of nature itself. Shortly after Luther's time, however, European civilization underwent a dramatic transformation under the combined influence of a rapidly expanding market economy, accelerated urbanization, technological innovation, and vast political reorganization. In the face of these astounding changes on all fronts of social life, people soon saw that the structure of human society is itself in part a product of human activity, changeable and affected by sin. Once people recognized this fact, it became clear, in turn, that to the degree human activity is motivated by sinful desires and worldly ambitions, the society thus produced is also likely to be structurally unsound and in need of reform. For example, an economy based upon greed and a government based on the arbitrary use of power stand in just as much need of repentance as the individuals who are a part of them. For this reason, other reformers insisted that not only the human heart, but also human society must be reformed in accordance with the Word of God. The emergent vision of the Christian life at the dawn of modern social work practice, then, required not only that people obey God in their callings, but that the callings themselves be aligned with the will of God.

### **Calling Within Social Work**

Although historically there have been many models of spirituality in social work, the calling model perhaps has been the most prominent, or at least the most extensively referred to in the social work literature. In fact, in the very early years, it was the dominant model. This dominance is certainly related to the fact that Protestantism was the dominant religious form at the time. Many early social workers in their writings refer to the relationship of their spirituality and social work within this calling model. Their response is not surprising,

since many of them grew up in devoted religious families, many had theological training, and still others were very active as lay people in their churches. All found in their spiritual experiences something which gave impetus, meaning, and value to their work of service.

The following examples illustrate the prominence of the calling model and how it has been articulated and practiced by a variety of different leaders within the profession.

Edward Devine, a leader in the Charity Organization Society and the first director of one of the first schools of social work, records in his book *When Social Work Was Young* (1939) the early experiences in social work education and summarizes these experiences as follows:

The real start towards the professional education of social workers as such was made in 1898, when the Society launched its summer school of philanthropy with thirty students enrolled.

For several years this summer school gathered from all parts of the country a substantial number of promising candidates, and a brilliant corps of instructors, who for one day, or sometimes for an entire week, expounded and discussed the fundamentals of the slowly emerging profession. Jane Addams, Mary Richmond, Zilpha Smith, Mrs. Glendower Evans, Graham Taylor, Jeffrey Brackett, John M. Glenn, Mary Willcox Brown, before and also after she became Mrs. John M. Glenn, James B. Reynolds, Mary Simkhovitch—a full roster of the lecturers in the school would be like a list of the notables in the National Conference of Social Work. Certainly, no religious gathering could have a deeper consecration to that ideal of learning how to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly, which Micah described as being all that is required of us. (pp. 125–126)

He ends the book by stating that in his opinion the spirit of social work finds its power, value, and purpose from the biblical Sermon on the Mount.

Richard Cabot (1927) addressed the model of calling more specifically in an article entitled “The Inter-Relation of Social Work and the Spiritual Life.” He writes:

Religion is the consciousness of a world purpose to which we are allied...when I speak of the purpose being a personality, I speak of the person of God of whom we are children... I think it makes absolutely all the difference in social work to know this fact of our alliance with forces greater than ourselves. If a person wants to find himself and be somebody, he has got to find his particular place in the universal plan. In social work, we are trying to help people find themselves, find their places and enjoy them. The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. (p. 212)

Cabot also articulated several spiritual powers applicable to social work practice that come to those who hold this faith: courage, humility and the ability to stand by people. He goes on to explain that the goal of social work is to:

Maintain and to improve the channels of understanding both within each person and between persons, and through these channels to favor the entrance of God's powers for the benefit of the individuals....

Unblocking channels is what social workers do. The sort of unblocking that I have in mind is that between capital and labor, between races, or between the members of a family who think they hate each other....

Spiritual diagnosis, I suppose, means nothing more than the glimpse of the central purpose of the person, unique and related to the total parts of the world. Spiritual treatment, I suppose, is the attempt to open channels, the channels I have been speaking of, so as to favor the working of the world purpose. In this way social workers participate in the providence of God. (pp. 215–216)

Perhaps the most prominent example of the power and dominance of the calling model is illustrated in Owen R. Lovejoy's presidential address to the National Conference of Social Work in 1920, entitled "The Faith of a Social Worker." In the speech he attempts to draw upon the foundations of faith of the members in order to aid in their approach to discussions during the Conference and to help create a real basis for unity. He begins by first disclaiming any intention of committing the Conference to any specific creed of social service. His desire, rather, is to discover "some of the underlying principles which bind people together."

He states that all social workers have a philosophy of life, a faith, a "basic enthusiasm," and those who act on this faith can choose to:

Regard this as a sacred ministry and claim their commission as the ancient prophet claimed his when he said: "The Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings to the meek, to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, the opening of prison to them that are bound, to give a garland for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." Certainly, this is not a slight task to which we are called, but the expression of a joyful faith carried with cheerfulness to those in the world most in need of it...a field of service based on the conviction that men are warranted in working for something corresponding to a divine order "on earth as it is in heaven. (p. 209)

He warns those "who look upon the visible institutions connected with their religion as the essential embodiment of faith," recognizing such a sectarian position frequently leads to imposing one's own values on others and proselytizing.

ing—similar issues we face today. He ends the address stating that the secret of their usefulness as social workers is found in the following litany.

God is a Father,  
Man is a brother,  
Life is a mission and not a career;  
Dominion is service,  
Its scepter is gladness,  
The least is the greatest,  
Saving is dying,  
Giving is living,  
Life is eternal and love is its crown. (p. 211)

It is difficult to imagine an address on such a topic being given today. Such was the significance of spirituality and the calling model in the social work profession at that time.

The calling model's chief apologist, however, was Ernest Johnson, a prolific writer and interpreter of Protestant religion and the social work profession. His writings detail the principles which he hoped would govern efforts to bring Protestantism to bear through the social work profession in meeting human needs. Recognizing that Protestantism had a majority position and influence in the culture, he strongly advocated, with some exceptions, for a pattern of social work based on the calling model. The result was to minimize the operation and control of agencies and social welfare enterprises by churches or religious groups and maximize Protestant participation in non-sectarian agencies.

Later in life he recognized that Protestantism, particularly when its pre-eminent position was beginning to wane, would never obtain complete cultural dominance or create an approximation to the ideal of a Christian society—the *Corpus Christianum*. The result, he lamented, would be only a partial transformation of the culture—and regrettably, a partial accommodation on the part of Protestantism to the culture. But despite this limitation, he still believed the Protestant pattern or model of influencing social work enterprises and social movements “indirectly” (through the means of one’s calling or vocation) was essentially sound. Johnson (1946) states:

It [the calling model] affords the most effective channel through which our churches, in the midst of a religiously heterogeneous population, can bring to bear their testimony through community endeavor and make their impact on a secular culture. This means, however, a recovery of the sense of lay Christian vocation, which has been so largely lost. The major Protestant contribution to social work can be made, I believe, through the consciously Christian activities of persons engaged in non-sectarian enterprises and movements. In the existing situation in America a revival of a sectarian, possessive attitude toward social work would be definitely reactionary....

In a word, then, we need to devise our social strategy in the light of our Protestant history, with its emphasis on freedom, and in the light of our cultural situation, which puts a premium on vocational work as Christian testimony. We can make our best contribution without seeking to enhance Protestant prestige, seeking rather to influence contemporary life and to meet human need through the activities of those whose lives have been kindled at our altars and nourished in our fellowship. (pp. 2–4)

As Johnson relates, the calling model has not always functioned as intended. Already in 1893, one leader of the new social work profession, responding to the widening gap between religion and the emerging influence of scientific models in social work, characterized social work as “a revolutionary turning of thought in our society from a religious service to God to a secular service to humanity” (Huntington, 1893). Along this line of thought, Protestant theologian Reinhold Niebuhr (1932) grappled with the practical consequences of the calling model for social work. With three-fourths of social workers then functioning under secular auspices, many had become “inclined to disregard religion.” This development he regarded as a significant loss for social work—“destroying or remaining oblivious to powerful resources and losing the insights religion provided in keeping wholesome attitudes toward individuals” and “preserving the sanity and health in the social worker’s own outlook upon life” (p. 9). He believed social workers needed, therefore, a renewed sense of vocation or calling. In addition, this loss of calling partially contributes to what church historian Martin Marty (1980) later referred to as “godless social service,” or the migration (privatization) of faith or spirituality from social work.

### **Contemporary Insights on Calling**

The historical social work literature clearly identifies how the notion of calling was central for many of the early social work professionals, and also for many persons who volunteered to serve their communities as agents of renewal at a time of rapid change and challenges brought on by immigration, urbanization, and industrialization. For many, this was a lifelong process of following Christ by responding to God’s call, and living their lives accordingly.

But many of my students over the years who read this literature frequently asked “how does this all work?” They found the theological framework from the literature inspiring, but the terminology used was difficult to understand, given its historical and sometimes specific denominational context. Calling terminology also didn’t give students much assistance as to the more practical processes involved in identifying or discovering a calling. Even the question as to what to call a calling; Is this really just about a job, or a vocation? These were terms more familiar to them. If it is not just about a paid job, what other aspects of life does it involve? It obviously involves a personal quest, but also a common good. So how do my individual gifts and my neighbor’s needs fit together?

Within the last twenty years or so, there has been a significant effort by faith related colleges to provide information and support for students in understanding

the concept of calling and in how to engage in the relational processes needed to “discover” a calling. This movement is supported by a variety of differing foundations and educational organizations (Lilly Endowment, Inc.; NetVUE—Network for Vocation in Undergraduate Education, Council of Independent Colleges; Council of Christian Colleges and Universities; and the Communities of Calling Initiative, Collegetown Institute). I draw from many of these resources in the following comments.

Perhaps the best place to start is with terms and definitions. Historically and theologically the term “calling” was most used, but today the term vocation is more commonly used and can be helpful to more diverse religious and secular audiences. The terms are best used interchangeably. A useful definition for vocation or calling is “answering a call to discover one’s unique gifts and employ them in service for the common good in ways that are personally satisfying and bring meaning to one’s life” (University of Dayton, 2017). Christians follow God’s call to love God and love others as ourselves—this being common to all believers. But we all also have a unique calling which involves identifying personal gifts, virtues, interests, strengths (and weaknesses) and pairing these characteristics to a particular type of work (paid) and/or profession—to an area of service. These personal characteristics can also be applied to a variety of other areas or units of service. These include involvement in community citizenship, family roles, activities in one’s faith community, lifelong learning, or differing personal, social, or physical relationships (Fanucci, 2013). In other words, one can have multiple vocations, and these vocations can change over time.

Many persons look to Carl Frederick Buechner, noted poet, Presbyterian minister, theologian, and writer, for definitions and insights. Buechner, an important voice exploring Christian calling and vocation, explained his idea of vocation:

Vocation comes from the Latin *vocare*, “to call,” means the work a person is called to by God. There are all different kinds of voices calling you to all different kinds of work, and the problem is to find out which is the voice of God rather than that of society, say, or the superego, or self-interest. By and large a good rule for finding out is this: The kind of work God usually calls you to is the kind of work (a) that you need to do and (b) that the world needs to have done. The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet. (Buechner, 1993, pp. 118–119)

Helping students identify their “deep gladness” and match it with a “deep hunger” is now an intentional and organized procedure at many colleges across the country. These practices involve both an intellectual and theological framework. Vocational exploration efforts at some schools are campus-wide efforts, involving faculty, career advising, student life staff and campus chaplain personnel. Activities include vocational and personality assessment instruments, community service immersion experiences, international study and travel, and mentorships. The time devoted in each of these areas is accompanied with

personal reflection and discernment opportunities. The goal is to help students identify both their individual passions and outside purpose—discerning God’s call on their lives and to live out these purposes. A range of colleges carry out these processes within the school’s religious and theological traditions. (Council of Independent Colleges; 2019; Council of Christian Colleges and Universities, 2019).

Buechner also directly addresses the more nuanced discernment skills needed in the process of discovering one’s calling.

We can speak of a man’s choosing his vocation, but perhaps it is at least as accurate to speak of a vocation’s choosing the man, of a call’s being given and a man’s hearing it, or not hearing it. And maybe that is the place to start: the business of listening and hearing. A man’s life is full of all sorts of voices calling him in all sorts of directions. Some them are voices from inside and some of them are voices from outside. The more alive and alert we are, the more clamorous our lives are. Which do we listen to? What kind of voice do we listen for? (Buechner, 1968, p. 27)

The Communities of Calling Initiative at Collegetown Institute has identified a variety of spiritual practices that support this discernment process. These include prayer—particularly “lectio divina”—the slow meditative reading of scripture and intentional discernment opportunities where sorting through competing voices is practiced. Another practice is that of mentoring, where experienced leaders share their personal calling process and experiences. And finally, the practice of storytelling, in which experienced persons tell about their own discovery processes. It can be quite powerful when storytellers share about what was helpful in their discernment, about processes that may not have worked well, and stories about vocational outcomes that were, to a certain extent, unexpected.

My vocational journey for example, changed unexpectedly midcourse. I started my social work vocation as a mental health professional, mainly doing outpatient therapy (my passion), but also working as a coordinator for a program to move persons who were previously in state hospital settings into community-based living arrangements and support systems. In addition, I helped coordinate an adolescent day treatment program, helping adolescents with both mental health and behavioral problems address these concerns and stay in their local school. These programmatic experiences were efforts of the federal government’s community mental health initiative, offering community-based programming for mental health needs that had earlier required an institutional treatment effort. After working in these programs for many years I moved to another state to be closer to family, and began to work primarily as an outpatient therapist. I realized I missed the programmatic aspects of my earlier work. A friend of mine invited me to come and teach at a small Christian college that was starting a BSW program. This enabled me also to work toward a Ph.D., which I would need to direct programmatic efforts in mental health similar to what I had expe-

rienced. So, I followed this path, but by the time I obtained the Ph.D., the field of mental health had changed significantly. President Ronald Reagan initiated an effort to Block Grant federal monies related to mental health to individual states. With this change in funding, much of the creativity related to programs in community mental health stopped. Many states could not afford to continue these earlier programs, or simply chose to offer less expensive options, many of which were not able to adequately support community-based models of care. So, I stayed with teaching, and learned to like it. I found opportunities to use new skills (passions) to do research, carry out program evaluations for local social service organizations, and engage in scholarship. Yes, Ronald Reagan changed my vocational life, unexpectedly.

Although new understandings and supports are available today in seeking God's direction in our life's callings, the journey is not always easy. Sometimes sufferings and struggles shape and reshape our callings. We may discover that the vocation we initially chose, after several years, does not fit as well with our passions and gifts as we first thought. Or we may encounter circumstances where the reality of obligations and responsibilities, such as having to care for a child with significant disabilities, or a spouse with a significant illness, or an elderly parent, does not fit well with how we had hoped to live out our callings in later life. Sometimes a calling can partially or fully end, such as when a person retires. I'm retired and I see how some of my retired friends continue to grieve over the loss of not being able to continue to actively practice their vocations.

Sometimes students feel pressure to find the perfect major, and discover their callings *before* they graduate! Others worry about getting it wrong, or are frustrated that they may not have more than one choice. One of my students long waited for her vocational "epiphany," and when at last it seemed to come, it was social work. But her father disagreed. Now what? The idea of finding your calling as an arrival is a fallacy. Much of life for students is uncertain concerning the future, as it is for most of us. Students quickly learn that finding our calling(s) is not just making decisions about our life and hoping God blesses these decisions. Vocation is more about listening, discernment, and following God's direction, although the outcome may seem illusive and unclear.

Although there may be detours and transitions in our vocational journeys, the central call is to trust the process. Trust that God will continue to call us into a relationship where we can use our gifts and passions to serve. A friend who I worked with for many years in a mental health facility died about a year ago of ALS (amyotrophic lateral sclerosis), or Lou Gehrig's disease. When his physical limitations required him to move to a nursing facility, he was not encouraged. When given an orientation and tour of the facility, he met a chaplain, who asked him how he was going to spend his time in the facility. She challenged him to take his passions and skills and find a new arena of service. He was a good writer, self-aware, and very articulate. He began to write a blog about his experiences in living with (and now dying of) ALS. His blog quickly developed a large audience from within his denominational faith community. He discovered a new calling, something he was passionate about, and enabled him to serve his faith community.

The theological focus of your calling or vocation, therefore, is about how you view your work and other relationships in connection to God's purposes for your life. Its central character is relational. God calls, and we respond to the call. How we hear the call may be through a variety of means: the Holy Spirit; an inner voice; the mediation of people in our lives that model a call to service; by assessing one's strengths and interests; or feeling drawn or nudged in a particular direction. Some of these avenues are anchored in particular theological language derived from denominational affiliation. The idea of calling involves a general call to discipleship that all Christians embrace, but also the more specific ways we are called to our professional work experiences and other relationships we develop throughout our lifetimes such as community citizenship, lifelong learning, family, faith community. Callings can challenge us even in early childhood, like with Tessie and her grandmother, and continue to change and evolve to the end of our lives, like with my friend with ALS. All callings involve service to others, and frequently require sacrifice, obedience, and just plain hard work (Collegeville Institute, 2019).

## **Conclusion**

Because of our distance from the thoughts and assumptions of our predecessors in social work and perhaps from the language of spirituality itself, efforts regarding such historical reflections as these may seem awkward and archaic. The goal is not, however, to recreate the past, but rather to identify the models of spirituality that guided our social work ancestors and then to find ways to translate and apply the spirit of these models to our present situation.

This model of calling offers significant insight into current discussions relating spirituality and professional social work practice. Within this calling model, religious faith is not the private possession of an individual, but is grounded in tradition and divine revelation, permeating the whole of life, connecting public and private spheres, and linking the individual with the community. The model also places professional techniques and methods in the context of larger goals and values that give life meaning and purpose for both clients and practitioners.

Historically, religiously motivated persons and groups found their faith propelling them into actions of concern for others, especially the poor and the vulnerable in society. These social workers have affirmed in a variety of ways their shared belief that the faith dimension of life leads to a transcendence of individualism, and to a commitment to others—to social work practice motivated by a calling to a life of service.

The model presented is helpful to social workers from the Christian faith tradition, but also to others who seek to acquire a better understanding of the meaning and effects of spirituality in their own and their clients' lives. A social worker's own cultivation of spirituality is a crucial preparation for the competent application of knowledge and skills in practice. The model is particularly helpful in taking into account the distinctive values, sources of power and master stories of one particular religious and cultural tradition, Christianity—represented by many social workers in practice today.

Although the model does not resolve the tensions and conflicts which exist between the Christian spiritual tradition and the current largely secular profession, it does provide a beginning framework for integrating Christian spirituality and social work at both the personal and professional levels. The profession's roots are significantly tied to this particular model of spiritual/professional integration, and many social workers as well as clients continue to define their lives, personally and professionally, in the context of this Christian-based spiritual call to service. The Christian values of love, justice, and kindness; its stories related to the poor, the vulnerable, and those of liberation from oppression; and its emphasis on self-sacrifice, are the "passion of the old time social workers" that many find attractive and wish to bring back—albeit in a form more adaptable to a more diverse clientele and changed environment (Constable, 1983; Gustafson, 1982; Reamer, 1992; Siporin, 1982, 1985; Specht & Courtney, 1994).

## References

- Augustine. (1950). *City of God* (M. Dods, Trans.). New York: Modern Library.
- Buechner, C. F. (1968). *The hungering dark*. New York: Seabury Press.
- Buechner, C.F. (1993). *Wishful thinking: A seeker's ABC*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Brower, I. (1984). *The 4th ear of the spiritual-sensitive social worker* (Doctoral dissertation). Union for Experimenting Colleges and Universities.
- Cabot, R. C. (1927). The inter-relation of social work and the spiritual life. *The Family*, 8(7), 211–217.
- Canda, E. R. (1988a). Conceptualizing spirituality for social work: Insights from diverse perspectives. *Social Thought*, Winter, 30–46.
- Canda, E. R. (1988b). Spirituality, religious diversity and social work practice. *Social Casework*, April, 238–247.
- Coles, R. (1993). *The call of service*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Constable, R. (1983). Religion, values and social work practice. *Social Thought*, 9, 29–41.
- Council of Christian Colleges and Universities. (2019). Retrieved from <https://www.cccu.org>.
- Council of Independent Colleges (2019). Network for Vocation in Undergraduate Education. Retrieved from <https://www.cic.edu/program/NetVUE>
- Devine, E. T. (1939). *When social work was young*. New York: Macmillan Company.
- Fanucci, L. K. (June, 2013). What to call a calling? Communities Of Calling Initiative, Collegeville Institute. Retrieved from <https://collegevilleinstitute.org/bearings/what-to-call-a-calling/>
- Fowler, J. W. (1981). *Stages of faith*. San Francisco: Harper and Row.
- Gustafson, J. M. (1982). Professions as "callings." *Social Service Review*, December, 501–515.
- Huntington, J. (1893). Philanthropy and morality. In J. Addams (Ed.), *Philanthropy and social progress*. New York: Crowell.
- Johnson, E. F. (1946). The pattern and philosophy of protestant social work. *Church Conference of Social Work*. Buffalo, New York.
- Leiby, J. (1985). Moral foundations of social welfare and social work: A historical view. *Social Work*, 30(4), 323–330.
- Lilly Endowment, Inc. (2019). Retrieved from <https://www.lillyendowment.org>.

- Lilly Endowment, Inc., coordinated by the Collegeville Institute (2019). Called to Lives of Meaning and Purpose Initiative. Retrieved from <https://www.lillyendowment.org>
- Lovejoy, O. R. (1920). The faith of a social worker. *The Survey*, May, 208–211.
- Marty, M. E. (1980). Social service: Godly and godless. *Social Service Review*, 54, 463–481.
- Niebuhr, R. (1932). *The contribution of religion to social work*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Reamer, F. G. (1992). Social work and the public good: Calling or career? In N. P. Reid & P. R. Popple (Eds.), *The moral purposes of social work*, (pp. 11–33). Chicago: Nelson-Hall.
- Specht, H., & Courtney, M. (1994). *Unfaithful angels*. New York: The Free Press.
- Siporin, M. (1982). Moral philosophy in social work today. *Social Service Review*, December, 516–538.
- Siporin, M. (1985). Current social work perspectives on clinical practice. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 13, 198–217.
- University of Dayton ( 2017). The Language of Vocation at the University of Dayton. Retrieved from [https://udayton.edu/lc/\\_resources/documents/vocation/language\\_of\\_vocation\\_at-ud.pdf](https://udayton.edu/lc/_resources/documents/vocation/language_of_vocation_at-ud.pdf)



# Social Work for Social Justice: Strengthening Practice with the Poor Through Catholic Social Teaching

---

*Julia Pryce, Michael S. Kelly, and Mary Lawinger*

This chapter focuses on the ways by which Catholic social teaching (CST), specifically the CST value of the “preferential option for the poor,” is present in social work education and practice. That this should require mention in a book devoted to Christian social work practice reflects the central argument advanced in this chapter. That is, despite clear calls to both social work education and Catholic social workers to put the needs of the poor in the foreground, the mission of social work practice seems to be partially characterized by viewing poverty as another aspect of “diversity” that, while respected, is not a career focus of social work students or of the programs training them. In this chapter, a brief discussion of the “preferential option for the poor” and its relationship to larger Christian teachings will lead to an analysis of how CST is reflected in current Catholic leadership, the social work Code of Ethics (COE), social work practice, and social work education. Finally, specific examples of ways to better integrate CST into social work practice and education will challenge social workers of all faiths to reexamine their own commitments to practice the preferential option for the poor.

## **Case Example #1: A Catholic Hospital Adrift?**

*Helen was a BSW student doing her field placement in the inpatient unit of a Catholic hospital. She loved the work and felt that her calling to be a hospital social worker was validated by the feeling of relief she saw in her patients as she helped them with discharge planning. However, she recently had been troubled by some changes she witnessed at the hospital. Along with her supervisor, she attended a meeting at the hospital where the Chief Operating Officer (COO) discussed the need for the hospital to market their services to potential patients from the newly gentrifying neighborhood around the hospital. These new neighbors were affluent and represented a stark contrast to the low-income, largely immigrant population that this Catholic hospital served over its 100 year history. During the meeting, the COO invited staff to join in the strategic planning process to “chart this new course” for the hospital. Following the meeting, Helen asked for an overview of the economic pressures facing the hospital at this time, and reviewed the particulars with another staff member. While at Mass in the hospital chapel later that day, Helen found herself*

wondering about the hospital's new direction and whether she should inquire about her supervisor's intentions in order to advocate that the hospital preserve its mission and prioritize serving the poor. "Isn't that the role of a Catholic hospital? Isn't that its purpose?" she wondered to herself. Subsequently, Helen considered how to advocate for ways by which the hospital could preserve its mission while responding to current financial pressures.

### **Perspectives on Change from the Frameworks of Christianity and Social Work**

Helen's experience might resonate with many social workers, whether Christian or not. They may share Helen's concern that the agency or site where they work is failing its patient population. This tension may be particularly strong within students like Helen, given her Catholic beliefs and the tradition of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) that informs her concerns. From the perspective of CST, the hospital's "new course" is not just about trying to make a profit; rather, it is about the hospital potentially abandoning a central aspect of its Catholic mission--the preferential option for the poor. As an approach, CST informs social work's core mission and is the basis for considering the intersection of CST and social work ethics.

The profession of social work has historically grappled with the ways by which change can occur at the individual and societal levels. Conversations between some of the mothers of the profession are well known for the struggle to identify the most appropriate way to address issues of justice among marginalized populations (Addams, 1911; 1990; Reynolds, 1934; 1951; Richmond, 1922). In more recent years, scholars have continued to consider the merit of addressing issues of social justice within social work curricula (Brenden & Shank, 2012; Finn & Jacobson, 2003; Daniel, 2011; Deepak, Rountree, & Scott, 2015; Funge, 2011; O'Neill & Miller, 2015; Vincent, 2012). Debates continue regarding the definition and nature of social justice (McLaughlin, Gray, & Wilson, 2015; Hawkins, Fook, & Ryan, 2001; McPherson, Terry, & Walsh, 2010; Vincent, 2012; Banerjee, 2011) and the contextual and political influences that contribute to its relevance at any given time.

In the midst of this struggle, the stated value placed by the profession on social justice via its Code of Ethics (COE) remains clear (NASW, 2008). The term "social justice" is referenced multiple times in the COE and is listed as one of the core ethical principles of the document (NASW, 2008). Further, social justice is referenced via a myriad of mission statements, both within secular and religious social work programs (Holosko, Winkel, Crandall, & Briggs, 2015). Primary professional conferences, such as the Council on Social Work Education Annual Program Meeting, continue to reference "justice" in their core themes (CSWE, 2009).

Alongside the profession of social work, many Christian theologians and leaders have continuously prioritized the role of justice as core to their belief system, although the conceptualization has shifted over time. According to St. Augustine,

for example, the source of justice comes from within. In other words, justice is the connection between an internal faith and external action (Deane, 1963). Martin Luther, on the other hand, often conceived of justice in the context of education (Luther, Pelikan, Poellot, Hansen, Oswald, Grimm, Lehmann, & Hillerbrand, 1955). In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the social gospel movement, which preceded Vatican II, represented a prominent Protestant Christian intellectual movement. This movement was based on the idea that justice was critical to facilitating the second coming of Christ. That is, without the amelioration of social ills in the context of social justice, the second coming of Christ would not occur. Although the peak of this movement occurred in the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the principles of this movement continue to inspire more recent Protestant movements. These serve as just a few of many examples of the ways by which the founders of the Christian traditions have conceptualized social justice as central to the faith.

### **Catholic Social Teaching**

Catholic Social Teaching (CST) is based on church doctrine and Catholic social movements that have been incorporated into church teaching since the late 19th century (Catholic Charities of St. Paul and Minneapolis, 2008). While all other aspects of CST are considered important for Catholics, most scholars and theologians agree that in the approach to social justice, the issue of the Catholic preferential option for the poor represents a central tenet (Pope John Paul II, 1995; Twomey, 2005).

In concept, the preferential option for the poor was initially discussed over a century ago, in the 1891 papal encyclical, “*Rerum Novarum*: On the condition of workers,” by Pope Leo XIII (Pope Leo XIII, 1891). Through this seminal work, *Rerum Novarum* addressed for the first time barriers that separated the church from the common worker. This encyclical’s comprehensive treatment of such social issues set it apart from its counterparts. The concept was again prominently articulated as part of the liberation theologies of Latin America, and was formalized in the Latin American Bishops Conferences (Medellin, Columbia, 1968; Puebla, Mexico, 1979) (Twomey, 2005).

In its application, this option for the poor served to organize peasants in Latin America into more self-reliant “Christian-based communities,” which began to create solidarity among participants. In the United States, however, consideration of the preferential option did not formally begin until the late 1970s, and has vacillated in its doctrinal centrality since then. The approach within the United States differed some from that of the liberation theology movement, focusing more on responsibility to the larger community than specifically to the poor (U.S. Catholic Bishops, 1986). In other words, while the church is supposed to show a special solicitude for the poor, it should not ignore those who are not poor. This reflects the continuing debate in the laity and institutional church worldwide regarding the role the church should play in advocating for the poor in political and economic terms (Cooney, Harrington, & Medaille, 2002; Twomey, 2005).

## **Pope Francis and the Resurgent Social Justice Mission of the Catholic Church, 2013–Present**

Jorge Maria Bergoglio—Pope Francis I—was inaugurated as the 266<sup>th</sup> pope on March 13, 2013, immediately replacing the recently resigned Pope Benedict XVI. As church leader of Catholics around the world, Pope Francis was given global responsibilities regarding living out church doctrine, preaching Jesus' word to all, and managing ecclesiastical systems of power throughout various regions, countries, and continents (Franco, 2013).

Francis's inauguration marked the first time in history that the church would be led by both a Jesuit priest and a Latin American. Prior to his papacy, the Catholic Church was guided by European leaders, which arguably marginalized the global south and other developing countries around the world (Franco, 2013). Recent popes, such as Pope John Paul II from Poland and Pope Benedict XVI from Germany, were known for visiting many countries, but largely within the confines of specific geopolitical values and shared cultural and religious ideals. Francis, emerging from the starkly impoverished and deeply spiritual Americas (Dionne, 2013; Duncan, 2014) in contrast, thus far has taken unique steps as a global pope (Franco, 2013).

Pope Francis's Argentinian roots and his familiarity and involvement with the Latin American Church have greatly affected his papacy thus far. Common themes emerging from Latin American Bishop Conferences in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century intertwine closely with Francis's revolutionary church mission. Massimo Franco (2013) writes that a Latin American pope means "skepticism towards capitalism and globalisation; cultural confrontation with the United States; [...] increased attention to the environment; and pacifism" (p. 74). As an example, prior to 2013, European Popes' call to 'social justice' often focused on class struggle, abortion, gay marriage, and usage of contraceptives (Dionne, 2013). In contrast, Pope Francis's focus on social justice challenges systematic powers, denounces wealth and materialism, and includes, cares for, and advocates for the poor (Cox, 2014; Dionne, 2013).

Analysis of influential church documents developed at these Latin American Bishop Conferences (i.e., in Puebla, Mexico; 1979 and Aparecida, Brazil; 2007) provide insights into the cultural and spiritual lenses that have helped to form Francis's narrative as Pope. At Puebla in 1979, the Latin American Bishops encouraged Church leaders to challenge political and economic injustices and focus strongly on the preferential option for the poor (Latin American Catholic Bishops, 1979). Years later, in 2007 at the Aparecida conference, which Bergoglio attended, bishops reaffirmed the necessity of standing in solidarity with the marginalized, protecting and preferring the poor and vulnerable, and promoting social reform and human rights (Duncan, 2014, p. 183; Latin American Catholic Bishops, 2007). These themes closely align with liberation theology (Gutiérrez, 1973), a theology developed and implemented in Latin America, in that they insist that preferential option for the poor not only requires charitable acts but mandates systematic change (Cox, 2014).

Likely this Latin American influence, along with his Jesuit identity (a priestly order known among Catholics for living out a faith that seeks justice, challenges beliefs, and stands in solidarity with the poor) (Currie, 2011), is the motivation for his choosing 'Francis' as his papal name. Days after becoming Pope, Francis told the press that, "[St. Francis of Assisi] is the man of poverty, the man of peace, the man who loves and protects creation, the same created world with which we don't have a good relationship... How I would like a church that is poor and that is for the poor..." (as cited in Motte, 2013, p. 165).

The peaceful, poor, humble, and environmentally conscious influences of St. Francis of Assisi have affected Pope Francis's cultural and occupational adaptations in Rome. Pope Francis quickly rejected the regal papal traditions of wearing red shoes, the red cape, a gold cross, and residing in the papal apartment in the Apostolic Palace. Rather, he chooses to wear his worn-out black cap shoes, his own iron cross, and his white papal cassock, and he stays at the Vatican boarding house for visiting bishops and church leaders (Flamini, 2013). These rejections of traditions highlight the changes that Pope Francis hopes to make as leader of the church—changes that closely align with his consistent themes and aim to make a 'poor church' rather than a 'church for the poor' (Bilocura, 2013, p. 165).

Since Pope Francis's inauguration in 2013, he has quickly spoken on and thoughtfully questioned themes of poverty, globalization, social responsibility, and capitalism in a way that has been profoundly revolutionary. Regarding globalization, the pope has mentioned the people of the church currently existing within a "globalization of indifference" (Pope Francis, 2013, #54; Cox, 2014, p. 24). As citizens of the world, we should rather have a social sensitivity that is inclusive of all people—even (and specifically) the deeply impoverished in developing countries. In doing so, the church could "rebuild their shattered image [...] through renewed attention to poverty and inclusion" (Franco, 2013, p.73).

Pope Francis suggests that, in order to strive towards being a compassionate globe, the Church needs to be socially responsible and focused on breaking down, rather than building up, barriers (Dionne, 2013). According to Francis, to do so, the Catholic church must live as a horizontal church—one that values each leader and laity as an important member that will live out Jesus' word and gospel at home, at work, and in worship. Francis has discarded the belief that "baptism suffices for life of discipleship" (Sanneh, 2013, p. 166), and instead preaches that membership in the church means having an active and essential role in building bridges between the church and the world (Sanneh, 2013).

As a church, two of the largest obstacles faced in building these bridges are capitalism and materialism (of note, Pope Francis has stated that he is "all in favour of capitalism [...] as long as these opportunities are open to everyone and all benefit") (Duncan, 2014, p. 191). In Pope Francis's exhortation, titled *Evangelii Gaudium*, he merges social responsibility with our current state of economic policies by calling on all participants in the economy (i.e., property owners, business leaders, financiers, CEOs, politicians, policymakers, etc.) to live like Jesus and spread the gospel (Pope Francis, 2013; Norcross & Koopman, 2015). The Pope

emphatically states that Jesus says that money is the root of all evil; you cannot serve both God and money (Duncan, 2014, p. 178). This is proven, he argues, by our current unjust economic structures in which the “powerful feed upon the powerless” (Duncan, 2014, p. 189). Pope Francis insists that the measured outcomes of economic policies and development need to be based on how they have improved sensible life opportunities for all (Duncan, 2014). After all, failure to help the poor is the rejection of God (Norcross & Koopman, 2015).

It should be no surprise, then, that Pope Francis’s public addresses have shown an obvious shift towards social and economic justice. The Pope has made it a priority to shine the global spotlight on the poor (Bilocura, 2013), people who have been ignored and forgotten in these discourses for decades. Pope Francis calls Catholics to not only donate time, talent, and treasure, but to challenge systemic powers that result in people living in homelessness and isolation. Pope Francis urgently and often states that eliminating poverty is at the heart of the Christian mission and is the “central demand of the gospel” (Duncan, 2014, p. 192).

It should also be of no surprise that not all Catholics are enthusiastic about the focus of Pope Francis on systemic economic issues (Stourton, 2015; Erickson, 2015). American Catholic leaders and lay organizations whose social justice agenda primarily addresses charitable action and focuses more on issues like abortion and same-sex marriage, have expressed concern about Pope Francis “dropping away [the] focus” from these issues (Erickson, 2015, para. 15). Specifically, Pope Francis’s approach to economics has been called by some “a disruption” to traditional Catholic values (Erickson, 2015, para. 2). Some critics have gone as far as to accuse Pope Francis of distorting the teachings of the Church altogether, claiming that his view of CST has more in common with socialist and even communist ideas than CST (Stourton, 2015). This perspective on Pope Francis was in full view during the Pope’s visit to the United States in September, of 2015. In response to this visit, numerous conservative political sources protested the Pope’s message to Congress; one Catholic Congressman, Representative Paul Gosar, even declared that he was boycotting the Pope’s Joint Address to Congress (Gosar, 2015).

Despite this resistance from Conservative Catholics, only 45% of whom report favorable ratings of Pope Francis, Pope Francis enjoys a 90% approval rating from American Catholics at this time (Erickson, 2015). His urgent call for social justice resurges and re-centers the “preferential option for the poor and vulnerable” to the heart of the church’s mission. Pope Francis does not merely suggest that the Church treats the poor equally and lives in solidarity with them, but mandates that, as Christians, we are expected to do so. From his name choice to his rejection of regal papal tradition to his specific focus on social justice, Pope Francis has established a clear mission for us all: to challenge injustice and to be a poor Church for the poor.

## **Pope Francis's Impact on the American Social Work Context**

Although the call for social justice has re-centered the church, the uptake of the message in the field of social work is less apparent. When the Pope visited the United States in September 2015, the National Association of Social Work released an article highlighting specific issues he addressed that social workers and their clients are immersed in every day: racial inequality, immigration, economic injustice, and criminal justice (NASW, 2015). His mentioning of these issues highlights how pertinent his teachings and public discussions are for social workers.

Although the issues raised by Pope Francis highlight the natural overlap between his message and social work, he challenges the profession in stating that welfare projects are necessary, yet not enough, in alleviating poverty and working in solidarity with the poor. Rather, he says that, “as long as the problems of the poor are not radically resolved by rejecting the absolute autonomy of markets and financial speculation and by attacking the structural cause of inequality, no solution will be found... inequality is the root of social ills” (Pope Francis, 2013, #202; Duncan, 2014, p. 193).

How social workers develop helping relationships with clients who are poor can be complicated by workers' desire to “save” the poor, rather than stand in solidarity with them to try to change the systems and structures that often create clients' impoverished conditions. When applying preferential option for the poor to real-life situations, roles can become muddled when workers view themselves as saviors rather than as partners and fellow travelers. “Bill,” the social worker in our next case example, explores this tension when working with Catholic Charities to deliver mentoring programs to youth living in under-resourced neighborhoods.

### **Case Example #2: Mentoring At-Risk Youth: Saving or Solidarity?**

*Bill has recently graduated with his Masters of Social Work from a Catholic university. He was raised Lutheran, and is a convert to Catholicism. He was hired by Catholic Charities to provide training and supervision to three mentoring programs for low-income, African-American youth in suburban and rural areas in his region. While in graduate school, he was influenced by several teach-ins led by the university's Black Lives Matter (BLM) group. Through these educational opportunities, Bill became committed to using his social work degree to combat the “school-to-prison” pipeline through mentoring of African-American youth.*

*At his first meeting with mentoring coordinators of each site, the discussion quickly turned to the shared sense of the staff that many of the recently recruited mentors are not following the goals of vocational mentoring in the program. One of the mentor coordinators said, “It's like the mentors pity these kids and view them as needing a rescue from their families...one mentor told me last year that she returns home from her mentoring sessions feeling sad, because she wishes she could adopt her mentee to give her a better life.” Another coordinator, acknowledging that her program serves youth who live in high-poverty, high-crime neighborhoods, shared*

*that she is struggling to find ways to get her mentors involved in the community and in the lives of their mentees' families. "It's like they just want to come to our building, do their mentoring, and get out of there as fast as they can." Bill observed that all three of the mentoring programs used the parish house of the local Catholic parish as their meeting space. He made a note to himself to talk to the parish priest and staff about how they might partner with the community to encourage stronger integration of the mentoring programs with the surrounding areas. Additionally, he told the group that he intended to address the mentors' approach through an improved training program informed by some of the ideas he had learned from his experience with BLM. The modified program would emphasize the importance of building healthy connections with mentees by focusing on mentees' strengths and dignity, rather than focusing only on their individual problems and the challenges of their environment.*

### **Social Justice and the Practice of Social Work**

As illustrated by the case example above, Bill is a Catholic social worker operating from the CST value of attending to the needs and strengths of the poor. Through this value base, he is actively seeking to make CST come alive in his social work practice by engaging the community and prioritizing its needs, rather than allowing it to remain marginalized and misunderstood. However, while Bill should be applauded for these efforts, it is also critical to explore the origins of these values. It is not clear how much Bill learned about the importance of CST as part of his MSW program at a Catholic school. As we will see in this next section, the infusion of CST in social work education is hardly a given, even when it involves teaching and learning about the poor.

The mission statements of Catholic schools of social work consistently reflect a desire to incorporate the values of faith and social justice into their curricula (Brenden & Shank, 2012). Similarly, scholars often promote the role of spirituality in professional education (Ai, 2002). The relationship between social work and religion is well documented through analysis of the literature (Graham & Shier, 2009), which specifically reinforces the importance of religion and spirituality in assessing the "person-in-environment" perspective of professional social work. However, the integration of religion and spirituality into professional education has continued to be a struggle (Barker, 2007), as the role of spirituality in formal education remains in tension with more traditional approaches to learning (Cohlic, 2006). Further complicating this struggle is the lack of guidance provided in the curriculum for social work students about integrating professional social work with faith and spirituality (Northcut, 2005; Praglin, 2004). Additional challenges come from others who suggest that preparing students as social workers should not include an explicit focus on faith as part of the human experience (Sheridan, 1994).

In the context of these tensions, we developed a content analysis focused on understanding what is being taught in Catholic schools of social work (Pryce, Kelly, Reiland, & Wilk, 2011). In so doing, our aim was to understand

how students are being prepared to grapple with concepts proposed by CST, particularly the “preferential option for the poor,” as social work professionals. Through this analysis, course syllabi of foundation level MSW courses were collected from 11 of the 12 accredited Catholic schools of social work. In total, 38 syllabi were included in the analysis. After developing a coding manual together and employing several additional methods to ensure rigor and trustworthiness (Pryce et al., 2011), the research team coded these syllabi with particular attention to the ways by which course content descriptions, assignments, and themes addressed poverty.

Findings from the analysis suggest that concepts such as “diversity,” “strengths,” and “social justice” are emphasized far more than explicit attention to poverty in the introductory-level core courses standard to first-year curricula within these programs. Not surprisingly, policy courses attend to economic and structural issues more often than their clinical and practice-focused counterparts, particularly in terms of the kinds of assignments offered to students. Unfortunately, analysis suggests that students are not receiving the kind of formal guidance and support in addressing issues of poverty in their courses, even in Catholic MSW programs. Instead, findings suggest that at this point, much responsibility is left to students themselves to systematically and critically engage issues of poverty within their education and practice (Pryce et al., 2011). These findings continue to suggest that Catholic social work education has work to do in placing the needs of the poor in the foreground.

## **Discussion**

The complex issues highlighted in this chapter outline some of the important challenges facing the profession of social work. Addressing these issues is imperative for our profession to provide effective service to those in economic need. Poverty continues to be the dominant social crisis in our society, and our current economic circumstances suggest it is of heightened concern (Reisch, 2013). Recent data from the Census Bureau suggest that the number of Americans living below the poverty line reached its highest level since the inception of the Bureau in 1959. Along the same lines, median household income levels in 2010 fell to levels similar to those of 1997 (Tavernise, 2011). Additionally, recent data indicate that income inequality has only accelerated in the past 40 years, with American families at the top seeing a 70% increase in income while the income of middle-class families stayed flat (Urban Institute, 2016). These data suggest a lack of growth within the middle class, and an even more dire situation for the poor in the United States.

As social work programs, we are also challenged by Pope Francis’s message, and to date, our response to his challenge is only minimally visible. In surveying Catholic MSW websites, the influence and presence of Pope Francis was limited to professors’ individual writings or campus-wide reflections on the Pope’s visit to the United States; little to no content was identified directly linking Catholic Social Teaching, solidarity with the poor, and social work. One notable excep-

tion is at the Catholic University of America, where a scholarship, called “Pope Francis Scholars,” has recently been developed. Each year, ten Catholic MSW students receive full-tuition to attend the university. In turn, the students are expected to serve the university and broader community in meaningful ways during and following their time as a student (CSWNA, 2015).

Pope Francis’s commitment to the preferential option for the poor and vulnerable inspires other important program changes focused on meaningful advances toward social justice. As individuals and as a profession, we are called to respond similarly to Pope Francis’s challenge with energy and enthusiasm. Social workers, while continuing to provide welfare services and community resources, need to more urgently and thoughtfully challenge structural causes of inequality in our country and world. As Christian social workers, we are reminded by Pope Francis’s message that this is essential in most accurately living out Jesus’ word and gospel. Until we can begin to question and devalue the complex systems that are perpetuating social ills, we will not make lasting impacts to eradicate poverty and further the gospel of joy and love.

### **Implications for Education and Practice**

The work of the social workers in our case examples need not be exceptional if the profession (and religiously-affiliated schools of social work in particular) take the initiative to return social work back to some of its first principles. For social work practice and education, we propose the following recommendations to students, faculty, and practitioners to strengthen programs and empower students in the efforts to increase attention to the needs of the poor.

1. *Students must be challenged to attend to poverty explicitly and systematically in their education and choice of social work career path.*

Although students bring hope and openness to the educational experience as aspiring social workers, they may not bring a specific desire to work with clients who are poor. This is not meant as a criticism of new social work students as much as a reflection on the reality that Specht & Courtney (1994) identified over 20 years ago: many incoming social work students are themselves coming from middle-class backgrounds and aspire to work as therapists, intending to focus on mental health concerns most explicitly, and possibly with clients possessing similar backgrounds to themselves (Perry, 2009).

It is critical for social work students to challenge themselves and their peers to reflect on their identity as social workers within the historic context of the profession. This attention to the role of economic status seems to be of particular salience at this point in American life, as our country faces ever widening gaps between the rich and poor (Reisch, 2013), and as awareness grows regarding the structural racism illuminated by the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement.

One way to engage in this reflection is to initiate action as a student body on behalf of social justice, particularly among the poor (Funge, 2011). Social work students can join peers at their college or university to address justice issues. In a study of student writing (McPherson, Perry, & Walsh, 2010), the concept of action emerged as key to student understanding of social justice, despite the fact (according to the content analysis featured in this chapter) that the social work curricula does not seem to regularly engage in this action-oriented framework. One's role and identity as a student may allow social work students the support needed to leverage some of these values in service of the community and profession.

2. *Students and instructors must explicitly include poverty in social work curricula, course assignments, and classroom activities, or it may go unexamined.* Although the chance to customize an assignment based on personal interests and comfort level is appealing and commonly offered, this approach, particularly within foundation level social work coursework and practice, will likely significantly limit a student's experience with issues of poverty, both in the classroom and in the field. In other words, despite the anxiety and discomfort that students and instructors often experience in taking on these complex issues (Funge, 2011; Daniel, 2011), it is critical that social work curriculum challenge students and faculty by incorporating issues of poverty into papers and group assignments.

To do so, departments and schools of social work must share the responsibility for teaching social justice across faculty and staff. This can help alleviate faculty concerns regarding conflicting with institutional norms, losing support of faculty, or jeopardizing one's position (Funge, 2011). Students must similarly experience a sense of institutional support for teaching this content (Funge, 2011) so that they can gain experience and confidence in effectively addressing these complex issues as Bill and Helen do in the case examples above.

Catholic scholars also encourage social work colleagues to make use of Catholic Social Teaching as an "articulate and well-developed system of social ethics" that describe and define social justice and can "fill a serious and compelling void in the social work profession" to guide social work in pursuit of social justice (Brenden & Shank, 2012, p. 130). This frame may assist students and faculty in grappling with the challenges presented by poverty and social injustice, challenges students will inevitably confront upon their entrance to the field (Davis & Wainwright, 2005).

3. *Both students and faculty must avoid the diversity trap in dealing with social justice issues related to poverty and the preferential option for the poor.* Based on the content analysis presented above, it is clear that all MSW programs examined are supportive of student interest in social justice on

behalf of their clients. The problem, however, is that sometimes social justice is discussed under the concept of “diversity,” which may mask the structural and economic issues most powerful in addressing issues of poverty. Furthermore, although our Education Policy Accreditation Standards emphasize diversity and populations at risk (CSWE, 2008), other terms, such as social and economic justice and oppression, remain undefined, which makes measurement and monitoring of these ideas in curriculum more difficult. Finally, with the exception of Devore and Schlesinger (1999) and Longres (2000), few scholars address social class as a major variable or focus on the intersection of class and ethnicity. These limitations impede consideration of how diversity, social justice, and oppression are linked. They also fail to encourage faculty and students to contend with the development of strategies to change oppressive structures, particularly those disadvantaging the poor, who arguably suffer the most serious long-term negative life outcomes (e.g., health, life expectancy, educational attainment, exposure to violence), regardless of their race, sexual orientation, or religious affiliation (as cited in Iceland, 2006).

4. *All social workers, students, faculty, and practitioners must consider our commitment to the poor as critical to the future of the profession.*

In extending findings into the larger practice domain, it is important to consider the ways by which the absence of focus on issues of poverty may influence the profession of social work more broadly. At the professional level, our ongoing distancing from the needs of the poor place both the profession and the larger society at risk. If social workers fail to address the needs of the poor, a few questions will linger: can social work claim to be a profession that advocates effectively for the vulnerable when so little of our time is spent preparing new social workers to work effectively with clients in poverty? Without such an emphasis, what ultimately will distinguish social work from other helping professions that tend to offer psychotherapy as the main intervention to address client challenges?

## **Conclusion**

In sum, students, educators, and practitioners must consider creative ways to support one another in working with clients impacted by poverty. This support is critical within all social work contexts, including those religiously-affiliated programs that may traditionally and explicitly identify the unique importance of the poor. Such support can include facilitating collaboration, both at the student and professional levels, between more senior and junior social workers. Social work departments, including faculty and field staff, can work together to identify ways to enhance attention to issues of poverty in and outside the classroom. At a curricular level, improvements to syllabi can be complemented

with explicit attention within field education to support students in learning about and contending with issues of poverty among their clients. Further, given the impact of federal and state budget cuts on systems of care, it is critical that social work educators engage students in formal exposure to advocacy (Kilbane, Pryce, & Hong, 2013) as a means of addressing client needs within very serious fiscal constraints.

Beyond these suggested changes, it is worth considering ways that religiously-affiliated social work programs can engage issues of poverty explicitly around conversations regarding faith. For many social workers, a faith-based orientation toward working with the poor may prove more compelling than a secular approach. Each faith tradition has stated values regarding the importance of addressing the needs of the poor (Swatos & Kivisto, 1998). Through these traditions, social work students and practitioners may find inspiration or provocation to engage in work on behalf of the poor beyond what they may encounter in a secular framework.

## References

- Addams, J. (1911/1990). *Twenty years at Hull-House*, with autobiographical notes, by Jane Addams; with illustrations by Norah Hamilton. New York, NY: The Macmillan Company.
- Ai, A. (2002). Integrating spirituality into professional education: A challenging but feasible task. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, 22(1-2), 103-130.
- Banerjee, M. M. (2011). Social work Scholars' representation of Rawls: A critique. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 47(2), 189-211.
- Barker, S. (2007). The integration of spirituality and religion content in social work education: Where we've been, where we're going. *Social Work and Christianity*, 34(2), 146-166.
- Bilocura, T. (2013). Pope Francis, Christian Mission, and the Church of Saint Francis. *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 37(3), 165-166.
- Brenden, M. A. F., & Shank, B. W. (2012). Social work for social justice: Strengthening social work education through the integration of Catholic social teaching. *Social Work & Christianity*, 39 (2), 128-150.
- Catholic Charities of St. Paul and Minneapolis. (2008). Retrieved from [http://www.osjspm.org/social\\_teaching\\_documents.aspx](http://www.osjspm.org/social_teaching_documents.aspx).
- Catholic Social Workers' National Association. (2015). Pope Francis Scholars at the Catholic University of America. Retrieved from <http://www.cswna.org/blog/CSWNA-Blog/pope-francis-scholars-at-the-catholic-university-of-america>.
- Cohlic, D. (2006). Spirituality in social work pedagogy: A Canadian perspective. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, 26(3-4), 197-217.
- Cooney, A., Harrington, P., & Medaille, J. C. (2002). *Catholic social teaching*. London: Third Way Publications.
- Council on Social Work Education, (2009). Annual Program Meeting, Final Program, Retrieved February 7, 2012, from <http://www.cswe.org/Meetings/APMArchives/2009APM.aspx>.
- Council on Social Work Education (2008). *Educational policy and accreditation standard*. Alexandria, VA: Author.

- Cox, H. (2014). Pope Francis: Liberation Theology's Second Act? *The Nation*, 23-25.
- Currie, S. J., & Charles, L. (2011). Pursuing Jesuit, Catholic identity and mission at US Jesuit colleges and universities. *Journal of Catholic Education*, 14(3), 4.
- Daniel, C. (2011). Lessons learned: Pedagogical tensions and struggles with instruction on multiculturalism in social work education programs. *Social Work Education*, 30(03), 250-265.
- Davis, A. & Wainwright, S. (2005). Combating poverty and social exclusion: Implications for social work education. *Social Work Education*. 24(3), 259-273.
- Deane, H. A. (1963). *The political and social ideas of St. Augustine*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Deepak, A. C., Rountree, M. A., & Scott, J. (2015). Delivering diversity and social justice in social work education: The power of context. *Journal of Progressive Human Services*, 26(2), 107-125.
- Devore, W., & Schlesinger, e. G. (1999). *Ethnic-sensitive social work practice* (5th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon
- Dionne, E. (2013, December). Resurrection: Pope Francis Brings the Freshness of the Gospel to the Catholic Church. *Foreign Policy*, 88-89.
- Duncan, B. (2014). Pope Francis's call for social justice in the global economy. *Australasian Catholic Record*, 178-193.
- Erickson, A. (2015). For conservatives sowing confusion. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/sf/local/2015/09/18/francis-is-a-global-sensation-but-to-certain-traditional-catholics-his-message-rings-hollow/>.
- Finn, J. L., & Jacobson, M. (2003). Just practice: Steps toward a new social work paradigm. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 39(1), 57-78.
- Flamini, R. (2013). Pope Francis: Resurrecting Catholicism's image? *World Affairs*, 176(3), 25-34.
- Franco, M. (2013). The first global pope. *Survival*, 55(3), 71-77.
- Funge, S. P. (2011). Promoting the social justice orientation of students: The role of the educator. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 47(1), 73-90.
- Gosar, P. (2015). Why I am Boycotting Pope Francis's Address to Congress. Retrieved from <http://townhall.com/columnists/congressmanpaulgosar/2015/09/17/why-i-am-boycotting-pope-francis-address-to-congress-n2053596/page/full>.
- Graham, J.R., & Shier, M. (2009). Religion and social work: An analysis of faith traditions, themes, and global north/south authorship. *Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Social Work*, 28(1-2), 215-233.
- Gutierrez, G. (1973). *A theology of liberation: History, politics, and salvation*, trans. Caridad Inda and John Eagleson. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- Hawkins, L., Fook, J., & Ryan, M. (2001). Social workers' use of language of social justice. *British Journal of Social Work*, 31(1), 1-13.
- Holosko, M. J., Winkel, M., Crandall, C., & Briggs, H. (2015). A content analysis of mission statements of ur top 50 schools of social work. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 51(2), 222-236.
- Iceland, J. (2006). *Poverty in America: A handbook*. (2nd Ed.) Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Kilbane, T., Pryce, J., & Hong, P. (2013). Advocacy week: A model to prepare clinical social workers for lobby day. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 49(1), 173-179.
- Latin American Catholic Bishops. (1979). *Third General Conference of Latin American Bishops*.
- Latin American Catholic Bishops. (2007). *Fifth general conference of the bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean*. Retrieved from <http://www.celam.org/aparecida/Ingles.pdf>.

- Longres, John. (2000). *Human behavior in the social environment*. Itasca, IL: FE. Peacock Publishers, Inc.
- Luther, M., Pelikan, J., Poellot, D. E., Hansen, W. A., Oswald, H. C., Grimm, H. J., Lehmann, H. T., Hillerbrand, H. J. (1955). *Luther's works*. Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.
- McLaughlin, A. M., Gray, E., & Wilson, M. (2015). Child welfare workers and social justice: Mending the disconnect. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 59, 177-183.
- McPherson, M., Terry, P., & Walsh, F. (2010). Investigating social justice understanding through student writing samples: An emergent theme analysis approach. *The International Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 6(1), 1-24.
- Motte, M. (2013). Pope Francis, Christian Mission, and the Church of Saint Francis. *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 37(3), 165-166.
- National Association of Social Workers. (2008). *NASW code of ethics*. Retrieved January 25, 2007, from <http://www.socialworkers.org/pubs/code/code.asp>.
- National Association of Social Workers. (2015) The Importance of Pope Francis's Message to the Joint Session of Congress. Retrieved from <http://www.socialworkblog.org/advocacy/2015/09/the-importance-of-pope-francis-message-to-the-joint-session-of-congress/>.
- Norcross, E., & Koopman, C. (2015). Pope Francis and the Economy: Evangelii Gaudium, New Institutional Economics, and the Search for Consistency Across Disciplines. *New Institutional Economics, and the Search for Consistency Across Disciplines* (September 21, 2015).
- Northcut, T. (2005). The role of religion and spirituality in clinical social work: Creating a space for integration in MSW/MDiv joint programs. *Journal of Religion and Spirituality*, 24(1-2), 45-54.
- O'Neill, P., & Miller, J. (2015). Hand and glove: How the curriculum promotes an antiracism commitment in a school for social work. *Smith College Studies in Social Work*, 85(2), 159-175.
- Perry, R. (2009). Factors influencing M.S.W. students' interest in clinical practice. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, 29(1), 1540-7349.
- Pope Francis. (2013). *Evangelii Gaudium*. Vatican Press. Retrieved from [http://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost\\_exhortations/doc\\_ments/pa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium\\_en.pdf](http://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/doc_ments/pa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium_en.pdf).
- Pope John Paul II. (1995). *Evangelium vitae*. Retrieved January 20, 2009, from [http://www.vatican.va/edocs/ENG0141/\\_INDEX.HTM](http://www.vatican.va/edocs/ENG0141/_INDEX.HTM).
- Pope Leo XIII (1891). *Rerum Novarum: On the condition of workers*. Retrieved September 19, 2011, from <http://faculty.cua.edu/pennington/law111/papalsocialencyclicals.htm>.
- Praglin, L. (2004). Spirituality, religion, and social work: An effort towards interdisciplinary conversation. *Journal of Religion and Spirituality*, 23(4), 67-84.
- Pryce, J., Kelly, M., Reiland, M., & Wilk, E. (2011). Do catholic social work programs "prefer" the poor? Results from a content analysis of MSW program syllabi. *Social Work & Christianity*, 37 (4), 407-423.
- Reisch, M. (2013). Social work education and the neo-liberal challenge: The US response to increasing global inequality. *Social Work Education*, 32(6), 715-733.
- Reynolds, B. C. (1934). *Between client and community: A study in responsibility in social case work*. Northampton, MA: Smith College School for Social Work.
- Reynolds, B. C. (1951). *Social work and social living: Explorations in philosophy and practice*. New York, NY: Citadel Press.
- Richmond, M. E. (1922). *What is social case work? An introductory description*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.

- Sanneh, L. (2013). Pope Francis, Christian Mission, and the Church of Saint Francis. *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 37(3), 165-166.
- Sheridan, M. J. (1994). Inclusion of content on religion and spirituality in the social work curriculum: A Study of faculty views. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 30(3), 363-76.
- Specht, H., & Courtney, M. (1994). *Unfaithful angels: How social work has abandoned its mission*. New York: Free Press.
- Stourton, E. (2015, June 7). Is the Pope a communist? *BBC News Magazine*, retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-33024951>.
- Swatos, W. H., & Kivisto, P. (1998). *Encyclopedia of religion and society*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.
- Tavernise, S. (2011, September 13). Soaring poverty casts spotlight on 'lost decade'. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/14/us/14census.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/14/us/14census.html?_r=1).
- Twomey, G. S. (2005). *The "preferential option for the poor" in Catholic social thought from John XXIII to John Paul II*. Lewiston, NY: Mellen Press.
- Urban Institute. (2016). *Nine charts about wealth inequality in America*. <http://apps.urban.org/features/wealth-inequality-charts/>.
- U.S. Catholic Bishops. (1986). *Pastoral letter on Catholic social teaching and the U.S. economy*. Retrieved January 20, 2009, from [http://www.osjspm.org/economic\\_justice\\_for\\_all.aspx](http://www.osjspm.org/economic_justice_for_all.aspx).
- Vincent, N. J. (2012). Exploring the integration of social justice into social work research curricula. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 48(2), 205-222.

# Doing The Right Thing: A Christian Perspective on Ethical Decision-Making for Christians in Social Work Practice<sup>1</sup>

---

*David A. Sherwood*

Imagine you are on the staff of a Christian Counseling Center and in the course of a week you encounter the following clients:

1. A minister who became sexually involved with a teenage girl at a previous church several years ago. His current church is not aware of this. He says he has “dealt with his problem.”
2. A Christian woman whose husband is physically abusive and who has threatened worse to her and their young child if she tells anyone or leaves him. She comes to your office with cuts and bruises, afraid to go home and afraid not to go home. She doesn’t know what she should do or can do.
3. A single mother who is severely depressed and who is not taking adequate care of her two young children, both under the age of four. She denies that her personal problems are affecting her ability to take care of her children.

The list could easily go on. Helping professionals, Christian or otherwise, are daily confronted with issues that are immensely complex and that call forth judgments and actions that confound any attempts to neatly separate “clinical knowledge and skill,” our preferred professional roles and boundaries, and, fundamentally, our world-view, faith, moral judgment, and character. Much as we would like to keep it simple, real life is messy and all of a piece. All kinds of things interconnect and interact. How would you respond to clients like the ones I just mentioned?

Christian social workers need to know who they are and what resources they have to do the right thing as children of God—personally, socially, and professionally. What are our resources and limits in choosing and acting ethically as Christians who are placed in helping relationships with others? I will try to review briefly a Christian perspective on:

- When we have a moral problem.
- Conditions under which we choose and act.
- Faith and the hermeneutical spiral (understanding God’s will).
- How the Bible teaches us regarding values and ethics.

- The Principle/Practice Pyramid—using fundamental values, guiding principles, and moral rules to make character-driven judgments in case-level ethical dilemmas
- A decision-making model that integrates the deontological (“ought”) dimensions with the teleological (purpose and consequences) dimensions of a problem.
- Evangelism and ethical professional social work practice as a case in point.
- The fundamental role of a character formed through the discipleship and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

We cannot devise or forcibly wrench out of the scriptures a set of rules that will simply tell us what to do if we will only be willing to obey. It appears that God has something else in mind for us as God grows us up into the image of Christ. Ultimately, “doing the right thing” results from our making *judgments* that grow out of our *character* as we are “*changed into his likeness* from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

### **When Do We Have a Moral Problem?**

When do we have a moral “problem?” I would argue that value issues are so pervasive in life that there is virtually no question we face that does not have moral dimensions at some level. Even the choice regarding what brand of coffee to use (or whether to use coffee at all) is not a completely value-neutral question. However, for practical purposes I think it is helpful to realize that moral “problems” tend to be characterized by the following conditions:

#### **1. More than one value is at stake and they are in some degree of conflict.**

This is more common than we would like to think. It need not be a conflict between good and bad. It is more usually differing goods or differing bads. A maxim that I drill into my students is “You can’t maximize all values simultaneously.” Which is to say life continually confronts us with choices, and to choose one thing *always* means to give up or have less of something else. And that something else may be a very good thing, so serious choices are usually very costly ones. A familiar, lighthearted version of this is the adage “You can’t have your cake and eat it too.” This is one of life’s truisms that is very easy to forget or tempting to ignore, but which is at the heart of all value and moral problems. No conflict, no problem.

#### **2. There is uncertainty about what values are, in fact, involved or what they mean.**

For example, what are all the relevant values involved in a decision regarding abortion? And what, exactly, is meant by “choice,” “right to life,” “a person”? Where do these values come from? What is their basis? How do they put us under obligation?

**3. There is uncertainty about what the actual facts are.**

What is the true situation? What are the relevant facts? Are they known? Can they be known? How well can they be known under the circumstances?

**4. There is uncertainty about the actual consequences of alternative possible choices and courses of action.**

Often we say that choices and actions should be guided by results. While it is true that their morality is at least in part influenced by their intended and actual consequences, Christians believe that God has built certain “oughts” like justice and love into the creation and that results always have to be measured by some standard or “good” that is beyond the naked results themselves. It is also crucial to remember that consequences can never be fully known at the time of decision and action. The best we can ever do at the time is to *predict*. We are obligated to make the best predictions we can, but we must be humbled by the limitations of our ability to anticipate actual results. However, unintended consequences turn out to be every bit as real and often more important than intended ones, especially if we haven’t done our homework.

**Under What Conditions Do We Have to Choose and Act?**

Given this understanding of a moral “problem,” it seems to me that real-life value choices and moral decisions are always made under these conditions:

**1. We have a problem.**

An actual value conflict is present or at least perceived. For example, we want to tell the truth and respect our dying father’s personal rights and dignity by telling him the prognosis, but we don’t want to upset him, perhaps hasten his death, or create possible complications for ourselves and the hospital staff.

**2. We always have significant limitations in our facts, knowledge, understanding, and ability to predict the consequences of our actions.**

What causes teenage unmarried pregnancy? What policies would lead to a decrease in teenage pregnancy? What other unintended consequences might the policies have? Correct information and knowledge are very hard (often impossible) to come by. As Christians we know that human beings are both finite (limited) and fallen (liable to distortion from selfishness and other forms of sin). The more we can do to overcome or reduce these limitations the better off we’ll be. But the beginning of wisdom is to recognize our weakness and dependence.

**3. Ready or not, we have to decide and do something, at least for the time being, even if the decision is to ignore the problem.**

Life won’t permit us to stay on the fence until we thoroughly understand all the value issues, have all the relevant data, conduct a perfectly complete analysis, and develop a completely Christ-like character. So, we have to learn how to make the best choices we can under the circumstances. (“You can’t maximize all values simultaneously” but you have to give it your best shot!)

**4. Whatever decision we make and action we take will be fundamentally influenced by our assumptions, world-view, faith—whatever that is.**

“Facts,” even when attainable, don’t sustain moral judgments by themselves. They must be interpreted in the light of at least one faith-based value judgment. Where do my notions of good and bad, healthy and sick, functional and dysfunctional come from? Never from the “facts” alone (Lewis, 1943, 1947).

**5. We would like to have definitive, non-ambiguous, prescriptive direction so that we can be completely certain of the rightness of our choice, but we never can.**

Not from scripture, not from the law, not from our mother. We want to *know* without a doubt that we are right. This has always been part of the allure of legalism, unquestioning submission to authorities of various stripes, and simplistic reduction of complex situations. The only way (to seem) to be saved by the law is to chop it down to our own puny size.

**6. We may not have legalistic, prescriptive formulas, but we *do* have guidance and help.**

Doing the right thing is not just a subjective, relativistic venture. God knows the kind of help we really need to grow up in Christ and God has provided it. We need to be open to the kind of guidance God actually gives instead of demanding the kind of guidance we think would be best. What God has actually given is Himself in Jesus Christ, the story of love, justice, grace, and redemption given witness in scripture, the Holy Spirit, and the community of the church, historically, universally, and locally.

**7. Ultimately, doing the right thing is a matter of identity and character.**

While both the Bible and the NASW Code of Ethics give us useful rules for applying our values to practice, we will always have to make character-driven judgments based on our core values. In the last analysis, our morality (or lack of it) depends much more on *who* we are (or are becoming) than what we know or the procedures we use. We must become persons who have taken on the mind and character of Christ as new creations. And it turns out that this is precisely what the Bible says God is up to—growing us up into the image of Christ, from one degree of glory to another. The “problem” of making and living out these moral decisions turns out to be part of the plot, part of God’s strategy, suited to our nature as we were created. Instead of fighting and resenting the hardness of moral choice and action, maybe we should *embrace* it as part of God’s dynamic for our growth.

## **Faith and the Hermeneutical Spiral**

### **Walking By Faith Is Not Optional**

Christian or not, consciously or not, intentionally or not, we all inevitably approach understanding the world and ourselves on the basis of assumptions or presuppositions about the nature of things. Walking by faith is not optional.

All human beings do it. We do have some choice (and responsibility) for what we continue to put our faith in, however. That's where choice comes in.

Is love real or a rationalization? Does might make right? Do persons possess inherent dignity and value? Are persons capable of meaningful choice and responsibility? Are human beings so innately good that guilt and sin are meaningless or destructive terms? Is human life ultimately meaningless and absurd? Is the physical universe (and ourselves) a product of mindless chance? Is there a God (or are *we* God)? These are a few of the really important questions in life and there is no place to stand to try to answer them that does not include some sort of faith.

### **Interpreting the Facts**

Like it or not, the world, life, and scripture are not simply experienced or known directly. Things are *always* interpreted on the basis of assumptions and beliefs we have about the nature of the world that are part of our faith position. Knowingly or not, we are continually engaged in hermeneutics, interpretation on the basis of principles.

My interpretation of the meaning of scripture, for example, is strongly affected by whether or not I believe the Bible is a strictly human product or divinely inspired. It is further affected by whether or not I assume the Bible was intended to and can, in fact, function as a legal codebook providing specific prescriptive answers to all questions. My beliefs about these things are never simply derived from the data of the scripture only, but they should never be independent of that data either. In fact, a good hermeneutical principle for understanding scripture is that our interpretations *must* do justice to the actual data of scripture (Osborne, 1991; Swartley, 1983).

The same is true regarding our understanding or interpretation of the "facts" of our experience. The same event will be seen and interpreted differently by persons who bring different assumptions and expectations to it.

On the day of Pentecost, the Bible records that the disciples "were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them" (Acts 2:4). Some in the crowd didn't know anything about the Holy Spirit, but were amazed by the fact that they heard their own native languages. "Are not all of these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his native tongue" (Acts 2:7-8). Some, however, heard the speech as drunken nonsense and said, "They have had too much wine" (Acts 2:13). Different interpretive, hermeneutical frameworks were in place, guiding the understanding of the "facts."

As a child, I occasionally experienced corporal punishment in the form of spankings from my mother (on one memorable occasion administered with a willow switch). The fact that I was on rare occasions spanked is data. But what did those spankings "mean" to me? Did I experience abuse? Was I experiencing loving limits in a way that I could understand? The experience had to be interpreted within the framework of the rest of my experiences and beliefs (however

formed) about myself, my mother, and the rest of the world. And those “facts” continue to be interpreted or re-interpreted today in my memory. In this case, I never doubted her love for me or (at least often) her justice.

### **The Hermeneutical Spiral**

We come by our personal faith position in a variety of ways—adopted without question from our families, friends, and culture; deliberately and critically chosen; refined through experience; fallen into by chance or default. Or, more likely, it comes through some combination of all of these and more. However it happens, it is not a static, finished thing. Our interpretation and understanding of life proceeds in a kind of reciprocal hermeneutical spiral. Our faith position helps order and integrate (or filter and distort) the complex overload of reality that we confront. But at the same time reality has the capacity to challenge and at least partially modify or correct our assumptions and perceptions (Osborne, 1991; Sherwood 1989).

Once, the great 18th century English dictionary-maker, writer, conversationalist, and sometime philosopher Samuel Johnson was asked by his biographer Boswell how he refuted Bishop Berkeley's philosophical theory of idealism (which asserted that the physical world has no real existence). Johnson replied, “I refute it *thus*.” He thereupon vigorously kicked a large rock, causing himself considerable pain but gaining more than enough evidence (for himself, at least) to cast doubt on the sufficiency of idealist theory as a total explanation of reality.

*This* is a hermeneutical spiral. You come to interpret the world around you through the framework of your faith, wherever you got it, however good or bad it is, and however embryonic it may be. It strongly affects what you perceive (or even look for). But the world is not a totally passive or subjective thing. So you run the risk of coming away from the encounter with your faith somewhat altered, perhaps even corrected a bit, or perhaps more distorted. Then you use that altered faith in your next encounter (Osborne, 1991; Pinnock, 1984; Sire, 1980). Unfortunately, there is no guarantee that the alterations are corrections. But, *if* the Bible is true, and *if* we have eyes that want to see and ears that want to hear, we can have confidence that we are bumping along in the right general direction, guided by the Holy Spirit.

### **How Does the Bible Teach Us?**

#### **The Heresy of Legalism**

For Christians, the desire for unambiguous direction has most often led to the theological error of legalism, and then, on the rebound, to relativism. Legalism takes many forms but essentially uses the legitimate zeal for faithfulness to justify an attempt to extract from the Bible or the traditions of the elders a system of rules to cover all contingencies and then to make our relationship to God depend on our understanding and living up to those rules (Sherwood, 1989).

It is theological error because it forces the Bible to be something that it is not—an exhaustive theological and moral codebook yielding prescriptive answers to all questions. It distorts the real nature and meaning of God’s self-revelation in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Scriptures, and even nature. Taken to its extreme, it effectively denies the gospel of justification by faith in Jesus Christ and substitutes a form of works righteousness. It can take the good news of redeeming, reconciling love and distort it into a source of separation, rejection, and condemnation.

The paradigm case in the New Testament involved some of the Pharisees. Jesus had some very strong words for them. When the Pharisees condemned the disciples for breaking the Sabbath by gathering grain to eat, Jesus cited the example of David feeding his men with the temple bread, also a violation of the law, and told them, in effect, that they were missing the point of the law. “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:23–28). In the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector Jesus warned about those who “trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others” (Luke 18:9–14). He talked of those who strain out gnats and swallow camels, careful to tithe down to every herb in their gardens but neglecting the “weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith” (Matthew 23:23–24). When a group of Pharisees condemned the disciples because they didn’t wash their hands according to the Pharisees’ understanding of the requirements of purification, saying, “Why do your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders?” Jesus answered, “And why do you transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? . . . For the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God. Hear and understand: not what goes into the mouth defiles a man, but what comes out of the mouth” (Matthew 15:1–11).

### **The Heresy of Subjective Relativism**

If the Bible isn’t a comprehensive law book out of which we can infallibly derive concrete, prescriptive directions for every dilemma, what good is it? Aren’t we then left to be blown about by every wind of doctrine, led about by the spirit (or spirits) of the age we live in, guided only by our subjective, selfish desires?

This is a good example of a false dichotomy, as though these were the only two alternatives. Either the Bible is a codebook or we land in total relativism. Yet this is the conclusion often drawn, which quite falsely restricts the terms of the discussion. Once we cut loose from the deceptively certain rules of legalism it is very easy to become the disillusioned cynic—“I was tricked once, but I’m not going to be made a fool again.” If the Bible can’t give me all the answers directly then it’s all just a matter of human opinion. So the false dilemma is stated.

### **The Orthodoxy of Incarnation—What if God Had a Different Idea?**

Such conclusions assume that, to be of any practical use, God’s revelation of God’s will can only be of a certain kind, an assumption we are more likely to

take *to* the Bible than to learn *from* it. It assumes that divine guidance must be exhaustively propositional, that what we need to be good Christians and to guide our moral lives is either specific rules for every occasion or at least principles from which specific rules can rationally be derived. What if such an assumption is wrong? What if it is not in keeping with the nature of God, the nature of human beings, the nature of the Bible, or the nature of the Christian life?

What if the nature of Christian values and ethics cannot be adequately embodied or communicated in a book of rules, however complex and detailed? What if it can only be embodied in a life that is fully conformed to the will of God and communicated through the story of that life and its results?

What if God had to become a man, live a life of love and justice, be put to death innocently on the behalf of others, and raise triumphant over death to establish the kingdom of God? What if the Bible was a book about that? A true story of how to become a real person?

The point I am trying to make is that if we go to the Bible for guidance on its *own* terms, not deciding in advance the nature that guidance has to take, what we find is neither legalism nor relativism but precisely the kind of guidance that suits the kind of reality God actually made, the kind of creatures we actually are, the kind of God with whom we relate.

We learn that ethical practice has more to do with our identity, our growth in character and virtue, than it does with airtight rules and that the Bible is just the kind of book to help us do this. It may not be as tidy as we would like. It may not be as easy as we would like to always tell the good guys from the bad guys. We may not always be able to act with the certain knowledge that we are doing just the right (or wrong) thing. But we will have the opportunity to get closer and closer to the truth of God, to grow up into the image of Christ. Growth is not always comfortable. However, the Bible tells us *who* we are, *whose* we are, and *where* we're going.

### **God is Bigger Than Our Categories but the Bible is a Faithful Witness**

The reality of God and biblical truth shatters our categories. At least, none of them, taken alone, can do the God of the Bible justice. Taken together, our categories have the potential to balance and correct each other. Human language can only carry so much divine freight in any particular car.

We are *all* susceptible to distorted use of Scripture. We need the recognition that we (*all* of us) always take preconditions to our Bible study that may seriously distort its message to us. In fact, we often have several *conflicting* desires and preconditions at work simultaneously. For example, we have the hunger for the security of clear-cut prescriptive answers ("Just tell me if divorce is always wrong or if I have a scriptural right to remarry") *and* a desire to be autonomous, to suit ourselves rather than submit to anyone or anything ("I don't want to hurt anyone, but my needs have to be met").

So, how do I think the Bible teaches us about morality? How does it guide us in making moral judgments in our professional lives? Struggling to rise above my

own preconditions and to take the Bible on its own terms, to see how the Bible teaches and what the Bible teaches, I think I am beginning to learn a few things.

### **God's Project: Growing Us up into the Image of Christ**

It seems to me that God is trying to reveal God's nature and help us to develop God's character. And it seems that the only way God could do that is in *personal* terms, creating persons with the dignity of choice, developing a relationship with a nation of them, becoming one of us, revealing God's love, grace, and forgiveness through a self-sacrificial act of redemption, and embarking on a process of growing persons up into God's own image. The process requires us to be more than robots, even obedient ones. It requires us to make principled judgments based on virtuous character, to exercise wisdom based on the character of Christ. Neither legalism nor relativism produces this.

According to the Bible, growing us up to have the mind and character of Christ is an intrinsic part of God's redemptive project. We are not simply forgiven our sins that grace may abound but we are being rehabilitated, sanctified—being made saints, if you will. The theme is clear, as the following passages illustrate.

In Romans 6:1–2, 4, Paul says that, far from continuing in sin that grace may abound, we die to sin in Christ, are buried with Him in baptism, and are raised that we too may live a new life. Romans 12:2 says that we do not conform to the pattern of this world but are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds which makes us able to test and approve what God's will is. Second Corinthians 3:17–18 says that where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom and that we are being transformed into God's likeness with ever-increasing glory. Ephesians 4:7, 12–13 says that each one of us has been given grace from Christ to prepare us for service so that the body of Christ might be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. First John 3:1–3 marvels at the greatness of the love of the Father that we should be called children of God and goes on to affirm that, although what we shall be has not yet been made known, we do know that when Christ appears we shall be like Him. In Philippians, Paul says that, being united with Christ, Christians should have the same servant attitude as Christ, looking out for the interests of others as well as ourselves. Then he makes this remarkable conjunction—“Continue to work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose” (2:12–13).

And in 1 Corinthians, Paul says that we speak a message of wisdom among the mature, God's wisdom from the beginning, not the wisdom of this age, revealed to us by God's Spirit. He explains that we have received the Spirit who is from God that we might understand what God has freely given us. He concludes, “Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.... But we have the mind of Christ” (2:14–16).

## **A Key: Judgments Based on Wisdom Growing Out of the Character of Christ**

It would seem that the key to integrating Christian values into professional practice (as in all of life) is making complex judgments based on wisdom growing out of the mind and character of God, incarnated in Jesus Christ.

In our personal and professional lives we face many complex situations and decisions, large and small. Real-life moral dilemmas confront us with having to make choices between (prioritize) values that are equally real (though not necessarily equally important—remember Jesus' comments on keeping the Sabbath versus helping a human being). Whatever we do, we cannot fully or equally maximize each value in the situation. (If the father embraces the prodigal son and gives him a party, there will be some who will see him as rewarding irresponsibility.) Whatever we do, we have to make our choices on the basis of limited understanding of both the issues involved and the consequences of our actions. Moreover, our decision is complicated by our fallen nature and selfish desires.

In situations like this, the answer is not legalism (religious or scientific) or relativism. The *mind* of Christ helps us to figure out *what* to do and the *character* of Christ helps us to have the capacity (i.e., character or virtue) to actually *do* it. It seems to me that in the very process of struggling through these difficult situations we are dealing with a principle of growth that God has deliberately built into the nature of things. The people of God are continually required to make decisions based on principles embodied in our very identity—the character of who we are, whose we are, and where we are going.

These virtues are not just abstract ones but rather they are incarnated in the history and *character* of Jesus Christ. Love and justice are the fundamental principles but we learn what they mean because Jesus embodies them. (Yes, keep the Sabbath but don't let that keep you from helping someone.)

How should a Christian social worker respond when a client says she wants an abortion? How should parents respond when an unmarried daughter tells them she is pregnant? How should a church respond to a stranger's request for financial aid? Should I be for or against our Middle Eastern policy? Should my wife Carol and I invite her mother to come and live with us? How much money can I spend on myself? It appears I have some complex judgments to make in order to live a life of love and justice.

So, one of God's primary dynamics of growth seems to be to place us in complex situations which require decisions based on judgment. These decisions require our knowledge of the character of Christ to make and they require that we be disciplined disciples at least beginning to take on the character of Christ ourselves to carry them out. It seems to me there is a deliberate plot here, daring and risky, but the only one that works, which fits the world as God made it.

## **Can the Preacher Have a Boat?**

Permit me a personal example to illustrate the point. I remember a lively debate in the cafeteria as an undergraduate in a Christian College over whether or not a preacher (i.e., completely dedicated Christian) could have a boat. The issue, of course, was stewardship, our relationship and responsibility toward material wealth, our neighbors, and ourselves. How should faithful Christians spend money?

Being mostly lower middle class, we all easily agreed that a yacht was definitely an immoral use of money and that a rowboat or canoe was probably okay. But could it have a motor? How big? Could it possibly be an inboard motor? How many people could it carry? It was enough to cross a rabbi's eyes. Since we believed the Bible to contain a prescriptive answer to every question, we tried hard to formulate a scriptural answer. But we found no direct commands, approved apostolic examples, or necessary inferences that would nail it down.

What we found was much more challenging—things like:

- The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof (Psalm 24:1).
- Give as you have been prospered (1 Corinthians 16:2).
- What do you have that you did not receive (2 Corinthians 4:7)?
- Remember the fatherless and widows (James 1:27).
- Don't lay up treasures on earth (Matthew 6:19–20).
- Follow Jesus in looking out for the interests of others, not just your own (Philippians 2:1–5).

Plenty of guidelines for exercising love and justice, lots of examples of Christ and the disciples in action—in other words, no selfish relativism. But no ironclad formulas for what to spend or where—in other words, no legalism.

Instead, every time I turn around I am faced again with new financial choices, fresh opportunities to decide all over again what stewardship means—plenty of chances to grossly rationalize, distort, and abuse the gospel, to be sure. But also plenty of opportunities to get it right this time, or at least better. To grow up into the image of Christ.

## **Gaining the Mind and Character of Christ**

So, only persons of character or virtue can make the kind of judgments and take the actions required of us. To do the right thing we need to be the right kinds of persons, embodying the mind and character of Christ (MacIntyre, 1984; Hauerwas, 1981).

The most direct route to moral practice is through realizing our identity as Christ-Ones. In Galatians 2:20 Paul said, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me," and in Galatians 5:13–14 he said, "You were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through

love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”

The mind and character of Christ is formed in us by the Holy Spirit as we submit to God’s general revelation in creation (Romans 1–2), written revelation in Scripture (2 Timothy 3:15–17), and, ultimately, incarnated revelation in Jesus Christ (John 1:1–18; Colossians 1:15–20). We can only give appropriate meaning to the principles of love and justice by knowing the God of the Bible, the Jesus of incarnation, and the Holy Spirit of understanding and power. This happens best (perhaps only) in the give and take of two living communities—Christian families and the church, the body of Christ.

What we have when this happens is not an encyclopedic list of rules that gives us unambiguous answers to every practical or moral issue we may ever encounter. Neither are we left in an uncharted swamp of selfish relativity. And, it should be noted well, we are not given a substitute for the clear thinking and investigation necessary to provide the data. The Bible and Christ Himself are no substitute for reading, writing, and arithmetic (or practice wisdom, theory, and empirical research)—getting the best information we can and thinking honestly and clearly about it.

Instead, what we have then is the enhanced capacity to make and carry out complex judgments that is more in harmony with God’s love and justice than we could make otherwise (Hauerwas & Willimon, 1989; Adams, 1987). We are still limited. We still know in part and “see but a poor reflection as in a mirror” (1 Corinthians 13:12).

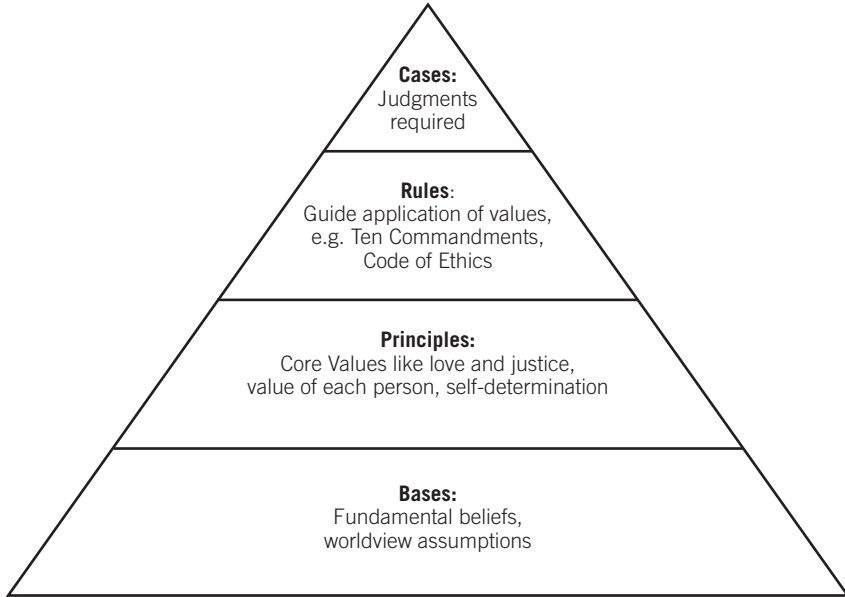
We may be disappointed that the Bible or Christ Himself doesn’t give us the kind of advice, shortcuts, or easy black-and-white answers we would like, but what they give us is much better—the truth. Do you want to live a good life? Do you want to integrate your Christian values and your professional helping practice? Do you want to do what is right? The only way, ultimately, is to know God through being a disciple of Christ. This doesn’t mean that only Christians can have good moral character—God’s common grace is accessible to all. But it really is *true* that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). God is the one who gives *content* to the idea of “good.” The mind of Christ is really quite remarkable, filling up and stretching to the limit our humanity with God.

Lord, help us to know  
*who* we are,  
*whose* we are, and  
*where* we are going.

### **Applying Values in Practice: The Principle/Practice Pyramid**

As I think about the relationship between basic faith (worldview assumptions and beliefs), core values or principles that grow out of our faith, the rules that we derive in order to guide our application of those principles to various areas of life, and the application of those values and rules to specific day-to-day ethical and practical decisions we must make, it helps me to use the image of

a “Principle/ Practice Pyramid.” The shape of the pyramid gives a rough suggestion of the level of agreement and certainty we may have as we go from the abstract to the concrete. You can turn the pyramid whichever way works best for your imagination—sitting on its base or balanced on its top. I put it on its base (Sherwood, 2002).



*Figure:* Principle/Practice Pyramid.

### **Fundamental Worldview and Faith-Based Assumptions**

The base or widest part of the pyramid represents our fundamental worldview and faith-based assumptions (religious or not) about the nature of the world, human beings, values, and God. All persons, not just “religious” people or Christians, have no choice but to make some sort of faith-based assumptions about the nature of the world and the meaning of life. These are the basic beliefs that help us to interpret our experience of life. This is part of the “hermeneutical spiral” we spoke of earlier. It is on this level that Christians are likely to have the broadest agreement (there is a God, God is creator; God has given human beings unique value; values derive from God).

### **Core Values or Principles**

On top of and growing out of the faith-based foundation sits our core values or principles. What is “good”? What are our fundamental moral obligations? As a Christian I understand these to be the “exceptionless absolutes” of love and justice (Holmes, 1984). God is love. God is just. There is no situation where these values do not apply. And we must look to God to learn what love and justice

mean. The social work analogy would be the core values expressed in the Code of Ethics: service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2017).

Christian and social work values largely agree at this level, though there might be significant differences at the more foundational level of worldview. What supports these values and makes them binding or obligatory, something we “ought” to seek?

### **Moral or Ethical Rules**

On top of and growing out of the “principle” layer are the moral rules that guide the application of the principles to various domains of life. These are the “deontological” parameters that suggest what we ought to do. Biblical examples would be the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, and other Biblical teachings that help us to understand what love and justice require in various spheres of life. Tell the truth. Keep promises. Don’t steal.

In the National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics (2017), there are many ethical rules that define boundaries and responsibilities in particular practice settings. These would be the specific standards relating to responsibilities to clients, colleagues, practice settings, as professionals, the profession itself, and the broader society. Each of these categories in the Code has a set of fairly specific and prescriptive rules. Don’t have sexual relationships with clients. Maintain confidentiality. Avoid conflicts of interest. These rules are very important in giving us guidance, but they can never provide us with absolute prescriptions for what we should always do on the case level (Sherwood, 1999, Reamer, 2013).

### **Cases Involving Ethical Dilemmas**

At the top of the pyramid sit the specific cases involving ethical dilemmas in which we are required to use the principles and rules to make professional judgments in the messiness of real life and practice. It is at this very concrete level that we will find ourselves in the most likelihood of conscientious disagreement with each other, even when we start with the same values, principles, and rules. The short answer for why this is true is found in what we have discussed before. It is that we are fallen (subject to the distortions of our selfishness, fear, and pride) and finite (limited in what we can know and predict). And even more challenging, our principles and rules start coming into conflict with each other on this level.

It is here that we have to resolve ethical dilemmas in which any actual action we can take is going to advance some of our values (and the rules that go with them) at the expense of some of our other values (and the rules that go with them). For example, the Code of Ethics tells us both that we must maintain confidentiality and that we have a duty to warn. Good rules. They will give us clear answers in many situations, but not when we have a client who suggests

he *might* hurt his wife or child. Both practice skill and the ability to make good judgments are required to sort out dilemmas like this. Our ability to know relevant facts and to predict the consequences of various courses of action is severely limited, yet some choice must be made and some action taken, now.

### **An Ethical Decision-Making Model**

Given this understanding of the human situation, how God is working with us to grow us up into the image of Christ, and the proper role that the Bible plays in giving us guidance, I would like to briefly introduce an ethical decision-making model for Christian helping professionals. It is a simple “problem-solving” model that assumes and is no substitute for developing the mind and character of Christ. It is simple only in concept, not in application. And it is what we need to do in all of our lives, not just in our work with clients.

### **Deontological and Consequentialist/Utilitarian Parameters**

Ethical judgments and actions can generally be thought of as being based on two kinds of criteria or parameters—deontological and consequentialist/utilitarian. These are philosophical terms for describing two types of measuring sticks of whether or not something is good or bad in a moral sense and either ought or ought not to be done.

**Deontological parameters—The “Oughts”.** Deontological parameters or criteria refer to moral obligation or duty. What are the moral imperatives or rules that relate to the situation? What are the “oughts?” For the Christian, it can be summed up by asking “What is the will of God in this situation?” Understanding the deontological parameters of an ethical dilemma we face is extremely important. But it is not as simple as it may first appear. Some think that ethics can be determined by deontological parameters only or that deontological parameters operate without consideration to consequences in any way. For example, the commandment “Thou shalt not lie” is taken to be an absolute, exceptionless rule that is to be obeyed in all circumstances and at all times, regardless of the consequences. By this principle, when Corrie Ten Boom was asked by the Nazis if she knew of any Jews, she should have led them to her family’s hiding place.

Trying to answer all moral questions by attempting to invoke a particular deontological principle in isolation, even if the principle is biblical, may wind up leading us into actions which are contrary to God’s will. That is the legalistic fallacy that we discussed before. Normally we have an ethical dilemma because we are in a situation in which more than one deontological principle applies and they are in conflict to some degree. Do we keep the Sabbath or do we heal? The Ten Commandments or the Sermon on the Mount, for example, contain deontological principles that are vitally important to helping us understand the mind of Christ and doing the will of God. But they cannot be handled mechanically or legalistically or we will become Pharisees indeed. Does “turning the other cheek” require that we never resist evil in any way?

Most Christians properly understand that God's will is fully embodied only in God's character of love and justice, which was incarnated in the person of Jesus Christ. Love and justice are the only "exceptionless absolutes" in a deontological sense. The moral rules and principles of scripture provide important guidelines to help us to understand what love and justice act like in various circumstances, but they cannot stand alone as absolutes nor can they be forced into a legal system which eliminates the need for us to make judgments.

**Consequentialist/Utilitarian parameters—The "Results".** For God and for us, moral reality is always embodied. Part of what this means, then, is that the deontological "oughts" can never be completely separated from the consequentialist/utilitarian parameters. The consequentialist/utilitarian parameters refer to the results. Christian ethical decisions and actions always have to try to take into account their consequences. What happens as a result of this action or that, and what end is served?

Many people (quite falsely) believe that moral judgments or actions can be judged exclusively on the basis of their results. Did it have a "good" or desired result? Then it was a good act. Many believe that if we value the end we implicitly accept the means to that end, no matter what they might be (say, terrorism to oppose unjust tyranny). This is just as much a fallacy as the single-minded deontological judgment. Pure utilitarianism is impossible since there must be some deontological basis for deciding what is a "good" result, and this can never be derived from the raw facts of a situation. And "goods" and "evils" must be prioritized and balanced against one another in means as well as the ends.

It is a fact that some adults engage in sexual activity with children. But so what? What is the moral and practical meaning of that fact? Is it something we should encourage or prevent? Without some standard of "good" or "health" it is impossible to give a coherent answer.

Another major limitation of consequentialist/utilitarian criteria in making moral judgments is that at best they can never be more than guesses or *predictions* based on what we *think* the results might be, never on the actual consequences themselves. If I encourage my client to separate from her abusive husband, I may think that he will not hurt her or the children, but I cannot be sure.

So, ethical and practical *judgments* are always required. They aren't simple. And they always involve identifying, prioritizing, and acting on *both* deontological and consequentialist/utilitarian parameters of a situation (Sherwood, 1986).

### **The Model: Judgment Formed By Character and Guided By Principle**

#### **1. Identify and explore the problem:**

- What issues/values (usually plural) are at stake?
- What are the desired ends?
- What are the alternative possible means? What are the other possible unintended consequences?

#### **2. Identify the deontological parameters:**

- What moral imperatives are there?

- What is the will of God, the mind of Christ?
  - What are the principles at stake, especially in regard to love and justice?
  - Are there any rules or rule-governed exceptions, biblical injunctions, commands, or codes of ethics that apply?
  - What does the social work Code of Ethics say?
- 3. Identify the consequentialist/utilitarian parameters:**
- What (as nearly as can be determined or predicted) are the likely intended and unintended consequences?
  - What are the costs and benefits? How are they distributed (who benefits, who pays)?
  - What must be given up in each particular possible course of action? What values will be slighted or maximized?
- 4. Integrate and rank the deontological and consequentialist/utilitarian parameters:**
- What best approximates (maximizes) the exceptionless absolutes of love and justice?
- 5. Make a judgment guided by character and act:**
- After gathering and analyzing the biblical, professional and other data, pray for wisdom and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
  - Make a judgment and act growing out of your character as informed by the character of Christ.
  - Refusing choice and action is choice and action, so you must do the best you can at the time, even if, in retrospect it turns out you were “sinning bravely.”
- 6. Evaluate:**
- Grow through your experience. Rejoice or repent, go on or change.

### **Evangelism and Ethical Professional Social Work Practice: A Case in Point**

Ethically integrating our Christian faith and our professional social work practice is never a simple matter. A case in point would be how we apply Christian and social work values and practice principles regarding evangelism in ways that maintain integrity for both our clients and ourselves.

### **Not Just an Issue for Christians**

Figuring out how to have integrity and competence in handling our own beliefs and values as we work respectfully and ethically with clients is not just an issue for Christians. Every single one of us comes to our work profoundly influenced by assumptions, beliefs, values, and commitments that we hold in part on faith. That is part of what it means to be a human being. Our reason and our science can only take us so far, but they can never take us to the bottom line of values and meaning. “Facts,” to the degree that we can ever really discern them, never answer the “so what” question. Values are never derivable from facts alone.

The first level of self-disclosure and informed consent that every social worker owes is critical personal self-awareness. This can be spiritual, religious, ideological, or theoretical—any “meta-narrative” that we use to make sense out of our experience of life. “Hello, my name is David and I’m a Christian.” Or, “I’m a Buddhist,” “I’m an agnostic,” “I’m an atheist,” “I’m a logical positivist,” “I’m a behaviorist,” “I’m a post-modernist.” Or a Punk or a Goth or a Democrat or a Republican, for that matter. I’m not saying that we should greet our clients this way, but I am saying that we need to be aware of our beliefs and be self-critical in regard to how they affect our work.

What are my fundamental assumptions, beliefs, and values? How do they affect my practice? The way I interact with my clients? My selection of theories and interpretation of facts? It is not simply a matter of *what* I believe (important as that is), but *how* I believe it, how I handle my beliefs, which in itself comes back around to the nature of my value commitments.

Lawrence Ressler, veteran social work educator and NACSW member, frequently tells the story of his first day in an MSW class at Temple University with Jeffrey Galper, who announced, “I am a Marxist, and I teach from a Marxist perspective.” I hope this meant that he had achieved this critical personal self-awareness that I am talking about and that his self-disclosure was in the service of facilitating informed consent on the part of his students. The proof of the social work practice pudding, of course, would be in his conscientiousness in not imposing this view on his students, his willingness to permit or even facilitate disagreement. Of course, the more deeply held the beliefs and the greater the disagreement, the more difficult it is to support self-determination. This is true even when self-determination is one of the core values one accepts.

So—integrating faith and practice is not just a Christian thing. It is a human thing. Those who don’t understand this basic truth are the ones who may pose the greatest risk of all of “imposing their beliefs on others,” precisely because they may think that they are not susceptible to the problem (Sherwood, 2000). However, the rest of my comments are going to be addressed primarily to Christians in social work, even though I think the basic principles will apply to those who are not Christians. Many of us may feel tempted to “evangelize” in more way than one.

### **Addressing Spiritual and Religious Issues with Clients Is Not (Necessarily or Normally) Evangelism**

“Talking about God” with clients is not necessarily or normally evangelism. This is an important distinction. For too long social workers (secular and otherwise) have tended to “solve” the problem of evangelism by avoiding spirituality and religion and offering a blanket condemnation—“Thou shalt not discuss spiritual and religious issues with clients.” If you do, it is automatically presumed that you are “imposing your own values on clients.” This happens in spite of overwhelming evidence that issues of meaning and purpose are central in the lives of clients, that spirituality and religion have great importance to many

people, and that religiously based groups, congregations, and organizations are vital sources of support for people (as well as barriers, at times).

Well, sometimes social workers do impose their values (religious, political, or otherwise) on clients and it is an ethical violation when they do. I would stress that when this happens it is a violation of Christian ethics as well as social work ethics. But deliberately avoiding spiritual and religious issues is professional incompetence. The presumption has often been that spiritual and religious issues should simply be referred to chaplains or other clergy. In what other important area of life would social workers condone such a policy of withdrawal and referral? How can we say we deal with the whole person-in-environment while ignoring one of the most important dimensions of people's lives (for good or ill)? Or how can we claim competence in dealing with diversity while ignoring or misunderstanding such a fundamental kind of diversity (Sherwood, 1998)?

The short answer is that we can't and shouldn't ignore spiritual and religious issues. The key is that we must do it from a client-focused and client-led perspective. This normally means that we may *not* ethically engage in evangelism with our clients. Exceptions would typically be when we are practicing in a faith-based context with a clearly identified Christian identity and with clients who clearly express informed consent. Even then, it is not transparently obvious that evangelism would be appropriate. I hope I can make it clear why I say this.

### **Proclamation Versus Demonstration of the Gospel**

A perhaps simplistic but none-the-less useful distinction is this: It is always ethical and appropriate to demonstrate the gospel to our clients, but it is seldom ethical to proclaim the gospel to them in our professional role as social workers.

The Bible describes evangelism in the sense of demonstrating or living out the gospel as the calling of every Christian. "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us" (Ephesians 5:1–2). "We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help" (1 John 3:16–17).

The profession of social work provides us all with unique opportunities to demonstrate the gospel of Christ—to give to our clients the grace-filled gift of knowing what it feels like to be treated with love and justice, what it feels like to experience caring, grace, forgiveness, trustworthiness, honesty, and fairness, what it feels like to be treated with respect and dignity as a person with God-given value. Often our clients have few opportunities in their lives to be in a respectful, non-exploitive relationship. The power of this experience can be transforming. It can even be a form of "pre-evangelism," preparing the soil for the good seed of the gospel proclaimed.

We do not all have the same part to play in God's work in a person's life. The New Testament frequently talks about varieties of gifts among the various parts of the body, and evangelism is one of them (Romans 12:3–8, 1 Corinthians

12:4–31, Ephesians 4:11–16). “What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth” (1 Corinthians 3:5–6). As Alan Keith-Lucas wrote (1985, p. 28):

Paul said that faith was the gift of the Spirit, which is true, but what we can do as social workers—and we do have a wonderful opportunity to do so—is to show such love and forgiveness that a confused and desperate person can understand the Spirit’s message when it comes.

A consideration of the Parable of the Sower may be helpful here. The seed only grows to maturity when there is good ground to receive it. But stony or even shallow ground can be converted to good ground by the addition of nutrients (love) or ploughing (facing reality) or breaking up of clots (getting rid of blocks) and perhaps what social workers can do for the most part is to be tillers of the ground, rather than the Sower, who must in the long run be God Himself. It is true that certain men and women, powerful preachers or prophets, may act, as it were, for God as sowers, but even they have for the most part audiences that have some readiness to listen.

On the other hand, explicit evangelism of clients (proclamation) in professional social work is almost always unethical. Why? What are the values and ethical principles involved?

At this point, we try to apply the principle/practice pyramid and model of ethical decision-making discussed above. We are trying to apply our core values and ethical rules at the case level.

### **The Use and Limits of the Code of Ethics (and the Bible: Ethical Judgments Are Required Because Legitimate Values Come Into Conflict**

Ethical analysis and decision making is required when we encounter an ethical problem and at the case level we cannot maximize all values simultaneously. In my paradigm, the definition of an ethical problem or dilemma is that we have more than one legitimate moral obligation that have come into some degree of tension in the case that we find ourselves dealing with.

For example, I believe in client self-determination (one legitimate moral obligation) and I believe in the protection of human life (another legitimate moral obligation). Most of the time these values do not come into conflict. However, now I have a client who is threatening to kill his wife. I now have an ethical problem in which any action I take will compromise one or more of my moral obligations. Values and ethical principles can and do come into conflict on the case level.

It is important to realize from the beginning what the Bible and Code of Ethics can do for us and what they cannot. They can give us critical guidance and direction, but they can never give us prescriptive formulas that will tell us

exactly what to do in every case, precisely because in the particular instance not all of the values can be fully achieved and not all of the rules can be completely followed. The NASW Code of Ethics (2017) says it very well:

Core values, and the principles that flow from them, must be balanced within the context and complexity of the human experience.... The Code offers a set of values, principles, and standards to guide decision making and conduct when ethical issues arise. It does not provide a set of rules that prescribe how social workers should act in all situations. Specific applications of the Code must take into account the context in which it is being considered and the possibility of conflicts among the Code's values, principles, and standards.

Sometimes one of these biblical rules or Code of Ethics standards may have to give way to another in order for us to come as close to love and justice as the situation allows. At the case level, we are always going to have to take responsibility for making judgments that prioritize our values and approximate the good we seek as closely as we can.

## **Ethics and Evangelism**

So, what are some of the core values and ethical principles from the Bible and the Code of Ethics that relate to evangelism with clients? I'll try to list a few and give some comments, although several of them overlap and interact with each other. And I would say that they all fall under the Biblical absolutes of love and justice.

**1. The Great Commission.** Well, what Christians call the "Great Commission" is certainly one of these core values, the reason we are exploring this issue in the first place. While the imperative "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19) was given to Jesus' original disciples, the New Testament makes it quite clear that bearing testimony to the good news about Jesus' healing and saving work on behalf of humankind is in some sense the responsibility of all of us who are disciples of Jesus Christ. And if the gospel of Christ is true, what could be more important for people to hear? This value is real for us and explains why we struggle with the question of evangelism in our professional roles.

**2. My Calling and Role.** Remember our discussion above about demonstration and proclamation? While it is true that not only evangelists bear witness to the gospel, it is also true that our particular calling and role in a given situation has a great impact on what is appropriate to do. If you are convinced that your calling from God is evangelism in the sense of direct proclamation, then you should be an evangelist and not a social worker (or a nurse, or a car salesman, or a loan officer). Under what auspice are you working? What are the functions associated with your role? My father-in-law for many years demonstrated the grace and love of Christ in his role as a bank teller at the Potter's Bank and Trust

in East Liverpool, Ohio, including taking money out of his own pocket to make sure that certain poor customers were able to get at least a little cash at the end of the month. But he could not, and did not, use his position to hand them tracts with the cash. As a social worker you may at times find it appropriate to share your faith directly, but most of the time you won't.

**3. Self-Determination.** From the first chapter of Genesis on, the Bible presents a picture of human beings endowed with the gift and responsibility of choice with consequences. We are presented with the paradox and mystery (on our level of understanding) of God's sovereignty and our freedom. God is depicted as calling us, but not coercing us, warning us, but not protecting us. Conscience and commitment cannot be compelled, even though external behavior might be. Self-determination is also a standard of the NASW Code of Ethics (2017), growing out of the principle of the inherent dignity and worth of the person. If ever a social work value stood on a theological foundation, it is belief in the inherent dignity and worth of every person. While I may have my perceptions of what might be best for my clients, I have no right to compel or manipulate them to that end. I do have a responsibility to help facilitate their ability to exercise their self-determination, including the exploration of available alternatives and their possible consequences, so that their choices are as informed as possible. God grants us the fearful dignity of self-determination; we can hardly try to deny it to our clients, explicitly or implicitly.

**4. Informed Consent.** A fundamental component of informed choice is informed consent, another standard of the NASW Code of Ethics (2017). Informed consent essentially means that people should know what they are getting into and agree to it. This principle interacts intimately with the next one—integrity. Informed consent is one of the key determinants of whether or not evangelism with clients is ethical. Related concepts are agency auspice and client expectations. Why are clients coming to your agency or to you? What expectations do they have? Is there anything upfront that would lead them to understand that the sharing of your religious beliefs or evangelism would be a likely part of their experience with your agency or you? I have found that even in explicitly faith-based agencies there are surprisingly few times when direct evangelism is the appropriate focus or outcome of interaction with clients. Christian clients struggle with the same kinds of issues as other clients. Sometimes we can help them sort through how their beliefs are resources or barriers for them. But frequently religious clients want to use "religious talk" to avoid coming to grips with their issues. There would be almost no cases in a public or secular private agency when direct evangelism is an appropriate focus or outcome of interaction with clients.

**5. Integrity.** Honesty and integrity are core Biblical and social work values. A number of "rules" derive from this value, such as truth-telling, trustworthiness, and keeping agreements. Some of the standards in the NASW Code of Ethics (2017) deriving from this principle come under the general heading of "Conflicts of Interest." These rules are particularly relevant to the question of engaging in evangelism with clients. These rules say, "Social workers should be alert to

and avoid conflicts of interest that interfere with the exercise of professional discretion and impartial judgment” (2017). They speak to the importance of setting clear, appropriate, and culturally sensitive boundaries and being careful of dual or multiple relationships with clients. Of particular relevance to the issue of evangelism is the standard that says, “Social workers should not take unfair advantage of any professional relationship or exploit others to further their personal, religious, political, or business interests” (2017).

### **So, What About Evangelism?**

The main reason that evangelism in the context of a professional social work relationship is normally unethical is that it almost always involves the risk of exploitation of a vulnerable relationship. It usually involves taking advantage of our professional role and relationship with our clients. It lacks the integrity of informed consent. And even when there seems to be a certain consent or even request from the client to go through the evangelistic door, it is the social worker’s responsibility to be the boundary keeper. I am not saying that there can never be a legitimate open door under any circumstance, but I am saying that the social worker, acting in the professional capacity, bears a heavy weight of responsibility to avoid taking advantage of the client’s vulnerability.

I think most Christians have little difficulty understanding the analogous rule in the Code of Ethics that says, “Social workers should under no circumstances engage in sexual activities, inappropriate sexual communications through the use of technology or in person, or sexual contact with current clients, whether such contact is consensual or forced” (2017). We also understand that it is the social worker’s responsibility, not the client’s, to maintain these boundaries. I hope no one is offended by my comparison of sexual exploitation to evangelism. Clearly there are significant differences. I believe in evangelism and I do not believe in sexual exploitation. However, we also need to understand the way in which evangelism in the context of a professional relationship does have some significant likeness to sexual exploitation, or any other taking advantage of the professional role.

For example, evangelizing a client coming to a public Rape Crisis Center would be unethical and, I would say, un-Christian. She is in a physically and emotionally vulnerable situation, there is nothing about the sign on the door that would lead you to believe that her coming is even giving implied consent to evangelism, and she is trusting you for specific kinds of help. The nature of your role and relationship means that you have a special responsibility not to exploit that role. What you can most certainly do with her is to give her the opportunity to experience what it is like to receive “grace,” love and justice; what it is like to experience respect, caring, support, trustworthiness, honesty; what it is like to not be taken advantage of.

It would also probably be going much too far to ask her, “Are you a Christian?” Even if she said no, and you quietly moved on, the question would hang in the air, coming from a representative of the Rape Crisis Center to a person

in a state of vulnerability who had a very particular reason for coming to this agency. How would she read that? How would it affect her response?

However, it might be quite competent and ethical professional practice to use a more appropriate probe that could be stated in “non-religious” terms—“This must be hard. Is there anything in your life that helps you get through things like this?” Then if she mentions something about her spiritual or religious beliefs, you are in a position to make a better judgment about how you might help her, even perhaps including engaging spiritual and religious resources. That could be good “spiritually-sensitive” social work practice (Sherwood, 1998).

Even then, you would be faced with the necessity of using good assessment skills, discernment, and judgment. For example, you would think that praying with clients in Christian agencies would be obviously the right thing to do. However, some clients are “religious” manipulators, and consciously or unconsciously use the appearance of spirituality to avoid dealing with hard issues. When a client says, “Let’s just pray about that,” or “I think we just have to trust the Lord,” you have to try to discern whether doing that is helpful or their way of avoiding dealing with their anger, fear, abusive behavior, or whatever else they may need to face.

### **No Prescriptions, but Guidance**

You will have probably noticed that I have avoided words such as “never” or “always” in what I have said. This is quite deliberate, and goes back to my earlier comments about what ethical principles and rules can do for us and what they can’t. They can give us meaningful guidance but they can’t give us simple formulas to prescribe our response to every situation. Although I might have come close to it, I have not argued that evangelism is never compatible with our professional role as social workers. I have tried to suggest ethical considerations as we try to make our best judgments about how we relate to our clients.

Morally and practically, a sense of certainty is highly attractive. Who doesn’t want to be sure that they are “right” and that they are doing the right thing? But that level of certainty is often not available to us as human beings. And yet we do have to decide and act. These judgments always require prioritizing our values based on the best understanding we can achieve at the time regarding the relevant values involved and the potential consequences of the choices available to us.

### **Character Formed through Discipleship and the Guidance of the Holy Spirit**

Ultimately, ethical Christian practice depends on one thing—developing the mind and character of Christ. It depends on our growing up into the image of Christ. This begins in the new birth as we become new creations in Christ. We are filled with the Holy Spirit and called to a life of discipleship in which we bring every thought and action in captivity to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). We present our bodies “as a living sacrifice,” not conformed to this world, but

“transformed by the renewal of your mind” (Romans 12:1–2). We hunger and thirst after righteousness. We seek to know God’s will through scripture, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and the community of the church. We identify with Jesus and the saints of God down through the ages. We daily choose to follow Christ as best we know and can. We repent and confess to our Lord when we fall. We thankfully receive his grace. We choose and act again.

Certainly piety is not a substitute for the discipline of professional training, careful research, and thoughtful analysis. Rather, the use of all of these is simply a complementary part of our stewardship and discipleship. The most solid possible assurance that we will do the right thing in our personal lives and in our professional practice is our discipleship, growing to have more and more of the character of Jesus Christ, as we make judgments more in harmony with God’s character and Spirit.

We become, in Paul’s words,

A letter from Christ... Written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts,... ministers of a new covenant, not in a written code but in the Spirit; for the written code kills, but the Spirit gives life.... Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into His likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” (2 Corinthians 3:3, 6, 17–18).

Lord, help us to be people who hunger and thirst for your “more excellent way” (1 Corinthians 12:31).

## References

- Adams, R. M. (1987). *The virtue of faith*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Hauerwas, S. (1981). *A community of character: Toward a constructive Christian social ethic*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Hauerwas, S., & Willimon, W. H. (1989). *Resident aliens: Life in the Christian colony*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press.
- Holmes, A. (1984). *Ethics: Approaching moral decisions*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Keith-Lucas, A. (1985). *So you want to be a social worker: A primer for the Christian student*. Botsford, CT: North American Association of Christians in Social Work.
- Lewis, C. S. (1943). *Mere Christianity*. New York, NY: Macmillan.
- Lewis, C. S. (1947). *The abolition of man*. New York, NY: Macmillan.
- MacIntyre, A. (1984). *After virtue: A study in moral theory* (2nd ed.). Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- National Association of Social Workers. (2017). Code of ethics. Washington, DC: National Association of Social Workers. Retrieved from <https://www.socialworkers.org/About/Ethics/Code-of-Ethics/Code-of-Ethics-English>
- Osborne, G. R. (1991). *The hermeneutical spiral: A comprehensive introduction to biblical interpretation*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

- Pinnock, C. (1984). *The scripture principle*. New York, NY: Harper and Row.
- Reamer, F. G. (2013). *Ethical dilemmas in social service* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Sherwood, D. A. (Spring-Fall 1981). Add to your faith virtue: The integration of Christian values and social work practice. *Social Work & Christianity*, 8, 41–54.
- Sherwood, D. A. (1986). Notes toward applying Christian ethics to practice: Growing up into the image of Christ. *Social Work & Christianity*, 13(2), 82–91.
- Sherwood, D. A. (1989). How should we use the Bible in ethical decision-making? Guidance without legalism or relativism. *Social Work & Christianity*, 16, 29–42.
- Sherwood, D. A. (1998). Spiritual assessment as a normal part of social work practice: Power to help and power to harm. *Social Work & Christianity*, 24(2), 80–89.
- Sherwood, D. A. (1999). Integrating Christian faith and social work: Reflections of a social work educator. *Social Work & Christianity*, 26(1), 1–8.
- Sherwood, D. A. (2000). Pluralism, tolerance, and respect for diversity: Engaging our deepest differences within the bond of civility. *Social Work & Christianity*, 27(1), 1–7.
- Sherwood, D. A. (2002). Ethical integration of faith and social work practice: Evangelism. *Social Work & Christianity*, 29(1), 1–12.
- Sire, J. W. (1980). *Scripture twisting*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Swartley, W. M. (1983). *Slavery, sabbath, war, and women: Case issues in biblical interpretation*. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press.

### Additional Resources

- Evans, C. S. (2004). *Kierkegaard's ethic of love: Divine commands and moral obligations*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Evans, C. S. (2006). Is there a basis for loving all people? *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 34(1), 78–90.
- Keith-Lucas, A. (1994). *Giving and taking help*. Botsford, CT: North American Association of Christians in Social Work.
- Mott, S. C. (1982). *Biblical ethics and social change*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- O'Donovan, O. (1986). *Resurrection and the moral order: An outline for evangelical ethics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Reamer, F. G. (1993) *The philosophical foundations of social work*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Reamer, F. G. (2018). *Social work values and ethics* (5th ed.). New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Sherwood, D. A. (2007). Moral, believing social workers: Philosophical and theological foundations of moral obligation in social work ethics. *Social Work & Christianity*, 34(2), 121–145.
- Smedes, L. (1983). *Mere morality*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Smith, C. (2003). *Moral, believing animals: Human personhood and culture*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Smith, C. (2010). *What is a person: Rethinking humanity, social life, and the moral good from the person up*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Verhay, A. (1984). *The great reversal: Ethics and the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Wolterstorff, N. (2006). Justice, not charity: Social work through the eyes of faith. *Social Work & Christianity*, 33(2), 123–140.

### **Endnote**

<sup>1</sup> Material in this chapter has been adapted from two articles previously published in *Social Work & Christianity*: Sherwood (1993). Doing the right thing: Ethical practice in contemporary society. *Social Work & Christianity*, 20(2), 140–159; and Sherwood (2002). Ethical integration of faith and social work practice: Evangelism, *Social Work & Christianity*, 29(1), 1–12.



# Models for Ethically Integrating Christian Faith and Social Work

---

*Rick Chamiec-Case*

Over 30 years ago, I was a new, eager, and inexperienced MSW student in my first practicum placement. This first placement was in a state mental health hospital with locked psychiatric wards secured by large, heavy metal doors. I was assigned to work with adolescents, many of them victims and perpetrators of sexual abuse. Many had a history of suicide attempts, and most were considered a threat to themselves and others.

To be honest, I didn't have much of an idea what I was doing, especially considering the complex challenges posed by these clients. But I was fresh and enthusiastic, committed to being a positive, encouraging influence in the lives of these boys and girls.

I was also pretty naïve. So when I was singled out and asked to meet with several senior treatment team members at the hospital, I assumed it was because they saw something special in me—a diamond in the rough, so to speak! It turns out, however, that what caught their attention was the fact that I was a dual degree student, and that the other program in which I was enrolled was Yale Divinity School. What this said to them was that in addition to being a social work student, it was likely that I was “religious.” The members of this senior treatment team wanted to communicate to me a clear and direct message. They wanted me to know that while they didn't hold it against me that I was a person of faith, it would be unacceptable for me to let my faith have any direct influence on how I practiced social work in their institution.

Now over 30 years later, it seems clear to me that the members of that treatment team had a particular image in their minds about what it would look like for my Christian faith to shape my social work practice. And clearly it was not a pretty image, one that possibly included me trying to convert the clients in their hospital to my understanding of Christianity, or running roughshod over their beliefs and values if they happened to differ from my own.

Now looking back, I can understand how with *this* particular image in mind, the members of the treatment team felt so strongly that I would have to—as they required—“check my faith at the door” if I wanted to practice in their program setting. At that time, however, I was only aware that my faith served as a powerful reason for my having become a social worker and for my desire to reach out to others around me that were struggling and needed support—that is, to be the hands and feet of Jesus, serving others in our community.

In my current role as Executive Director of the North American Association of Christians in Social Work (NACSW) for over 20 years, I have learned that the issue of integrating religion, spirituality, and faith (RSF) on the one hand, and social work, on the other, is much more nuanced than my internship supervisors were able or willing to consider when they warned me about not letting my faith affect my work in their program. There are, in fact, a large number of ways in which the RSF of Christians in social work can influence their practice, most (though not all) of which are positive and healthy, and which potentially add value to their work. At the same time, I have discovered that social work, in turn, often has a vital impact on how Christian social workers understand and live out their RSF as well.

During the past few decades, there has been considerable attention focused on religion, spirituality, and faith (RSF) in the social work literature (Furman, Zahl, Benson, & Canda, 2007; Hodge, 2008; Oxhandler, Parrish, Torres, & Achenbaum, 2015; Scales & Kelly, 2016; Sheridan, 2012; Williams & Smolak, 2007). There are a number of good reasons for this focus:

- a. Significant spiritual and religious questions, issues, and experiences often emerge during the helping process, and social workers have the obligation to respond sensitively and competently when such issues are raised, as affirmed in the National Association of Social Workers' (NASW) *Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice* (NASW, 2015).
- b. NASW's *Code of Ethics* (2017) mandates that practitioners recognize and respect clients' RSF as an important element of human diversity, and to avoid discriminating against them on that basis.
- c. Many clients prefer and even request that care providers incorporate their religious or spiritual beliefs in the helping process (Harris, 2016; Oxhandler and Stanford, 2018).
- d. Spiritual and religious interventions have been shown to contribute to valued health and mental health outcomes (Koenig, King, & Carson, 2012).
- e. Clients often lean on their RSF to cope—either positively or negatively—with life's challenges (Furman, Benson, & Canda, 2011).

For the most part, however, attention to RSF in social work literature has focused on the RSF of *clients* (Oxhandler et al., 2015) rather than on social workers' RSF. For example, most of the scales developed for exploring and evaluating the role and impact of spirituality in social work and related helping professions have focused primarily on clients and client interventions (Oxhandler & Pargament, 2014; Oxhandler and Stanford, 2018). Within social work, these scales have included the Role of Religion and Spirituality in Practice Scale (Sheridan, Bullis, Adcock, Berlin, & Miller, 1992), the Religion and Prayer in Practice Scale (Mattison, Jayaratne, & Croxton, 2000), the Spiritually Derived Intervention Checklist (Canda & Furman, 2010), and the Religious/Spiritually Integrated Practice Assessment Scale (Oxhandler, 2016).

Yet, while a strong focus on clients' RSF for developing effective, spiritually-sensitive social work practice is important and appropriate, there are also

important reasons to explore the RSF of *social workers* as well. First, for many social workers, their RSF is a powerful asset that informs, motivates, and provides resilience in their practice (Rinkel, 2016; Singletary, 2005), strengthening their ability to cope with the many challenges and stress associated with being a social worker. This line of thought comports well with a growing recognition in many fields and types of work that people's "religious faith should inform and impact their life at work" (Russell, 2007, p. 72).

Second, a recent study found that social workers' intrinsic religiosity (that is, a desire to live out their religious/spiritual beliefs) is the variable most significantly related to and predictive of the likelihood of social workers addressing clients' spirituality and religion in clinical practice (Oxhandler et al., 2015). Similarly, in another study, 44% of clinical social workers indicated that their own personal religiosity played a key role in helping them incorporate clients' religion and spirituality in their work (Oxhandler and Giardina, 2017). These findings suggest that it is important to more fully explore social workers' intrinsic religiosity and how this relates to their understanding and practice of social work, including their attention to clients' RSF (Oxhandler, Polson, & Achenbaum, 2018).

Third, many social workers of faith share the conviction that the thoughtful, sensitive integration of RSF and social work offers the potential of generating a rich *synergy* that can add considerable value to both their work and their faith. Synergy in this context refers to: "two or more things working together in order to create something that is bigger or greater than the sum of their individual efforts" (YourDictionary, 2014). From this perspective, a key benefit of the thoughtful integration of RSF and social work is that for people of faith, it can contribute to outcomes (that is, the accomplishment of valued goals for clients and communities, as well as growth in RSF for social workers) that are potentially greater than the sum of what can be achieved through just either one on their own). Many Christians in social work believe that the content of their RSF provides perspective and unique insight (for example, about the human condition) that might not be part of their social work training, but which can be extremely helpful when applied thoughtfully to social work practice:

Christians believe that in the person of Jesus, in the text of the Bible, and in the historical experience of the Church God has revealed important truths that would otherwise be largely hidden from view. (Jacobson & Jacobson, 2004, p. 28)

The same can be said about the content and practice of social work, which provides perspective and unique insight which can be extremely helpful in supporting Christians' efforts to understand and live out their RSF (for example, when seeing up close the pain and marginalization of our clients enables us to understand faith's compelling call to serve the "least of these" [Matthew 25:40] in a deeper and more robust way).

Last, in the same way social workers recognize that RSF can be a core part of their clients' identities (NASW, 2017), the same may be true for many social

workers—that is, their RSF can be a core part of their identities, and as such, not something that they can simply ignore when they practice social work. For many social workers of faith, attempting to bracket and put aside their RSF at work may feel forced, inauthentic, and/or lead to an unsatisfying and unproductive disconnect between their personal and professional selves (Hughes, 2005). Effective integration enables practitioners to be more authentic and whole as they seek to bring together two vitally important aspects of their lives. Thus, social workers who thoughtfully integrate their RSF in their practice are more likely to find their work satisfying and meaningful (Alford & Naughton, 2001; Conger, 1994; Fairholm, 1998). In addition, such integration has been shown to be a predictor of increased productivity and motivation (Mitroff & Denton, 1999), job satisfaction and commitment (Milliman, Czaplewski, & Ferguson, 2003), as well as leading to overall improved work performance and more ethical behavior (Garcia-Zamor, 2003; Maglitta, 1996). As such, for many Christians in social work, the critical question is not *whether* their RSF interacts with their social work practice, but rather how *thoughtfully, competently, and ethically* they handle these interactions.

It should be noted that while this chapter primarily focuses on the positive and synergistic contribution of social workers' RSF to social work, some social workers report that at least in some ways they experience conflict between Christian RSF and social work (Dessel, Bolen, & Shepardson, 2011; Spano & Koenig, 2007; Todd & Coholic, 2007). Thus, it is important that attempts to study the integration of social workers' RSF and social work should be sensitive to both the potential positive/synergistic effects of such integration, as well as potential tensions that might exist for some social workers between the two.

### **Broad Categories Organizing Models of Integrating RSF and Social Work**

In an attempt to organize the many ways social workers' RSF and social work potentially interact with each other in their lives and practice, this chapter will explore three broad categories for organizing a variety of approaches to ethically integrating Christian RSF and social work:

1. The Effect of Integration on *Motivation and Character/Identity Formation* (how both RSF and social work affect the development and strengthening of social workers' personal identity, character, inner strength and motivation).
2. The Effect of Integration on the *Understanding* of RSF and/or Social Work (how faith affects the way Christians in social work *understand* social work theory and practice, as well as how social work affects the way they *understand* their Christian faith).
3. The Effect of Integration on the *Practice* of RSF and/or Social Work (how faith affects the way Christians in social work *carry out* social work practice, as well as how social work affects the way they *practice or live out* their Christian faith).

Before launching into a description of these three categories and the various integration approaches that fall under them, it will be helpful to provide a working definition of the phrase “the integration of RSF and social work.” To “integrate,” according to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary (2019) is “to form, coordinate, or blend into a functioning or unified whole.” Integration, therefore, for the purposes of this chapter, will be defined quite broadly to mean the way in which the RSF of Christians in social work affects, influences, shapes, or contributes to their understanding and practice of social work, as well as the way in which social work theory and practice has a similar effect on how Christian social workers understand and practice their Christian faith—with the goal of bringing the two together into a unified whole.<sup>1</sup>

### **Category 1: The Effect of Integration on the Christian Social Worker’s Motivation and Character/Identity Formation**

The first broad category for organizing approaches to integration focuses on how the RSF of Christians in social work affects the development and strengthening of their personal identities, character, inner strength and motivation in ways that impact the way they understand and practice social work. Reciprocally, this category also focuses on how social work affects the development and strengthening of the personal identities, character, inner strength and motivation of Christians in social work in ways that contribute to influence they understand and practice their RSF. Some examples of integration that fall within this first category include the: a) calling; b) virtues; and c) wonder & worship models of integration.

**Calling Model of Integration.** There are many ways that the interaction of RSF and social work potentially contributes to and supports the formation of the identity, character, and motivation of Christian social workers. For example, for many, RSF informs, drives, confirms, or clarifies their decisions for choosing the vocation of social work as a career. It grounds their belief that God has called them to their careers as social workers in order to serve people who are hurting and to further social justice and human flourishing in our world, a central aspect of the Christian life. Beryl Hugen (2016) writes:

Historically, religiously motivated persons and groups found their faith propelling them into actions of concern for others, especially the poor and the vulnerable in society. These social workers have affirmed in a variety of ways their shared belief that the faith dimension of life leads to . . . a commitment to others—to social work practice motivated by a calling to a life of service. (p. 81)

Janie, a social worker tells her story of feeling called to social work:

I loved history, and believed that people would be wiser if they understood the past. I planned to be an archeologist focusing on ancient Greece. I was happy to work hard, and assumed that if I did I would “win.” My job. My goals. My achievement.

One evening during my senior year in high school, I was invited to a Bible study. The study leaders pointed to Jesus, the Son of God, and told us that God wanted us to reorder our futures based on His call for our lives. As I continued in the study, I came to realize that Jesus' priorities for my life would need to be my first priorities as well. That would mean following the command to love God with all my heart, soul, mind and strength... and to love my neighbor as I love myself" (Matt 22:37-39).

After a period of extensive wrestling, I came to believe that God was asking me to engage with the **present** world rather than focusing primarily on the past. I came to realize that many without access to power in our society were being harmed by those with more power and control. I felt God calling me to empower those who are left at the margins of society. The call to "do justice, love mercy and walk humbly" (Micah 6:8), burned its way into my soul and my actions. I switched my major to social work.

Once in practice, God showed me the richness and joy that come from embracing those whom the world ignores. God has put me far from the world I had planned for myself. God has given me new eyes. With these eyes, I have been able to discern what *God* was calling me to do with my life. Now, by God's grace, I'm not just a "nice" person, I'm His person (J. Hoyt-Oliver, personal communication, July 18, 2013).

The belief that God has called them to social work, in turn, often motivates, nurtures and sustains the commitment of Christians in social work to the rigorous demands of their work even during the most challenging and stressful times and circumstances.

Reciprocally, for some, social work contributes to a person's call to a life of faith. Dr. Alan Keith-Lucas, an early pioneer in the integration of RSF and social work, came to the Christian faith somewhat later in life after he was already an established social work scholar. Keith-Lucas was not reluctant to share how his becoming a Christian was heavily influenced by the resonance of the central features of the helping process—and how this influenced his understanding of what God must be like. He describes this resonance in one of his unpublished works:

Some time ago... I was asked by the Florence-Darlington (South Carolina) Mental Health Society to address them on the subject of the nature of the helping process.... Were there, for instance, any universal rules that applied to all efforts to be helpful?...

In the more successful cases I had managed, without realizing it, to bring three things to my client. One was reality... —that is, I had told my clients the truth.... At the same time, I had been very

much aware of what my clients were going through, and was feeling what it would be like to be in their shoes, and thirdly, I had made myself available to them. I hadn't given up on them when they didn't take my advice or made a mess of things.

These three factors, which I called reality, empathy and support... did and do seem to me to have something universal about them. But I was unprepared for the revelation that came to me one day, on my way back from work, that these are essentially the ways in which God has dealt with us.

I had already called them the trinity of helping. I'd even insisted that they were triune, three things that were essentially one. But there's another Trinity, spelled this time with a capital T, three Persons... who were at the same time One. There is God the Father, the Creator of all reality.... And what did this God do in His passionate desire to bring us to salvation, a word that originally meant health and happiness, both in this world and the next? He came, as one of my Texas friends puts it, 'smack dab down here,' to be tempted in all ways as we are, yet not to sin himself—the greatest act of empathy the world has ever seen. And what did He promise us when He left us?... That He would send a Guide, a Counsellor, a Comforter... —today we might say a supporter...

Working with people, trying to help, deepened my understanding of what God is about.... Finding the need for empathy with my clients and seeing it work helped me see what it was that God really did when He humbled Himself and came down among us, and how great His Love was for Him to do it. (Keith-Lucas, ca. 1980, pp. 6-8, 14)

**Virtues Model of Integration.** There are other examples of ways that the interaction of RSF and social work potentially contributes to the formation of the identity and character of Christians in social work, an interaction that can have a direct and beneficial impact on their provision of social work practice. For many Christians in social work, integration consists of engaging in a variety of Christian disciplines and practices (Ripley, Garzon, Hall, Mangis, & Murphy, 2009). These practices nurture the development of Christian virtues such as faith, hope, humility, hospitality, gratitude, selflessness, and love, which transform not just what they *do*, but even more fundamentally who they *are* (and *are becoming*). These changes, in turn, permeate all aspects of their lives, including their work as they strive to become conformed to the image of Christ, who is viewed as “the *telos* of human development” (Yangarber-Hicks et al., 2006, p. 344).

In his article “Selflessness as a Virtue in Social Work Practice,” Denis Costello describes the spiritual discipline of reading the Psalms as an intentional faith practice to nurture the virtue of selflessness, a prerequisite for strong clinical practice (Costello, 2013). This approach to integration wrestles with questions such as:

- What character traits, dispositions, commitments and virtues ought to be nurtured in social workers of faith to equip them to engage with and serve their clients and communities well?
- Which Christian disciplines and practices serve best to nurture the development of these traits and/or virtues?
- What is the role of social workers' faith traditions in the character and virtue formation of Christians in social work?

**Wonder and Worship Model of Integration.** Still one more way that the interaction of RSF and social work potentially contributes to the formation of the identity and character of Christians in social work involves how they *respond* to what they observe, learn and experience in their work, especially the progress and positive change that occurs in the lives of their clients or client systems. In particular, many Christians in social work describe a sense of wonder or awe they sometimes experience when they see glimpses of God's grace and work of healing, reconciliation and transformation in and through their work—ultimately leading to a response of heartfelt praise and worship (Glanzer, 2008). Indeed, for some people of faith who have finely honed their capacity to see and experience God's grace working in and through their practice, it might be said that their *doing* of social work, in fact, often becomes for them an act of adoration and worship.

Early in my social work career I worked as a house parent at a group home for adolescents with disabilities. Being a houseparent meant I lived in the group home in a room in the same hallway as the residents there. It was very difficult work that sometime required extremely long hours. I remember one time when I stayed up all night with a young man who was going through a very difficult transition in his life. The transition was causing him a great deal of pain and frustration, and the only way he knew how to deal with what he was feeling was to engage in severe self-abuse—slapping himself in the face and head until he drew blood.

On this particularly difficult evening, we spent most of the night up together, my simple goal being to prevent him from seriously hurting himself. I remember vividly how as morning approached after what seemed like an endless night, much of this young man's anxiety and tension began to ease, and we were able to play a few simple games together. Although I knew this young man still had many challenging days ahead of him during this difficult transition in his life, I remember having this sense that I was watching and perhaps even in a small way participating in God's work of bringing healing to the life of this distraught young man. As physically and emotionally drained as I was at that time, I remember feeling this wave of awe and wonder roll over me, leading to this profound experience of gratitude. It was truly a sacred moment in my life.

## **Category 2: The Effect of Integration on the *Understanding* of RSF and of Social Work**

The second broad category for organizing approaches to integration focuses on how RSF affects the way Christians in social work *understand* social work theory and practice. Reciprocally, this category also focuses on how social work

theory and practice affect the way they *understand* their Christian faith. Some examples of integration that fall within this second category include the latent and cognitive models of integration.

**Latent Model of Integration.** There are many examples of ways that RSF influences and contributes to the way Christians understand social work, sometimes even when they are not deliberately intending to do something they would call integration or are even consciously aware of it—at least until they take time to reflect on it. C. S. Lewis, in his essay on “Christian Apologetics,” in *God in the Dock* (1970), refers to this as Christians acting with their “Christianity latent” (p. 93), and Jacobson and Jacobson (2004) similarly describe the sense in which a Christian’s faith is sometimes “unconsciously embodied” (p. xi) in the way they live their lives.

Early in my career I was working for an agency that operated group homes for adolescents with developmental disabilities. Straight out of college with only a degree in philosophy, I knew very little about either residential care or developmental disabilities. But I remember with remarkable clarity my strong resistance to a component of the treatment plan for one of the more challenging residents in that system. According to the terms of this resident’s behavior plan, he was not allowed to go home to visit his family on weekends unless he met a number of prerequisite behavioral targets during the course of the week. Simply put, if his behavior was not “good enough” during the week, there would be no family visit for him on the weekend. In spite of my lack of work experience in this field, I was fiercely opposed to this component of the resident’s behavior plan.

Although I couldn’t have clearly articulated at that time why I felt this strategy was likely to cause more harm than good, upon reflection many years later, I began to understand my strong reaction. It had to do with the fact that this component of the behavior plan clashed irreconcilably with how I believe God treats us, and in turn, how God asks us to treat each other. At the heart of my understanding of Christian faith is this: if God required us to meet a series of “prerequisite behavioral targets” before He would allow us to have a relationship and fellowship with God, we would all be in serious trouble! Instead, it is only *because* God loves us first that we are able to begin becoming the kind of people who live and behave in the ways God intends for us. As I understand it, this is what the Christian concept of grace is all about. It seems clear to me now that my Christian faith had a strong impact on my opposition to this component of this resident’s behavior plan, but not in a way that was conscious, intentional or overt—I came to this issue with my Christianity latent.

**Cognitive Models of Integration.** There are many other examples of ways that RSF affects—in a more intentional way—the way Christians in social work understand social work, as well as the way social work reciprocally affects Christians’ understanding of their RSF. Some of these examples are developed more fully in the psychology literature, from which we will largely borrow here to illustrate how according to this model, the respective beliefs and values of RSF and social work can often:

- a. affect which particular aspects or priorities of the other discipline become a significant concern or emphasis for the Christian in social work
- b. strengthen, reinforce, support, refine, or complement the beliefs and values of the other discipline (Jacobson & Jacobson, 2004)
- c. retain their validity, but only within their own separate spheres (“The truth of each discipline is to remain separate and contextualized within the discipline from which it came” (Eck, 1996, pp. 108-109)
- d. act as filters to help sort out from the other discipline what the person is and is not able and willing to embrace (Brandsen & Hugen, 2007; Chamiec-Case, 2008; Jones, 2006)
- e. make a contribution to the other, but only after one or the other is in some way changed, altered, reconstructed, reinterpreted, transformed, or subsumed within the other to deal with initial or apparent tensions or inconsistencies (“Data from the other discipline must be altered to become acceptable as data for the process of integration”; Eck, 1996, p. 104)
- f. lead to new, fresh insights in the both disciplines that would likely not be found in either other discipline in and of itself and which are richer and/or more nuanced than either discipline could be on its own

In their article “Social Work for Social Justice: Strengthening Social Work Education through the Integration of Catholic Social Teaching,” Mary Ann Brenden and Barbara Shank describe a process through which the Colleges of St. Catherine/St. Thomas went about “thoughtfully and systematically integrating Catholic Social Teaching (CST) into the social work curriculum” (Brenden & Shank, 2012, p. 354), resulting in the program strengthening its social justice content.

As another illustration, in his article “Who Cares?” (2008), Jim Vanderwoerd proposes several biblical principles (which would not be found in the social work literature) to serve as a foundation for the development of a uniquely Christian view of social welfare, including: a) that God creates and upholds all the different societies that have and do exist; and b) that the purpose of societies/social structures is to facilitate God’s intent for humans in creation—which is to have abundantly flourishing relationships in harmony.

As one last illustration, Alan Keith-Lucas shared how biblical insights helped reinforce for him that his practice was “on the right track”:

How do we use them [insights from the Bible] in our practice? To me, perhaps, what they have done first and foremost is to confirm, or, in a few cases deny, my own gropings towards understanding what helping people really entails. I get an idea from practice. It looks good. But is it? Let’s look at God’s helping process, as the Bible records it. Yes, it is there. I must be on the right track. Or no, it isn’t consistent with God’s actions as I understand them from the Bible. I need to think again.

That is, I don’t start with the Bible and try to follow it in my practice. I don’t think the Bible is a manual on helping, but I do find that its insights deepen my understanding of what I am thinking and doing (Keith-Lucas, 1992, p. 13).

Reciprocally, what might illustrate how social work affects Christians' understanding of their RSF? Although there has been a dearth of scholarship within social work circles about the effect of social work on RSF, groundbreaking research in related fields over the past 15-20 years has confirmed a strong, positive correlation between spirituality/religion on the one hand, and health/mental health on the other (George, Larson, Koenig, & McCullough, 2000; Koenig et al., 2012; Oxhandler & Pargament, 2014). The empirical confirmation of this correlation, long believed by most faith traditions, provides an illustration of how "modern learning at its best might... reinforce... the truths of faith" (Glanzer, 2008, p. 45).

As another illustration, Nicholas Wolterstorff, though not a social worker, describes how his experience working with groups of South African blacks (during the time of apartheid), and later Middle Eastern Palestinians, brought into sharper focus that a crucial part of being faithful is to be passionately committed to working against injustice in its many ugly forms in our world (2019). In a significant way, Wolterstorff's understanding of the Christian faith has been shaped by his experience of working with people enduring terrible suffering and injustice.

### **Category 3: The Effect of Integration on the Practice of RSF and of Social Work**

The third broad category for organizing approaches to integration focuses on how RSF affects the way Christians in social work *carry out* social work practice, as well as how social work affects the way they *practice or live out* their Christian faith. Some examples of integration that fall within this third category include the Excellence/Integrity, Life of Service, Intrapersonal, Spiritual/Religious Sensitivity, and Bridging models of integration.

**Excellence/Integrity, and Life of Service Models of Integration.** One example of how the RSF of Christians in social work affects how they carry out social work practice is that for many Christians in social work, their faith drives and sustains their efforts to deliver the highest-quality of services possible—primarily because their ultimate goal in their work is to honor God (Brandsen & Hugen, 2007) and to meet what they understand to be God's standards for service, not merely the profession's standards: "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters.... It is the Lord Christ you are serving" (Colossians 3:23-24).

Many Christians in social work see their practice as a tangible way to offer acts of loving service through which they identify with and bear witness to Jesus and His love for all (Keller, 2012). The focus here is not so much on analyzing *intellectually* how RSF contributes to social work (like in the cognitive models of integration), but rather on putting RSF into action by humbly serving others, and by so doing, identifying with and being the hands and feet of Jesus—agents of His love in the world.

The illustration often given in the Mennonite tradition of such loving witness through service is Jesus' humble washing of the disciple's feet at the Last Supper:

The starting point for Mennonites has more to do with holistic living than with cognition and more to do with ethics than with the intellect.... For when Mennonites “focus on hands and heart,” they remind us that human life is more than cognition.... They take seriously Jesus’ words when he counseled his followers to abandon self in the service of others and especially in the service of the poor... to emulate Jesus in his ministry to “the least of these.” (Hughes, 2005, pp. 55, 56, 60)

Often this life of “following Jesus in the way of service and obedience” (Wolfer, 2011, p. 158) is modeled for us by Christians who exemplify what it means to live out their RSF by serving others. These Christian exemplars serve “to help others have spiritual and religious models as well as to provide inspiration and direction” (Yangarber-Hicks et al., 2006, p. 343), and can inspire us to imitate the way RSF has made a difference in their work. This is true whether they are persons we know well (co-workers or colleagues), or people about whom we have read or heard (notable figures like Mother Teresa or Martin Luther King Jr, for example). A poignant illustration of the Life of Service model appeared in a post to NACSW’s blog, *Shared Grace*:

When I was 15 years old I saw a social worker kneel in front of a weeping, pregnant 13 year old. She assured this frightened unwed mother-to-be that despite what it seemed in the moment, there were hope and a future for her. The incident happened in a Cleveland, OH welfare office and not a church. Still that Christian who was also a social worker engaged in the work of ministry. That day I vowed I’d become a social worker (Bridgeman, 2013 #632; Bridgeman, 2013 #632; Bridgeman, 2013 #632). (Bridgeman, 2013)

**Intrapersonal Model of Integration.** Another example of how the RSF of Christians in social work affects how they *carry out* social work practice would be the way some Christians in social work engage in one or more spiritual practice or discipline to help them focus and prepare for the work they do as social workers. For some this might include: a) engaging in private prayer or meditation as they prepare for (or even during) their work with their clients (Walker, Gorsuch, Siang-Yang, 2004, p. 71); b) reflecting on passages of Scripture or other religious texts that serve to encourage or inspire them, help them cope more effectively with situational anxiety or work-related stress, and/or enable them to focus their energies and attention; c) participating in other forms of individual or corporate worship, especially when the content, liturgy, or expression of that worship reinforces the purpose and value of their work.

### **Models Emphasizing More Direct Interaction between the Beliefs and Values of Social Workers and Their Clients**

Given the level of concern expressed by some within the social work profession that Christian faith potentially poses irreconcilable differences with social

work (Dressel et al., 2011; Spano & Koenig, 2007; Todd & Coholic, 2007), it is important to note that up to this point, the numerous examples of integration discussed thus far in this chapter carry a fairly low risk of creating any type of ethical tension or dissonance. That is primarily because these initial examples of integration have focused on ways that RSF motivates or inspires Christians to become social workers, nurtures the development of their characters, forms a basis or rationale for their core values (many of which, such as dignity and worth of persons, justice, service, overlap with the values of the social work profession), helps them center themselves in preparation for practice, etc.—none of which readily pose a challenge to the codes and standards of the social work profession.

There are, however, other examples of integration in which the potential risk of ethical tensions between RSF and social work become more relevant, for example, models of integration that involve interactions between the spiritual beliefs and values of social workers and those of their clients/client systems (Tan, 1996). Of course, such interactions (and the potential tensions that can arise out of them) are not unique to social workers who are Christians. Research has shown that religion and spirituality are important to many clients (Eun-Kyoung & Barrett, 2007; Oxhandler & Pargament, 2014), and in fact, some clients express a clear preference that service providers initiate discussion of their (the clients') religious and spiritual beliefs in the helping process (Koenig, 2005; Stanley et al., 2011). Since social workers are committed to "starting where the client is," incorporating clients' spiritual and religious interests, strengths, and beliefs when this is an important dimension in their lives is good social work practice. However, social workers do not come to their work as a spiritual "blank slate" and all social workers have spiritual worldviews that they bring with them to their practice (Hodge, 2008). Therefore, interactions between the spiritual worldviews of social workers and clients, whether acknowledged or not, are often an unavoidable part of helping relationship.

In this regard, it is important to note that Christians who make a commitment to become social workers (like all social workers) agree in good faith to abide by the ethics and standards of the social work profession including respecting clients' rights to self-determination (NASW, 2017, Section 1.02) and providing services that are sensitive to clients' beliefs and cultures (including spiritual and religious cultures), as well as to differences among people and cultural groups (NASW, 2017, Section 1.05). As such, social workers have the responsibility to be sensitive to and respectful of the spiritual and religious beliefs and values of their clients, and not to impose or let their own beliefs and value overwhelm those of their clients—especially those with religious beliefs and values that are different than their own.

An important aspect of maintaining this responsibility is for Christians in social work (as for all social workers) to be keenly aware of their own spiritual and religious beliefs and values, and the different ways they can potentially impact their work. It is only when they are conscious and mindful of their own beliefs and values that Christians in social work can be intentional about how

to integrate them into the helping relationship—in a way that is characterized by sensitivity and a willingness to exercise the capacity for self-criticism and change if necessary. The challenge then for Christians in social work—and indeed for all social workers, since everyone, religious or spiritual or not, brings basic worldview beliefs and values to their work—is “figuring out how to have integrity and competence in handling of our own beliefs and values as we work respectfully and ethically with clients” (Sherwood, 2012, p. 139).

**Spiritual/Religious Sensitivity Model of Integration.** So what are a couple of examples of ways that RSF affects the way Christians in social work *carry out* their social work practice in which there is more direct interaction between the spiritual beliefs and values of the social worker and those of the client/client system? In one important example, the spiritual/religious sensitivity model of integration, Christians in social work draw upon their own experience of RSF to heighten their sensitivity to and understanding of the spiritual or religious interests, strengths, and concerns of the clients, client systems, and colleagues/supervisees (Gingrich & Worthington, 2007; Okundaye, Gray, & Gray, 1999) with whom they work.

An excellent illustration of this example can be found in David Hodge’s “Constructing Spiritually Modified Interventions: Cognitive Therapy with Diverse Populations” (2008). Hodge, a Christian social work scholar, proposes a strategy for modifying or adapting cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) in a way that he argues is spiritually and religiously sensitive to clients whose spiritual worldviews are in conflict with some of the values underlying traditional cognitive behavioral therapy. Hodge’s argument goes something like this:

1. Every social work intervention is informed by an underlying set of values and worldview (no interventions are value-free).
2. The use of interventions whose underlying values and worldview are incongruent with clients’ values may have limited effectiveness, and/or be offensive/disrespectful of the clients’ autonomy (or even cause some harm).
3. Many western counseling interventions—such as cognitive behavioral theory—have been strongly influenced by “Enlightenment-based” values and worldview assumptions such as individualism, independence, self-actualization, and secularism.
4. Many clients embrace spiritual value systems and/or transcendent worldviews that are incongruent with some of these Enlightenment-based values and worldview assumptions: “Islam, for instance, tends to affirm values such as spirituality and community as opposed to secularism and individualism” (p. 182).
5. For these clients who do not share Enlightenment-based values and worldview assumptions, interventions like traditional, western cognitive therapy may pose significant value conflicts, and therefore may have limited effectiveness and/or be offensive to and/or disrespectful of these clients.
6. Therefore, to address these potential value conflicts in a way that exhibits spiritual and religious sensitivity, “practitioners trained in western cogni-

tive procedures might consider constructing spiritually modified interventions with clients who affirm spiritual worldviews” (p. 183).

In this way Hodge shows how spiritually modified CBT can be more spiritually sensitive to and respectful of—and therefore more effective with—clients who are Christian, or for that matter, Muslim, because it resonates with the spiritual beliefs and values more congruent with their worldviews. In this example, it is the client’s spiritual worldview (rather than the social worker’s) that remains the primary emphasis in the helping relationship (focused on “starting where the client is”), though it is important to note that much of the motivation and competence for Christians in social work to be spiritually and religiously sensitive to their clients is supported by the social worker’s faith.

**Bridging Model of Integration.** The Bridging model of integration emphasizes how Christians in social work can draw on both their connections to and understanding of RSF to serve as valuable bridges between the faith community on the one hand, and the social work community on the other. For although these two communities often share a similar commitment to reaching out to people in need, often they find it difficult to understand, trust and work cohesively with one another. Christians in social work are often able to take advantage of their affiliations with and commitment to both communities to help bring them together to help clients/client systems flourish and meet valued outcomes.

The following illustrates a Christian in social work serving as an effective bridge between the social services community on the one hand, and faith-based organizations and congregations on the other. During the late 1990s, Bill Raymond, an MSW-level social worker and a Christian, was the executive director of Good Samaritan, a faith-based organization located in Ottawa County, Michigan. As part of its “Project Zero,” Ottawa County officials approached Good Samaritan about partnering to help individuals receiving welfare to obtain employment. Under Bill’s leadership, Good Samaritan, which had long-standing relationships with many congregations in the area, mobilized over local 50 churches and helped these churches develop teams of trained mentors to work with interested welfare recipients. The Ottawa County welfare office, after screening clients in their system, would refer appropriate candidates to Good Samaritan, which would facilitate matches between the Ottawa County clients and church mentor teams, as well as provide on-going training and support for these teams. This partnership, in which Bill served as a key bridge-builder between government officials and a wide range of congregations from the faith community, contributed to Ottawa County becoming “the first locality in America to put every able-bodied welfare recipient to work” (Sherman, 1999).

### **What’s Still Missing from the Integration Discussion?**

Although the social work literature has paid a significant amount of attention to the integration of RSF and social work over the past several decades, there are still a number of important areas that have been largely absent from this discussion to date including:

- a. there is currently very little empirical research exploring which approaches to integration are currently in use, by whom, under what circumstances, in which settings, under whose auspices, with which populations, and to what measurable effect
- b. more efforts need to be made to explore what the distinctive theologies and practices of the various Christian denominations and traditions contribute to our understanding of the integration of RSF and social work
- c. more efforts need to be made to compare and contrast how faith traditions *other than* Christianity understand and work out the integration of RSF and social work (what do Christians in social work have to learn from and contribute to the efforts of Muslims (Ragab, 1992), Jews, and Hindus, for example, interested in the interaction of RSF and social work)
- d. more attention needs to be paid to the extent to which integration is a *communal* practice (Brandsen & Hugen, 2007, p. 352)—as opposed to something simply explored at a personal, individual level; e) this chapter's focus on the positive synergy that can be developed through the integration of RSF and social work should not anesthetize us to the fact that in at least some cases, integration can be approached in such a way (outside of the bounds of ethical practice) that could negatively affect social work practice, potentially even causing clients or clients systems harm; developing a clearer understanding about what differentiates healthy, positive integration from unethical integration should be an important research priority
- e. Social workers need to pay more attention to the rich and varied ways that social work theory and practice contribute to how Christians in social work understand, experience, and practice their RSF to balance the current focus of the literature which focuses primarily on how RSF contributes to social work

### **Concluding Thoughts on Integrating Christian RSF and Social Work**

The examples of integrating RSF and practice outlined in this chapter only represent the tip of the iceberg when it comes to describing the many and varied ways RSF and social work can come together to build powerful synergy contributing to efforts to support our clients and communities, though as has been noted, there remain some within the profession who argue that some Christians violate the NASW *Code of Ethics* because they proselytize with their clients and colleagues or are openly discriminatory on issues related to sexual diversity and gender identity (Dessel et al., 2011). Thus, further research on the RSF of social workers should be sensitive to both the potential positive/synergistic effects of integrating Christian RSF and social work, as well as tensions that may exist between the two.

This chapter's description of the ethical integration of Christian faith and social work is not intended to be "the final word" on this subject—far from it. There is still a great deal that we need to learn about the reciprocal influence

of Christian faith and social work on each other. My hope is that this chapter will serve as both a resource and an impetus for continued discussion about the many ways the faith/RSF of Christians in social work can make a positive, dynamic difference in their work as professional social workers, as well as the many ways social work can have a vital impact on the way Christians understand and live out their faith.

## References

- Alford, H. J., & Naughton, M. (2001). *Managing as if faith mattered: Christian social principles in the modern organization*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Brandson, C., & Hugen, B. (2007). Social work through the lens of Christian faith: Working toward integration. *Social Work & Christianity*, 34(4), 349-355.
- Brenden, M. A., & Shank, B. (2012). Social work for social justice: Strengthening social work education through the integration of Catholic Social Teaching. *Social Work and Christianity*, 39(2), 128-150.
- Bridgeman, P. (2013). Called to marketplace ministry. *Shared Grace*. Retrieved from <https://www.nacsw.org/called-to-marketplace-ministry/>
- Canda, E. R., & Furman, L. D. (2010). *Spiritual diversity in social work practice: The heart of helping* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Chamiec-Case, R. (2008). Exploring the filtering role of Christian beliefs and values in the integration of Christian faith and social work practice. In B. Hugen & L. Scales (Eds.), *Christianity and social work: Readings on the integration of Christian faith and social work practice* (3rd ed., pp. 93-104). Botsford, CT: NACSW.
- Conger, J. A. (1994). *Spirit at work: Discovering the spirituality in leadership*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Costello, D. (2013). Selflessness as a virtue in social work practice. *Social Work and Christianity*, 40(3), 271-286.
- Dessel, A., Bolen, R., & Shepardson, C. (2011). Can religious expression and sexual orientation affirmation coexist in social work? A critique of Hodge's theoretical, theological, and conceptual frameworks. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 47(2), 213-234.
- Eck, B. E. (1996). Integrating the integrators: An organizing framework for a multifaceted process of integration. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, 15(2), 101-115.
- Eun-Kyoung, L., & Barrett, C. (2007). Integrating spirituality, faith, and social justice in social work practice and education: A pilot study. *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work*, 26(2), 1-21.
- Fairholm, G. W. (1998). *Perspectives on leadership: From the science of management to its spiritual heart*. Westport, CT: Quorum.
- Furman, L. D., Benson, P. W., & Canda, E. R. (2011). Christian social workers' attitudes on the role of religion and spirituality in U. S. social work practice and education: 1997-2008. *Social Work & Christianity*, 38(2), 175-200.
- Furman, L. D., Zahl, M.-A., Benson, P. W., & Canda, E. R. (2007). An international analysis of the role of religion and spirituality in social work practice. *Families in Society*, 88(2), 241-254.
- Garcia-Zamor, J.-C. (2003). Workplace spirituality and organizational performance. *Public Administration Review*, 63(3), 355-364.
- George, L. K., Larson, D. B., Koenig, H. G., & McCullough, M. E. (2000). Spirituality and health: What we know, what we need to know. *Journal of Social & Clinical Psychology*, 19(1), 102-116.

- Gingrich, F., & Worthington, E. L. (2007). Supervision and the integration of faith into clinical practice: Research considerations. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, 26(4), 342-355.
- Glanzer, P. L. (2008). Why we should discard “the integration of faith and learning”: Rearticulating the mission of the Christian scholar. *Journal of Education & Christian Belief*, 12(1), 41-51.
- Harris, K., Randolph, B., & Gordon, T. (2016). What do clients want? Assessing spiritual needs in counseling: A literature review. *Spirituality in Clinical Practice*, 3, 250-275.
- Hodge, D. R. (2008). Constructing spiritually modified interventions: Cognitive therapy with diverse populations. *International Social Work*, 51(2), 178-192.
- Hugen, B. (2016). Calling: A spirituality model for social work practice. In L. Scales & M. Kelly (Eds.), *Christianity and social work: Readings on the integration of Christian faith and social work practice* (5th ed., pp. 71-84). Botsford: NACSW.
- Hugen, B., & Scales, T. L. (2008). *Christianity and social work: Readings on the integration of Christian faith and social work practice* (3rd ed.). Botsford, CT: NACSW.
- Hughes, R. T. (2005). *The vocation of a Christian scholar: How Christian faith can sustain the life of the mind* (rev.). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Jacobson, D., & Jacobson, R. (2004). *Scholarship and Christian faith: Enlarging the conversation*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Jones, S. L. (2006). Integration: defending it, describing it, doing it. *Journal of Psychology & Theology*, 34(3), 252-259.
- Keith-Lucas, A. (1992). Biblical insights into the helping process. *Social Work & Christianity*, 19(1), 6-14.
- Keller, T. (2012). *Every good endeavor: Connecting your work to God's work*. New York, NY: Penguin Group USA.
- Koenig, H. G. P. (2005). *Faith and mental health: Religious resources for healing*. Philadelphia, PA: Templeton Foundation Press.
- Koenig, H. G., King, D. E., & Carson, V. B. N. Y. (2012). *Handbook of religion and health* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Lewis, C. S. (1970). *God in the dock: Essays on theology and ethics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Maglitta, J. (1996). For God and company. *Computerworld*, 30(15), 73-75.
- Mattison, D., Jayaratne, S., & Croxton, T. (2000). Social workers' religiosity and its impact on religious practice behaviors. *Advances in Social Work*, 1(1), 43-59.
- Merriam-Webster. (2019). Integrate. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Retrieved April 16, 2019, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/integrate?src=search-dict-box>
- Milliman, J., Czaplewski, A. J., & Ferguson, J. (2003). Workplace spirituality and employee work attitudes: An exploratory empirical assessment. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 16(4), 426-447.
- Mitroff, I., & Denton, E. (1999). *A spiritual audit of corporate America: A hard look at spirituality, religion, and values in the workplace*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- National Association of Social Workers. (2015). Standards for cultural competence in social work practice. Retrieved April 16, 2019 from <https://www.socialworkers.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=7dVckZAYUmk%3d&portalid=0>
- National Association of Social Workers. (2017). Code of ethics. Retrieved April 16, 2019 from <https://www.socialworkers.org/about/ethics/code-of-ethics>
- Okundaye, J. N., Gray, C., & Gray, L. B. (1999). Reimagining field instruction from a spiritually sensitive perspective: An alternative approach. *Social Work*, 44, 371-383.

- Oxhandler, H. K. (2016). The development and validation of the Religious/Spiritually Integrated Practice Assessment Scale. *Research on Social Work Practice, 26*(3), 295-307.
- Oxhandler, H. K., & Giardina, T. D. (2017). Social workers' perceived barriers to and sources of support with integrating clients' religion/spirituality in practice. *Social Work, 62*(4), 323-332. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/swx036>
- Oxhandler, H. K., & Pargament, K. I. (2014). Social work practitioners' integration of clients' religion and spirituality in practice: A literature review. *Social Work, 59*(3), 271-279.
- Oxhandler, H. K., Parrish, D. E., Torres, L. T., & Achenbaum, W. A. (2015). The integration of clients' religion/spirituality in social work practice: A national survey. *Social Work, 60*(3), 228-237.
- Oxhandler, H. K., Polson, E. C., & Achenbaum, W. A. (2018). The religiosity and spiritual beliefs and practices of clinical social workers: A national survey. *Social Work, 63*(1), 47-56.
- Oxhandler, H. K., and Stanford, M. S. (2018). Client attitudes toward integrating religion and spirituality in mental health treatment: Scale development and client responses. *Social Work, 63*(4), 337-346.
- Ragab, I. A. (1992). Islamic perspectives on theory-building in the social sciences, *21st Annual Conference of the Association of Muslim Social Sciences*. East Lansing, MI: Association of Muslim Social Sciences.
- Rinkel, K. M. L. M. (2016). What does religion and spirituality mean to a racially diverse group of social work practitioners? *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought, 35*(3), 200-221.
- Ripley, J. S., Garzon, F. L., Hall, M. E. L., Mangis, M. W., & Murphy, C. J. (2009). Pilgrims' progress: Faculty and university factors in graduate student integration of faith and profession. *Journal of Psychology and Theology, 37*(1), 5-14.
- Russell, M. L. (2007). The secret of marketplace leadership success: Constructing a comprehensive framework for the effective integration of leadership, faith, and work. *Journal of Religious Leadership, 6*(1), 71-101.
- Scales, L., & Kelly, M. (Eds.). (2016). *Christianity and social work: Readings on the integration of Christian faith and social work practice* (5th ed.). Botsford, CT: North American Association of Christians in Social Work.
- Sheridan, M. J. (2012). Introduction: Connecting spirituality and social justice within macropractice. *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought, 31*(1-2), 1-8.
- Sheridan, M. J., Bullis, R. K., Adcock, C. R., Berlin, S. D., & Miller, P. C. (1992). Practitioners' personal and professional attitudes and behaviors toward religion and spirituality: Issues for social work educators and practice. *Social Work Education, 28*(2), 190-203.
- Sherman, A. (1999). Faith in communities: Implementing "Charitable Choice"—Transcending the separation between church and state [Electronic Version]. *Philanthropy*. Retrieved September 27, 2011, from [http://www.centeronfic.org/v2/equip/publications/articles/ImplementingCharitableChoice\\_1999.html](http://www.centeronfic.org/v2/equip/publications/articles/ImplementingCharitableChoice_1999.html)
- Sherwood, D. (2012). Doing the right thing: A Christian perspective on ethical decision-making for Christians in social work practice. In L. Scales & M. Kelly (Eds.), *Christianity and social work: Readings on the integration of Christian faith and social work practice* (3rd ed; pp. 123-150). Botsford: CT: NACSW.
- Singletary, J. E. (2005). The praxis of social work: A model of how faith informs practice informs faith. *Social Work & Christianity, 32*(1), 56-72.
- Spano, R., & Koenig, T. (2007). What is sacred when personal and professional values collide? *Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics, 4*(3), 91-104.

- Stanley, M. A., Bush, A. L., Camp, M. E., Jameson, J. P., Philips, L. L., & Barber, C. R. (2011). Older adults' preferences for religion/spirituality in treatment for anxiety and depression. *Aging and Mental Health, 15*, 334-343.
- Tan, S.-Y. (1996). Religion in clinical practice: Explicit and implicit integration. In E. P. Shafranske (Ed.), *Religion and the clinical practice of psychology* (pp. 365-390). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Todd, S., & Coholic, D. (2007). Christian fundamentalism and anti-oppressive social work pedagogy. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work, 27*(3/4), 5-25.
- Vanderwoerd, J. R. (2008). Who cares? Social welfare in a diverse society. In B. Hugen & L. Scales (Eds.), *Christianity and social work: Readings on the integration of Christian faith and social work practice* (3rd ed., pp. 179-198). Botsford, CT: NACSW.
- Walker, D. F., Gorsuch, R. L., & Siang-Yang, T. (2004). Therapists' integration of Religion and Spirituality in counseling: A meta-analysis. *Counseling & Values, 49*(1), 69-80.
- Williams, M., & Smolak, A. (2007). Integrating faith matters in social work education. *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought, 26*(3), 25-44.
- Wolfer, T. (2011). Following Jesus in social work: Learning from Anabaptist theology and practice. *Social Work and Christianity, 38*(2), 146-174.
- Wolterstorff, N. (2019) *In this world of wonders: Memoir in a Life of Learning*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Yangarber-Hicks, N., Behensky, C., Canning, S.S., Flanagan, K.S., Gibson, N.J.S., Hicks, M.W., Porter, S.L. (2006). Invitation to the table conversation: A few diverse perspectives on integration. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity, 25*(4), 338-353.
- YourDictionary. (2014). Synergy. In *YourDictionary.com dictionary*. Retrieved August 15, 2014, from <http://www.yourdictionary.com/synergy>

## Endnote

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that some social workers of faith otherwise committed to bringing RSF and social work together express caution regarding the use of the term "integration" to describe the relationship between Christian faith and social work because they believe: a) the term "integration" is used as a buzz word reflecting an attempt minimize the central and foundational role RSF should play in every aspect of life, thereby domesticating "faith" in an effort to make it more respectable and palatable to the larger social work profession; or b) that too strong a focus on "integration" could prevent social workers from serious consideration and application of social work knowledge and theories generated outside of the faith community; or c) that the concept of "integration" seems to imply that Christian social workers have something called RSF on the one hand, and one's profession, social work, on the other—as if faith and what we do in social work are wholly independent of or separable from social workers themselves, rather than seeing them both as "bubbling up from the very center of the social worker" (Brandsen & Hugen, 2007, p. 351).

# Integrating Christian Faith and Social Work Practice: Students' Views of the Journey

*Jon Singletary, Helen Wilson Harris, T. Laine Scales, and  
Dennis Myers*

Perhaps you remember family vacations that included road trips across the country; trips that started with the unfolding of a map on the dining room table or an internet search for driving directions. You found your current location on the map or through your GPS, then found your destination on the map and only then began the exploration of various routes to get there. The journey really started before the map was secured or the computer was booted up. It very likely started as you considered your destination and the purpose of your trip. Once you knew where you were going, your focus could move to the “how to” of getting there.

In this chapter four social work faculty members at a Christian university, Baylor University in Waco, Texas, share reflections from a study of student views of their journeys toward integration of faith and social work practice. As faculty colleagues, we spend a lot of time pondering this journey toward integration. We think about Christianity and social work very personally, in relation to ourselves and our callings both to the profession and to the academy. We talk about this often with other faculty members on retreats or in meetings. Most importantly, we explore this topic with students in advising, in classrooms, and over the course of more than a decade, in a research project with several of our students. We have been intentional in our exploration of this topic because of our call to teach and because we have been deeply affected by our own responses to the question “Where am I on the journey toward integrating Christian faith and social work practice?”

Our purpose in writing this chapter is three-fold. First, we want to share with you the fulfillment of our vocation in capturing the stories from Christian students at our university who have been on this journey toward becoming a social worker. Our second purpose in writing is to comment on the various themes emerging from the students' reflections as they shared stories of seeking God's plan, dealing with obstacles, and seeking companionship for their vocational journey. Finally, we will invite you to join with other Christian travelers and educators as we figure out together various ways to integrate Christian faith and social work practice.

We are addressing our comments to students, faculty members, social work practitioners, and others who may read this chapter. Our hope is that the stories of these Baylor students will prompt you to reflect on your own journey. We expect that for our readers, these conversations about calling have been and will

continue to be a central part of the dialogue concerning Christians in social work: a dialogue involving other students, advisors, supervisors, teachers, families, and friends. This chapter is grounded in our data analysis but is not presented as a standard research article. These personal reflections are from a longitudinal, interpretive research process initiated in 2005, with iterations in 2011 and 2019, that focuses on how students understand vocation in the context of social work education in our religiously-affiliated university setting. The assumption has been that there would be differences in terms of what the concept of vocation means, differences in how students discern vocation, and differences in lived vocations—namely, that students who choose social work as a career option live out the profession in different ways. This project engaged 10 baccalaureate and graduate social work students in semi-structured interviews that have taken place in person, by phone, and by email. The purposive sample includes two baccalaureate, two MSW foundation, and two MSW advanced-year students, as well as four dual-degree (MSW-MDiv) students: two in the foundation year and two in the advanced year.

We refer you to the formal research findings in another, earlier publication (Singletary, Harris, Myers, & Scales, 2006). Here, what you will find is our personal sharing of selected quotes from students turned alumni that we hope will serve as information and inspiration as you consider your calling and your pilgrimage. We invite you to travel with us as we reflect on the nature of vocation using the extended metaphor of a journey.

### **The Road Trip of a Lifetime**

For the Christian student, one of their most compelling questions is “Where am I going?” It is frequently easier for Christian students to talk freely about their eternal destination while struggling significantly with determining the course of their life journeys. Which of the many career paths available shall we take? What is it we are to “do” with this life we have been given? We look at the “life map” of possibilities and consider our options while many voices, from parents to mentors to detractors, offer opinions. Shall we travel major highways with large loops that let us travel quickly and efficiently but that help us or make us skirt around the inner cities where the bustle of life and pain of others is palpable? Shall we travel the back roads of life where the pace is slower and the interactions more measured and deliberate? Will our travels take us through many small adventures or will this journey center on one or two defining highways?

For the Christian social worker, there is a real sense that God serves as a navigator who helps chart our path, who created us with particular gifts and talents, and who works with us to accomplish the purposes of a good and beautiful creation. But understanding the message and instructions of the Navigator that guide our journey is often the challenge. Has God called me to a specific work? And if so, how will I “hear” the call and know the path? We find ourselves asking, “What are the roads or pathways that will get me to the work and then sustain me through the work to which God is calling me?”

Students who understand that they have been “called” to social work describe that time of hearing the Navigator’s voice in a variety of ways. Becoming a social worker is a process, a journey that may begin from any place at any time. Some social workers can trace the beginning of their travels to childhood: parents who modeled for them the giving of self in service of others and encouraged the journey of helping. For some, the journey toward social work may have begun later in life, after several apparently false starts down roads that were blocked or just seemed to be the wrong direction. Eventually they realized that in the midst of these unsettling destinations, the Navigator provided directional signs toward new pathways for strength building, clarity, and focus.

While all social work students may be on a journey, for Christians in social work, the paths toward life as a Christian and toward professional social work are often traveled simultaneously. Even a student who has been a Christian for many years may be walking a path of deepening faith. Therefore, Christian students in social work explore questions such as these: “How does my journey as a Christian intersect with, compliment, replicate, or diverge from travel along my journey toward professional social work? Will I be confronted with the choice between two roads, one representing my faith journey and the other representing my professional journey? Or is there truth in the statement that social work and Christianity really are quite compatible with one another? Is it possible that we have been called by God to forge a new road that brings our path across the most vulnerable, the most wounded, those needing a guide to get back to the road?”

Several of our students, now alumni with 15 years of practice experience, are able to tell us that the road is long, the path is not always clear, and that the journey is the destination. One alumna reflecting on her practice talks about the adventure, and explains “that it comes down to a few simple things... being genuine, being intentional and most importantly being a sojourner for those whom I encounter. As a social worker, these encounters often happen with my clients, but having these moments in my daily life are just as important.” Each day represents another step on the road trip of a lifetime.

### **Why Social Work Education?**

Our students’ stories remind us that all journeys must begin somewhere, even though the map has not been secured or the destination is not in view. Some students are very comfortable with wandering. Some are taking a leisurely journey that may be spontaneous and filled with last-minute decisions about destinations and activities. In some instances, students may enter social work to check it out and decide along the way what is interesting. In contrast, other students are on a carefully defined path to a very specific destination. They have a particular vocational goal in mind and their social work education is an intentional arrival point on their map. One student described where she hopes to be in 10 years:

I want to have started a nonprofit [agency] for doing job training for women. For impoverished women—that’s what I would like to be doing in ten years. To get there, I think in two years I am going

to be working at an agency doing very micro work.... I really need to have that perspective.<sup>1</sup>

One can imagine this student viewing social work classes as a predetermined route with sign posts that lead to the ten-year goal.

In some cases, students found their way to social work after developing a commitment to a particular population. For example, one young woman knew that she was gifted in working with children, so she planned to pursue teaching in a school setting. In conversation with her own teachers she began to broaden her view of careers in which she might work with children. Soon she was imagining social work as an option. In her own words,

I would have more job options [in social work] and if I'm a school teacher, then that's what I do with kids, I just teach them, but with social work I could do a whole bunch of different things and I liked that.

Another student began social work in order to work with children and adolescents, but, through experience in internships and classes, opened her mind to consider work with additional populations:

I always thought I was going to work with children. And it's switched a lot. Our society's changing as well, so Alzheimer's and caregivers are going to be big needs our population is going to have. I definitely could see myself in that kind of field.... I have lots of options.

Another student's ultimate goal was ministry, but this student intentionally sought a social work education to gain particular skills and information. Encountering other travelers with social work competencies motivated this student to walk with them.

I want to connect to people and really help them work through these issues that they've got. I thought that I could do that in seminary, but when I got in there—that's where the catch was—when I started asking questions, the only two people in the room that knew were social work students, that was what really did it for me. This is some information that I have always wanted to know. How do I get this information? And social work has that information with it.

While the student quoted above wanted to join the social workers to gain particular knowledge or skills, another student wanted to journey alongside social workers because she appreciated the value base of the profession.

The first draw in my mind was that I thought social workers worked with the poor, that was the initial lead in. But also, helping the oppressed and the poor in justice issues from a biblical basis and seeing that as a value of the social work profession.... So social work values are definitely places that attracted me as a means of vocation or a job where I live out the values.

As our alumni look back, their social work education is just as meaningful 15 years later. One offers, "I don't think it's possible to overstate the positive impact my social work education, as well as my relationship with other social workers, have had on my life and my sense of calling." Another talks about how her education gives meaning to each area of her life:

While my [view of calling] has drifted from professional work to my private relationships, the education and social work perspective have given me insight and understanding I often notice are not present in many of my non-social work peers. I feel this has led to the development of healthier, more fulfilling relationships and stronger peer networks.

### **Clarity of Calling**

For some, social work education expands students' view of calling. One says,

Growing up, being 'called by God' meant church. Through the experiences I had in graduate school, I started to see that God's calling was so much bigger than this. I began to recognize that my calling was not to ministry in the traditional sense, my calling was to show Christ's love to everyone I encountered.

Another young alumna expresses the breadth and depth of her calling:

My calling is to hug someone who feels untouchable because he just found out he is HIV positive. My calling is to sit with a suicidal client being admitted in to a mental health facility because he has no one else who can. My calling is to be honest with my clients having those hard conversations about living wills and advanced directives. My calling was to sit with my 82-year-old client as he died because he had no other family. My calling is walking alongside a couple, really wanting a second child, while also understanding their risks... and then celebrating with them when their daughter was born HIV negative (she is now 8 years old). My calling also being able to celebrate with my client as he begins his fifth year of sobriety.

Even when there is this rich sense of purpose, our alumni know that faithfulness to their calling is needed to sustain them in light of the profession's challenges:

When people ask me what I do, I already know what their reaction and response will be, 'Wow, that must so hard.' Of course, it is hard but there is nothing else I would rather do. This is my calling.

Another alumna looks back on how she understands her vocation as a way of following God in the fullness of her life's journey. She says:

My understanding of vocation is that it is a seamless thread by which I understand my life's journey, who I am, and what I am called to do

that both pervades and transcends not only my work life, but also my life as a wife, a mother, a friend, a neighbor, and a child of God.

### **Where am I Going?**

In contrast to students who had a clear picture about why they chose social work education and what their calling means, other students were wandering, seeking clarity on the journey. One student was simply lost and stated bluntly “I have no direction on my future at this point.” Another traveler expressed outwardly a feeling of confidence that she would find the way as she goes, but at the same time, admits an “uneasy feeling” as well.

To me, at this point, it’s all very unclear. I’m learning that there are so many options out there and that I have to give it time to know things will develop, and I’ll find it as I go. So I’m doing my education to help give me some more options and some more places, but I can’t see down the line right now. And it’s kind of an uneasy feeling, not knowing which direction or any of the options that are available—in either direction.

We may know that good things can happen along the way and that the path will be there when we need it; however, the uneasiness described above leads to a natural question for students: will we really like what we find along the way? And, perhaps a more troubling question: when we arrive at our destination, will the satisfaction we find be worth the time and effort we have invested?

Sometimes it is easier to see where we are on the path by looking behind us, at where we have been. This student reflects on the calling to social work as a process; looking back as a young alumna, she can see that there were signposts of confirmation on her journey.

I don’t think it was one instance, like one minute, all of a sudden, I was like, ‘I’m called to social work.’ I think it was a process... the constant affirmation. I believe when people are walking with God, and in His word every day, and are really seeking Him, then He’ll lead you in a certain direction, and so as I’ve been seeking Him through- out college, my college experience and life, I’ve felt confirmed over and over again to continue in the path of social work. And more so every day, even today, more so than yesterday.

### **Am I on the Right Road?**

One of the lessons we learned from the students we interviewed was that entering and staying on the path to a vocation in social work can be an uncertain and complicated task. Their experiences made us more aware of the unexpected turns, intersections, and detours that accompany most who travel this way. These honest reports of the terrain will alert you to the possibility that you may encounter obstacles in the pathway—you or others in your life may question the direction

you are going, the accuracy of your map, and the worth of your destination. You will discover that others have traveled the path that you are now on or that you are thinking of entering. They have much to say about the challenges you face and about how God keeps them on the path and helps them make sense of the journey.

Some students told us that, in the beginning, they didn't want to be on the path toward a career in social work. It seems that God's plan for their life's journey was very different from the life map they envisioned. This reflection illustrates how God's plans may not be our plans:

I remember a point where I sat there and I said, "I don't want to go this direction." I remember praying, "God, you got something confused here. You got the wrong plan for the wrong girl." There was a point where I really remember just about screaming my head off going, "God; you're just off, here! I don't understand why you're doing this!"

Another student described the experience of misinterpreting God's plan:

I think, for me, I misinterpret God, definitely because I am a self-ish person and have my own agenda and my own plans that aren't necessarily in conjunction with His, so I do get a little confused and can't see the line—but I definitely know that from my experience, He's used other people and is just planting a seed in my heart, or maybe a desire or maybe just a little interest.

It seems that once these students reluctantly entered the path of God's plan for their Christian vocation, confirmation that they were in the right place reassured them. Students reported confirmation from a number of sources.

I really think, looking back, it was nothing other than God saying, 'We're going to have to take major steps to intervene on this girl's life, because she is not listening to anything I'm saying to her! I've put this desire in her heart, I've put this internal factor in her that is driving her towards social work, and she is just abandoning it!' So, that's why I think that God definitely had a huge part in that.

One student described the sense of peace that confirmed the chosen path:

I think it's completely natural for me to be in social work. And if I try to pursue other things, it really doesn't give me that sense of peace, it gives me more of a sense of like I don't belong there. That's really the role that social work plays and that's how I feel as far as my calling, when I know that when I'm doing something that God doesn't want me to do, I don't have that peace. And when God wants me to do something and that's where I should be, and that's where I am, I have that sense of peace and I'm fine with it even if it makes me uncomfortable, but I feel just natural to be there.

Looking back as alumni, these young professionals know the value of the journey in and of itself. We do not often know if we are on the right road, at the right time, or even if we have landed at the right place. One alumna put it this way:

I have found reorientation of how I view my own calling and perceive the calling of others; being called by God is less about finding a 'perfect' path and more about being willing to be led on a journey for the purpose of becoming, belonging, and contributing. This can take place in spite of finding the 'perfect' job, relationship, or experience. In fact, the pursuit of these perfect situations can often keep us paralyzed from moving forward.

### **Encountering Obstacles**

After overcoming their resistance, and then heading out on to the social work path, some students reported that they encountered unanticipated obstacles along the way. Some of these challenges, such as the family members who questioned their choices and the public perception of social work, affected their decisions to begin the journey while others, such as a loss of professional destination created a temporary disorientation.

#### **Family concerns**

Confusion or concern may be the response of parents and family members to students who choose social work as a career. Family members may want to understand the motivation and reasoning that underlie this sometimes controversial decision. These two quotes from students reflect the concerns that some family members may have about the choice of social work as a career:

No matter what I do, there is [from my parents] this, "ok what is your reasoning behind this?" I think that is a real big key thing, to see where my motivation is coming from, and what makes me do this, to make sure I am doing it for the right reasons. Also, I think, part of it is for bragging rights, so that when people ask them, [parents] can say, 'well, she's doing it because she wants to dah, dah, dah.' I get a kick out of that - that that's one of the things that they do.

Another student described a negative reaction to the career path from family:

Oh, well, they definitely have not influenced me to be called to—I mean, they are—my grandparents still are in denial that I am a social work major. I mean, no one in my family wanted me to be a social work major. So, they really have not done anything to encourage me to do that. But I think they just really wanted me to do business. But, I don't know.

#### **Public perception of social work**

Professional prestige and societal recognition may affect career choice. This was not an often mentioned concern in these interviews but there were at least several references to this potential obstacle. One student described a narrow per-

ception of social work when initially considering the profession, asking “Aren’t they just CPS [Child Protective Services] workers? That was my whole idea of social work.” Another student suggested that “social work isn’t that glamorous of a profession.” He described the questions others ask: “Is social work a real profession?” People look down on social workers. They don’t think it is a real thing. In court, they don’t listen to their testimony, they don’t think it’s real, but that’s just how it was with Jesus.”

### **Obstacles as a path to new directions**

Obstacles can detour the traveler in a direction that actually leads to God’s intention for the social work student. Consider this observation:

I wish I could say I was that trusting and that easy to influence, but one of the characteristics I have is being stubborn. I am someone who’s not very easy to move and it seems I keep getting hit from different directions until I’m finally going, maybe I’m being told something here. That includes some of the people that I know. I’m wanting to go on this path and I keep getting stumbling blocks that are really actually people who are kind of going, ‘you might want to consider doing this, you’re fitted for this.’

All of these social work students were seeking a path that would lead them to a place where they could ethically live into their vocation and their faith. The stories provide maps for travelers that aspire to the same destination. The pathway can be clearly marked with signs of confirmation and direction. We also have seen that, along the way, social work students who embrace Christian faith may encounter unanticipated obstacles that may disorient and even cause them to lose their way. Amazingly, the God who called them to the journey is also able to set their feet on the life-long path of service and Christian vocation. And, fortunately, Christian social workers do not ever have to walk alone.

### **Fellow Travelers**

Social workers know perhaps better than most that no one successfully journeys alone in this life. As you learn how to walk alongside the people you serve, you also may begin to wonder “Who will travel with me? Family, faculty, supervisors, student colleagues, God?” You may experience the presence of God calling in many ways; some direct and some indirect, but a part of God’s calling is found in the voices of those who go with you on the journey.

Students in our program discussed their understanding of God’s call through the influence of other people. We heard about direct and indirect influence of family members, co-workers, social workers, faculty, or others who helped students understand social work as an option for responding to God’s call. Interpersonal relationships helped students discern God’s call to the profession of social work and to know that there was someone on the journey with

them. And, as alumni, relationships are no less important. These professionals continue to recognize the need for support on the journey, for friends and colleagues who can walk alongside them in the conversations prompted along the way. One graduate states:

I find relationships are significant for me in keeping a right mind and heart when I think about my vocation and calling.... I have found having relationships with people who are willing to hold me accountable, calling out places of needed development and acknowledging moments of growth, are helpful so that I am not only walking in my own judgment.

Here we highlight some of these relationships on the journey.

### **Who will guide my journey? God**

In trusting God's presence in our midst, we heard students describe the meaning of this for their journeys. One student said that God's "hand was there and just kept guiding me through." Another student offers, "the calling for me is just following what God wants me to do and where God is leading me to." And also, "With me, I feel like God really, strongly directed me towards this." Finally, a graduate looks back in recognition of God's guidance, "God calls us, not just me, to shine and show love for his creation. This creation includes everything and everyone. In other words, we're all called to take responsibility for God's creation."

### **Who will go with me? Family and friends**

The most common travelers alongside students were their family and friends. Sometimes these loved ones question the turns we make on the journey. Sometimes, they aren't sure how to support us along the way. Looking back on years of family strife, a student reflected on her family's role in her journey saying, "I don't know if my family necessarily, in a positive way, influenced my decision for social work."

Yet, other students had different experiences as families ventured forth with them: "I knew that by choosing a profession where I would be helping people," said one student, "I would be understood by my family and they would support that decision because that's what I wanted to do." Another student also voiced the encouragement of family traveling with them, "I think that there is an experience where your family, they are helping me through a lot of this. That's one thing I feel very blessed with, is that they have been very supportive." And in hindsight, a graduate says, "Belief in me by others whose opinions I value and trust has played a vital role in affirming my sense of call."

One alumnus we talked to is married to a social worker-turned-minister who reflects on vocation with him. He says,

My wife has had an impact on my sense of calling. As an ordained minister, she has her individual calling. However, we do not see our calling apart from one another. In other words, in order to do the work that we're called to do, we both have to be called. That is, our mutual support is crucial to doing what we're called to do.

### **Who will go with me? Social workers such as faculty, classmates, and field supervisors**

Significant relationships are influential in helping you make your way down the road into professional social work practice. There are many others who travel alongside you in the adventure of becoming a professional, and social work education offers students unique and practical experiences in developing strength for the journey. Students spend a great deal of time with classmates, faculty, and field supervisors, who are a part of their journeys of discernment. They often recognize right away the importance of these relationships.

One new student described one of her attractions to the program: "I knew the faculty was very friendly and very interested in their students succeeding."

Students commented on the relationships faculty intentionally developed with students on this journey. "I think it's pretty much invaluable," said one student, "At least if it's set up properly, because you can draw on the experience of your professors, who have years of experience in the field, as well as the experience of the people who are even writing the textbooks." Professors are described as mentors in students' lives as they walk alongside them, "they really push to a high standard, but they're also there to, not hold your hand, but support you, encourage you, and I just got a really strong sense of community, and support."

And as the years go by, an alumna is mindful of colleagues and faculty who continue to shape her journey:

Colleagues from the social work program past and future, as well as colleagues in my broader higher educational institution have certainly played an important role in shaping my sense of belonging and have been influential. There is no question that one of the greatest privileges I feel is having the support and encouragement of my former professors to lean into.

Faculty understood the importance of engaging with students and alumni. After a weekend of discussions about our own vocational journeys, faculty in our program wrote about the role they envisioned for themselves in walking alongside students: "My assessment is that sharing about our journeys and aspirations enabled us to see and appreciate the complexity and richness of the fabric of our collective relationship," offered one professor. Another added her reflections,

My renewed awareness of my own calling and what has contributed to living it out has made me more aware of the potential significance of every interaction I have with students. I find myself asking my

advisees and other students more open-ended questions about their purpose and urging them to see their inner promptings and long-held dreams.

As students, you also have supervisors guiding you while you learn, preparing you for the road ahead: "I talk to my supervisor constantly about what is going on with this client," said one person we interviewed. "She lets me do the work, but she is there for advice and consultation. This is uncharted territory for me, but I am learning so much." Students express appreciation for the learning that comes in supervision. One offers, "It was tremendously helpful to me that my supervisor went out on an assessment with me. I was able to discuss advanced practice with her and it was really good to have her feedback from the assessment." And another echoes the support on the journey of learning: "In the middle of the crises of moving the clients I was on the phone with my supervisor. I wasn't sure what to do, and she talked me through it. But she also let me do it on my own, for which I am now thankful. It was a great experience."

### **Who will go with me? Clients**

In social work education, you will have opportunities to reflect upon and then practice traveling with your clients, whether you are in generalist practice, direct practice, or practice with larger systems, you will be asking how to accompany your clients and how they will accompany you on this journey.

Our students may be aware of where they have stumbled along the way, but they are not sure that the people they serve understand the challenges of their journeys. "Sometimes, it's harder to meet people's needs because sometimes you have to convince them they have needs, or they don't realize they have needs," said one interviewee. What this suggests is that students are learning the reciprocal nature of walking alongside others. They walk with clients in hopes of making a difference in their journeys. One student said, "If you can intervene and somehow help them realize that they are worth something and they have true potential, I feel like it changes so many things." After a similar experience with a client, another student said, "That made me feel good because I didn't force anything on him, I just lived right and tried to treat him like I treat anybody else."

As students on the journey into the profession walk with clients, they want to help them, but we know they also learn to "have the clients be the expert of their experience," as one student put it. In this, the clients also walk with students. They help students move further along the journey.

### **Integration of Christian Faith and Social Work Practice**

Now we have come to the heart of what we learned from our interviews. If you are reading this, you probably have some interest in exploring the integration of Christian faith with a passion for service. Maybe you are faculty members, like us, who have thought about this for years. Maybe you are a student, who

is exploring various aspects of what it means to travel this road. Social work students who embrace Christian faith seek a path leading to places where they can integrate professional values and ethics with their religious beliefs. The journey down this path usually creates a unique set of opportunities, challenges and blessings.

## **Opportunities**

For some students, Christian faith adds an extra measure of compassion to their work. This student articulated how faith integration may allow the worker to understand the client more completely.

My faith shapes who I am—kind of like my thought processes.... as I'm in social work, I'm learning to evaluate situations and just know who I am and what my beliefs are, but then to see that person for who they are and to work with them in where they're at. So... I think how I approach situations may be different. I may be a little more compassionate than somebody else would be.

Another student explored a similar theme, acknowledging that her own Christian values are a lens through which she sees the world, but this lens does not prevent her from valuing the different perspectives of her clients.

I'm at peace, I guess, as far as, I'm able to discuss with clients about their own views and their own wants and desires for whom—for who they are. Without imposing my own values. Because I realize that my values are, maybe, different from theirs. But that doesn't mean that I cannot help that person.

Looking back, an alumni offered a similar response:

Social work education prepared me to fully engage individuals who are different from me and to help them even if I do not agree with them. In other words, the task is to serve regardless of my own values and beliefs.

Perhaps most significantly, a number of students reported the important interplay between their faith and their professional identity and practice. This student described this as “accountability”:

Another great blessing I have had is that it [social work] has made me,—it has held me accountable to my faith. But it has made me more genuine in my faith. It has really made me examine what it means to be a Christian—what it means to minister. The word ‘ministry’ to me just means doing good social work. The profession has held me more accountable to my faith, and my faith has held me more accountable to my profession.

## Challenges and Dilemmas

For some of the students we interviewed, the potential dissonance between faith and practice created significant, but not overwhelming concerns along the way. For one student this blend was a “dangerous” idea:

I think that calling and social work sometimes can be dangerous words to associate together for the social work profession because you don't want to minimize the professionalism of social work. And classifying social work as a ministry is very dangerous. I think that it does take out the element of professionalism. At the same time, you need to know how to effectively balance faith and practice, because you are never going to be just a social worker. I am going to be going somewhere as a Christian, with the title social worker. And I think it's a wonderful blessing to have that opportunity, but it can be very dangerous because you are representing two amazing things. I think that's why so many people are so afraid of having faith in practice, and those two words together are like an oxymoron to so many people. I think it's sad, but I think there is a delicate balance there.

Other interviewees, preparing for ministry roles, echoed the potential dissonance between the role of social worker and the role of minister.

I like the fact that in social work, you know—there are certain things you can do that you can't seem to do in ministry. And there's the other catch where there are certain things you can't do in social work that you can in ministry. For example, with a pastor, they can openly go in and say, this is what I believe and all of this. In social work, it's not really—that's kind of frowned upon.

Students admitted that learning to do this integration was a process; one that sometimes involved some “hard knocks.” One student, who described the process of integration as “a little confusing,” told us about a learning experience.

For the most part, it's just a hard issue. You take it case by case. I had a hard experience this past semester in my agency where I did an intake and I asked my client if she ever prayed and it helped our conversation and I didn't regret doing it but my supervisor and I had to talk a long time about why that would have been a bad idea and it was hard. In the end I really saw where he was coming from. I just want to know what is best for the client. I just want to be led by the Holy Spirit and not necessarily by the [NASW] Code of Ethics. It's just really hard for me, but I am learning a lot and I am open to learning a lot more.

Some students reported that trying to reconcile the values of the social work profession with Christian values presented a major obstacle for them. One felt

frustrated stating, "I don't know that I have been able to integrate it [faith and social work] to the point that I feel that it works; I feel really torn." Another student described in more detail:

I think that there are major conflicts with how I was raised and element of faith in my life. Something I struggled with a lot in undergrad is kind of taking on my parents' values and the things that I learned in the church, you know things that I was supposed to do and how I was supposed to act, and what I needed to do I felt like conflicted greatly with social work, and that troubled me.

These are the dilemmas that students mention as they embark on a journey that fully embraces the authentic integration of social work and Christian faith. While the struggles are significant and formative, there are also encounters with blessings and opportunities that mark the journey.

### **Blessings**

In spite of encountering challenges, the students we interviewed reported a wide array of blessings and opportunities associated with the blending of Christian faith and professional identity. At a deeply personal level, students indicated that their intentional efforts at integration resulted in "the feeling of inner harmony," "freedom and flexibility," and helping "me realize more of who I am and making me understand... what I want to do." Sometimes the reward is a feeling of comfort and joy as reflected in this statement: "I prayed about it, and I feel great about it."

One frequently mentioned outcome of the intentional integration of faith and practice was that faith was strengthened in the process. For example, "my social work education has shaped my faith and has made me—it's kind of really helped me be a better Christian." These words echoed this same conclusion—"it [social work] has made me more genuine in my faith." This kind of integration may also have the power to change important assumptions. One student described herself as "a Christian wearing the hat of a social worker," with training that "is going to be shaping how I speak to people, even though it [professional education] may not have changed everything how I feel, but it has changed how I think."

The process of blending faith and practice seemed to have beneficial consequences for interactions with clients. Consider this observation—"I think that's my biggest thing that I've enjoyed... it's what pulled me into it is being able to identify a need and to be aware of needs more than probably the average person is." One student counted among her blessings: "I have gotten to work with people who I never would have ever talked to or met..." While there may be dilemmas and challenges related to an intentional quest to integrate Christian faith and social work practice, you may also find blessings and opportunities to discover and claim along the way. Whatever you encounter, please know that you do not have to travel alone. Christians have expressed this idea in the worship hymn "The Servant Song":

*We are travelers on a journey,  
Fellow Pilgrims on the road  
We are here to help each other  
Walk the mile and bear the load.*

### **The Journey Leads Home**

As we follow up with alumni who continue to reflect on their education and the profession, on obstacles they encounter and on those who travel with them, as they consider the role of faith, a consistent theme is both the metaphor of calling as a journey and the sense of home they feel on the journey. We heard one remark, “When I think of my calling at this stage of my journey, I physically feel a sense of calmness; I feel I have finally found my home.”

Another shares a similar thought, “Calling feels like coming home. It’s having a better understanding of who you are, and how that connects to understanding what is your purpose in this world.”

One more reflection on this theme,

I am in a space in my life today where my sense of call is pretty solid. In my spirit through prayer, through worship, through conversations with colleagues with a shared love of teaching, I feel God’s affirming ‘Yes. Yes, my child this is where you are at home, and where I want you.’

And what is this place called home. It is clear that they have found a home in faithful service, a home in following in the way of their faith, and a home in the profession of social work.

### **Conclusion: The Journey Matters**

The scripture is replete with journey metaphors that help us understand that our relationship with God and our response to God’s call is about the day to day living out of our faith rather than rushing headlong toward a destination. Moses, called to deliver the people, died after a life of leadership with the discovery that his ministry was about the journey, not about the destination. Saul was out looking for donkeys when Samuel found him and communicated God’s call for leadership. David was tending sheep when God called him to lead an army and eventually a nation. Jesus’ ministry occurred from village to village as he traveled, preached, healed, and loved. He called to his disciples (who were not sure where he would take them), “Come follow me.” He invited them to participate with him in ministry rather than to arrive at a particular destination. We know from the life and ministry of Jesus that the journey is not always easy or without challenges. The words of our students confirmed that in spite of challenges, they found strength to continue, by faith, as followers of Jesus, to travel with him as he equips them and leads them to the hungry, the poor, the broken in body and spirit, the dying, the rejected and lonely, the least

of these. We commit then to journey on together, to talk with them, and listen to them, and reflect with them, bound by the call to be fellow travelers with the one who taught us best about the ministry of presence.

We end our chapter with a prayer offered up for social workers by our founding dean Dr. Diana Garland. It is our intercession on behalf of you who are joining us on the journey.

*We are grateful, Lord God, that when you call us on this journey,  
You don't call us to walk it alone.  
We thank you for one another to share the journey,  
To comfort and encourage one another.  
Hold us together, Lord; hold our hands and steady us on the way.  
Show us just the next steps to take—  
We don't need to see all the way, for we trust the destination to you.  
Give us courage to go, step by step, with one another and with you.*

## **References**

Singletary, J., Harris, H. W., Myers, D., & Scales, T. L. (Spring, 2006). Student narratives on social work as a calling. *Areté*, 30(1), 188-199.

## **Endnote**

<sup>1</sup> This and all other quotes are from Baylor University Institutional Review Board approved interviews conducted in 2004-2005, with follow-up interviews in 2011 and 2019, with Baylor University students and alumni. To protect their confidentiality, names will not be cited.



## SECTION 3

# Human Behavior and Spiritual Development in a Diverse World

---



# Integrating Clients’ Religion and Spirituality into Social Work Practice: Current Research and Future Recommendations

---

Holly K. Oxhandler<sup>1</sup>

The concepts of religion and spirituality (RS) are not new to the social work profession. Looking back on social work’s history, RS have been woven into our profession’s roots, influenced social justice movements, motivated social work practitioners to carry out their work, and have been deeply embedded into the fabric of our clients’ lives and circumstances—in both positive and negative ways.

Though many definitions of these terms exist across helping professions, Canda and Furman (2010) have defined these terms in social work as the following:

*Religion:* “an institutionalized (i.e., systematic) pattern of values, beliefs, symbols, behaviors, and experiences that are oriented toward spiritual concerns, shared by a community, and transmitted over time.

*Spirituality:* “refers to a universal quality of human beings and their cultures related to the quest for meaning, purpose, morality, transcendence, well-being, and profound relationships with ourselves, others, and ultimate reality. In this sense, spirituality may express through religious forms or it may be independent of them.” (p. 59)

Another way to describe spirituality that one of my dear mentors, W. Andrew Achenbaum (a historian) offered is “the immanence and transcendence” (personal communication). Still, another mentor of mine, Kenneth I. Pargament (a psychologist), defines spirituality as “the search for the sacred” (2007). When Canda and Furman note that “spirituality (like emotionality or physicality) is a type of word that connotes a process and way of being” (2010, p. 59), that certainly includes the variety of ways in which we interpret and define this term. As described below, spirituality has a sense of depth and meaning for many of us, and is an important component to our bio-psycho-social-spiritual makeup. Spirituality is both subjective and personal, with many interpretations that reflect the various ways we experience this concept.

There are also many ways in which RS intersect with one another. Specifically, Hill and colleagues (2000) have keenly highlighted their overlap by noting the following:

Beliefs and experiences that are considered to be an aspect of traditional religiousness (e.g., prayer, church attendance, reading of sacred writings, etc.) are also spiritual if they are activated by an individual's search for the sacred. In the absence of information about why an individual engages in a particular religious or spiritual behavior, it can be difficult to infer whether that particular behavior is reflecting religiousness, spirituality, or both. (p. 71)

### **Prevalence of Religion and Spirituality**

Across the United States (US), adults tend to consider themselves both religious and spiritual (42%), with fewer identifying as religious but not spiritual (20%), spiritual but not religious (21%), or neither (12%) (5% as other; Smith, Davern, Freese, & Morgan, 2019). Further, 65% of US adults consider themselves to be moderately or very spiritual, and 53% consider themselves moderately or very religious, indicating they also view these terms as overlapping.

Regarding the prevalence of RS in the US, Pew Research Center (2015) reported that 77% of US adults consider religion to be at least somewhat important, with 53% saying it is very important. Across faith traditions, nearly nine out of 10 believe in God and pray often, with 55% praying at least daily and another 16% praying at least weekly. Further, 92% agree that practicing a religion helps provide comfort in difficult times (Smith et al., 2019).

These data are not limited to one faith tradition, but cut across a diverse tapestry of deeply embedded beliefs and practices across the US. In the most recent General Social Survey (Smith et al., 2019), 49% identified as Protestant, 21% Catholic, 2% Jewish, <1% Muslim, <1% Buddhist, <1% Hindu, 3% Other, and 23% None. It is important to note that even if two individuals identify with the same tradition, it does not necessarily mean they believe the exact same things, are in the exact same place along their faith journeys, or engage in the exact same practices. In fact, there may be times in which a Catholic and Buddhist share more similar beliefs (e.g., their approaches to valuing the entire spectrum of life) and practices (e.g., contemplative prayer and meditation) than two Catholics or two Buddhists at different places in their faith journeys. Of course, previous life events, relationships, travel, education, interfaith dialogue, and experiences will lend themselves to mold an individual's faith to shift and grow over the years.

Indeed, Fowler's (1979) *Stages of Faith* is a great example of normalizing how one's faith journey changes over time, beginning with the first stage (Intuitive-Projective Stage), when our most basic ideas about God are identified from our family of origin and society, to stage six (Universalizing Faith), which few people reach, but will result in transitioning to a life of service for others

without worries or doubts. As if RS were not complex enough with the beautiful diversity of faith traditions, layering six stages of faith development certainly adds an important consideration and opportunity to practice humility in social work practice! The two sections below focus on why social workers must still consider this complex area of both clients' lives and our own.

## **Rationale for Considering Clients' RS**

There may be many rationales for considering clients' RS in ethical and effective social work practice. However, within this section, three are highlighted: 1) the National Association of Social Workers' (NASW) Code of Ethics; 2) emerging research on such integration, client preferences, and the evidence-based practice process; and finally, 3) understanding the connection between clients' religious coping mechanisms and views of God in their treatment.

### **Code of Ethics**

As social workers, we are mandated to practice under our NASW (2017) Code of Ethics. Interestingly, for the first two decades of its existence (between 1960 and 1980; NASW, 1980), RS was not included in the NASW Code of Ethics in response to following a medical model of practice that discouraged practice without research support. Though our most recent version (NASW, 2017) does not include spirituality, religion is mentioned within five standards. Namely, we find our ethical responsibilities to clients around cultural awareness and social diversity (1.05) and conflicts of interest (1.06) both include attention to religion. We are also responsible for respecting colleagues' diversity (2.01), not engaging in any form of discrimination (4.02), and to prevent and eliminate domination of, exploitation of, and discrimination against others across the broader society, including on the basis of their religion (6.04). In addition to these five standards that directly mention religion, there are 10 other standards that are worth reviewing and reconsidering as they relate to RS, even if they aren't directly addressing or including the terms RS: 1.01, 1.04, 1.16, 2.03, 2.05, 3.01, 3.02, 4.01, 4.05, and 5.02 (NASW, 2017).

### **Previous research, client preferences, and the evidence-based practice process**

Over the last few decades, there has been an increase in the number of studies exploring the impact (if any) that integrating clients' RS into treatment has on clinical outcomes. From clinical issues that include depression and chronic illness (Pearce & Koenig, 2016), anxiety (Barrera, Zeno, Bush, Barber, & Stanley, 2012; Rosmarin, Pargament, Pirutinsky, & Mahoney, 2010), even migraines (Wachholtz & Pargament, 2008), studies are reporting that ethically assessing and integrating clients' RS into treatment largely results in desirable clinical

treatment outcomes (Koenig, King, & Carson, 2012; Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2001; Smith, Bartz, & Richards, 2007). Often, clients' RS is integrated by adapting secular interventions (e.g., cognitive behavioral therapy) to infuse elements of clients' RS as appropriate. This may include infusing client-identified RS language into coping statements, engaging clients' RS practices to alleviate symptoms, or simply holding a safe space for clients to unpack their faith in light of the presenting clinical issue. Even assessing clients' RS beliefs and practices can communicate to clients they are allowed to discuss their RS in session if they prefer. As David H. Rosmarin (personal communication, July 24, 2019) recently noted in an interdisciplinary meeting we were both in, the question we should add to a client intake form is "Do you want to consider your religion or spirituality in your treatment plan?"

This brings up another important area: client preferences. Though clients have had mixed responses regarding who they would prefer bring up the topic of RS, more would prefer the helping professional initiate the conversation rather than wait for the client to bring it up (Harris, Randolph, & Gordon, 2016; Oxhandler, Ellor, Stanford, 2018). Often this is because clients recognize the power differential in the client/therapist relationship and wonder if it is okay to talk about their faith in practice. In 2019, I surveyed over 1,000 current mental health clients with the help of my colleagues (Ken Pargament, Michelle Pearce, and Cassandra Vieten), asking about a variety of dimensions related to their mental health and RS. The John Templeton Foundation supported this study (grant #60971), and at the time of this chapter being written, we are analyzing and writing the results from this study. (If you are interested in the results of this study, you may follow [www.hollyoxhandler.com](http://www.hollyoxhandler.com), which will be updated to include our study's findings as they are published.) Generally, our findings suggest that clients have favorable views toward integrating their RS in practice and consider their RS and mental health as overwhelmingly relevant to one another. Thus, as a profession that deeply values client perspectives, it is critical we pay attention to what clients are communicating regarding their preferences for and perceived relevance to integrating their RS into mental health treatment. One seamless mechanism to support this includes the evidence-based practice process.

Evidence-based practice, or EBP, is often interpreted to mean either a) a process-orientated approach to practice, or b) an intervention-oriented approach to practice (also called empirically-supported treatments or interventions). Many times, social workers talk about EBP in the context of the latter, and incorrectly use the term "EBPs" (see Parrish [2018] for clarity on these definitions); however, the process-oriented perspective is the root of the meaning of evidence-based practice. In fact, in its original definition, EBP is the "contentious, explicit and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions about the care of individuals" (Sackett, Rosenberg, Gray, Haynes, & Richardson, 1996, p. 71) and "the integration of best research evidence with clinical expertise and [client] values" (Sackett et al., 2000, p. 1). Specifically, the EBP process is a five-step process summarized best by Parrish (2018) below:

It is a decision-making process for practice that includes the following five steps: formulating an answerable practice question; searching for the best research evidence; critically appraising the research evidence for its validity and applicability; implementing a practice decision after integrating the research evidence with client characteristics, preferences, and values; and evaluating the outcome. (p. 407)

These client characteristics, preferences, and values certainly include their RS. What makes the EBP process particularly important within the context of RS in social work is it recognizes 1) client preferences for integrating this area of their life into treatment, and 2) research suggesting that ethically integrating clients' RS improves outcomes (Oxhandler & Pargament, 2014). Not only do client preferences and research point toward the importance of integrating clients' RS, but they also lead us to another key area: client coping mechanisms.

### **Client coping mechanisms**

The clients we have the honor of working with are incredibly resilient, navigating the challenges of injustice, illness (mental or physical), poverty, hunger, addiction, trauma, complex systems, oppression, barriers, and major decisions that impact themselves and their loved ones. Not surprisingly, based on the prevalence of RS mentioned above, some of the coping strategies clients utilize through these challenges include their RS beliefs and practices. For example, my very first client was an older woman with generalized anxiety disorder who infused her faith within her coping statements. One example, which she lovingly wrote out for me to pass along to other clients, was a statement she had taped to her wall as a daily reminder. It said: *Good morning, this is God. I will be taking care of all of your problems. I will not need your help so have a carefree day.* For her, these three sentences offered a key strategy in her toolbox of coping skills to face another day with her clinical diagnosis of generalized anxiety disorder. Though this is one example, there are many ways clients utilize their RS to cope, regardless of their faith tradition. Meditation, prayer, yoga, fasting, reading sacred texts, creativity, retreats, sweat lodge ceremonies, keeping Sabbath or Shabbat, music, worship, journaling, centering prayer, and many other practices can all be used by clients across faith traditions to lean on their faith to cope with various life circumstances.

In fact, we have found that many young adults (18–25 years old) with serious mental illness freely bring up their RS in conversations about mental health (Oxhandler, Narendorf, & Moffatt, 2018). At no point during the interviews were the 55 participants asked about their RS, and yet, 34 organically brought up RS as it related to their mental health. The themes that emerged included positive RS coping (prayer; reading their religious text; support from an RS community; seeking a RS meaning or purpose in the situation), their relationship with God (God providing support, comfort, or protection; experiencing a direct intervention from God; feeling accepted by God), negative RS experiences/coping

(RS organizations not being supportive; having negative experiences with RS or RS organizations; praying for a negative outcome), and the role of support systems and RS (family/friends referencing God or RS for support; RS-related recommendations they had for others).

Though RS can be woven into clients' coping in a positive way, it is worth noting that RS is not always a source of comfort or support. There are many ways in which clients have been hurt or traumatized by their faith traditions or communities and as social workers, we must be sensitive to those experiences. For example, to recommend that a client attend church during a season of depression, without knowing her faith leader sexually assaulted her, would be tremendously painful for the client. Further, RS can also be woven into various uses of negative RS coping that we must be aware of and sensitive to. Encouraging a man who is struggling with depression to pray to God when he is wondering whether God has abandoned him could be harmful, even if unintentional. Exline (2013) has written extensively about religious struggles and in her Religious and Spiritual Struggles Scale (Exline, Pargament, Grubbs, & Yali, 2014), she articulates six dimensions of religious or spiritual struggles that we may encounter in our social work practice. These include struggles related to the divine, demonic, interpersonal, moral, doubt, and ultimate meaning. Further, Pargament (1997; 2007) has spearheaded the conversation on religious coping (particularly among the Abrahamic traditions, including Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), recognizing there are both positive and negative forms of RS coping, and clients often engage in a mixture of both. In addition to engaging in these complex positive and negative forms of RS coping, individuals may also relate to God through difficult times in diverse ways. As Pargament (1997) has written, those within the Abrahamic faith traditions often fall within three categories of coping: self-directed (seeking to control the situation without God's help), deferred (waiting for God to control the situation), and collaborative (seeking control of the situation by partnering with God). These may vary based on the individual's upbringing, faith tradition, stages of faith, and culture. However, research has suggested that those who engage in a collaborative approach to facing RS struggles have the most positive outcomes (see Xu, 2016).

Not only do clients engage in these complex forms of RS coping, but they also view God in various ways. Froese and Bader's (2010) Views of God survey is a great tool for understanding the many ways we view God's character. In their 2007 survey, Froese and Bader (2010) found approximately 22% of US adults believe in a Benevolent God, 21% believe in a Critical God, 28% believe in an Authoritative God, and 24% believe in a Distant God (5% identified as Atheist). Therefore, if you are a social worker who believes in a Benevolent God with a client who believes in an Authoritative God, you will both consider God to be engaged in your lives, but you will have very different views of God's motivations and actions. Specifically, a Benevolent God is viewed as being present to humanity to offer love, not judge, and be a positive influence, whereas an Authoritative God is present to humanity to punish or teach a lesson while being a force behind all good *and* bad things that happen. Imagine the disconnect that

would exist between you and your client as you (believing God is benevolent), suggest that your client (believing God is authoritative) trust God through the difficult situation, but your client interprets the difficult situation as *caused* by God! Though not commonly discussed in social work discourse, our various views of God are yet another area related to RS-integration that calls the social worker to practice with humility and curiosity.

### **Rationale for Considering Our Own RS as Social Workers**

Before diving into a summary of research on the social worker's own RS, I consistently begin with a reminder that our very first ethical responsibility within our Code of Ethics (standard 1.01) highlights *our commitment to clients*. Specifically, our "primary responsibility is to promote the well-being of clients. In general, clients' interests are primary" (NASW, 2017), and this needs to be at the forefront of what we do in social work practice. That being said, I do want to note that as much as we recognize our clients as holistic, bio-psycho-social-spiritual beings, so are we as social workers. In fact, just like the people we serve, we often have our own diverse RS beliefs and practices, we may utilize our RS to cope with adversities and promote resilience, and/or we may have a very painful relationship with RS, elements of RS, or our Higher Power. Each is worth considering carefully during our training, supervision, and ongoing professional development (like any other area of intersectionality). As social workers, we must not avoid considering and assessing how our RS is connected to our practice until we are in the midst of holding space for our clients and suddenly find we are experiencing unrecognized triggers related to RS or ways in which our RS may be unethically influencing our clients.

It is worth noting that social workers provide the largest proportion of mental health services in the US (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2013). Compared to the general US population, more LCSWs consider themselves moderately or very spiritual (82% versus 65%), and fewer LCSWs identify as moderately or very religious (35% versus 54%) (Oxhandler, Polson, & Achenbaum, 2018), which echo the results Hodge (2002) found. Further, LCSWs' religious affiliations also differ from US adults, with about half as many LCSWs identifying as Protestant (24% vs. 49%), Catholic (13% vs. 25%), Muslim (0.2% vs. 0.4%), and Hindu (0.2% vs. 0.6%). Further, far more LCSWs identify as Jewish (22% vs. 2%), Buddhist (6% vs. 1%), or Other (15% vs. 2%) compared to US adults, and one in five in both groups identified as having no religious affiliation. These differences were further amplified across each of the four regions of the US (Oxhandler, Polson et al., 2018).

Why do these differences matter to social workers? Within this same study, we also developed and validated the Religious/Spiritually Integrated Practice Assessment Scale (RSIPAS; Oxhandler & Parrish, 2016), which measured LCSWs' attitudes, perceived feasibility, self-efficacy, and behaviors related to integrating clients' RS into social work practice, and together, these four constructs measured their overall orientation to this practice area. We also asked about LCSWs' age,

race, ethnicity, gender, region, degree of burnout, years in practice, and age of clients served, and found none of these were related to the RSIPAS subscales' or overall scale's scores. In fact, only two practitioner characteristics emerged as being significantly related to and predicting LCSWs' views and behaviors toward integrating clients' RS in practice: intrinsic religiosity (the degree to which they are motivated to internalize and live out their beliefs; Allport & Ross, 1967) and prior training (a course in their MSW program [13% took a course on RS] or continuing education [46% sought continuing education on RS]), with intrinsic religiosity being the *top* predictor (Oxhandler, Parrish, Torres, & Achenbaum, 2015). In other words, while training does influence LCSWs' consideration of clients' RS in practice, the LCSW's motivation to live out their faith had the most influence on their views and behaviors related to whether clients' RS is considered. No other characteristic was related to their orientation toward integrating clients' RS.

From these findings and related professions' background research, I developed *Namaste Theory* (Oxhandler, 2017). The Sanskrit terms, *namah* (to bow or bend) and *te* (to you) are combined to form the term, *Namaste* (Nambiar, 1979), which has been adopted as a Hindi term. As Nambiar (1979) notes, *Namaste* is the "blending of matter with spirit or the mortal body with the immortal soul, as demonstrated by the folded hands," (p.18), with this being "an expression of humility: 'I recognize God in you.'" (p.7) This word has been more commonly translated as "the sacred in me honors the sacred in you" and as I note in the article, "utilizing this perspective, regardless of RS affiliation, it is truly the recognition of the sacred within that allows and empowers us to recognize the sacred within others" (Oxhandler, 2017, p. 6). Further,

Namaste Theory introduces the concept that as helping professionals infuse their own RS beliefs/practices into their daily lives, deepening their intrinsic religiosity and awareness of what they deem sacred, they tend to consider and integrate clients' RS beliefs/practices, and what clients consider sacred as well... [or], as the helping professional recognizes the sacred within him or herself, s/he appears to be more open to recognizing the sacred within his/her client. (Oxhandler, 2017, p. 1)

### **Initial Takeaways**

There were three conclusions from this research that remind us of the importance of considering social workers' RS. The first highlights that few social workers take a course on this area of practice in their training, but that training was significantly related to and predictive of their views and behaviors toward integrating clients' RS in practice (Oxhandler et al., 2015). In response to this finding, Clay Polson and I are studying the degree to which MSW programs include content on RS within their curriculum (Spencer Foundation, Grant #201900208). Further, if you did not receive training in this area or would like to learn more.

Second, social workers' intrinsic religiosity influences what happens in practice, more than any other predictor or characteristic, when it comes to the social worker's views and behaviors around ethically integrating clients' RS. This finding means social workers must a) set appropriate boundaries around their own RS beliefs and practices, b) focus primarily on clients' RS beliefs and practices, and c) continue to practice self-awareness around this area of their life. This finding not only showed up in the quantitative data as the top predictor, but also in the qualitative data. When asked what helps or hinders this national sample of LCSWs to integrate clients' RS, 44% freely described their personal religiosity (including their RS journey, belief system, practices, and curiosity) as helping them integrate clients' RS (Oxhandler & Giardina, 2017). In a 2015 follow-up study of Texas helping professionals (LCSWs, nurses, counselors, marriage and family therapists, and psychologists), 42% also freely mentioned their personal religiosity as helping them integrate clients' RS (Oxhandler, Mofatt, & Giardina, 2018).

The third important conclusion is that social workers are holistic, bio-psycho-social-spiritual beings. We must practice self-awareness around and care for each of these areas to reduce the risk of unintentionally working through these complex areas of our lives with clients. In the same way we must become aware of and care for our bodies, our mental and emotional health, and our relationships, we must do the same for our spirituality and faith journey. Neglecting the time needed to become aware of and care for our spirituality, regardless of what we believe in, can have a devastating impact on us as well as those around us, including clients. Further, many social workers find their RS beliefs and practices are a source of comfort or support in their self-care journey, recognizing we cannot care for others if we are not caring for ourselves. In fact, in light of Namaste theory, practicing self-awareness around and mindfully caring for each of these bio-psycho-social-spiritual areas of our lives is key to ensuring our primary concern is on our commitment to clients as we hold space for them.

### **Other Considerations**

Though this chapter has covered the importance of considering clients' RS in practice and why this is so important, it would be remiss to not mention the importance of considering the practice setting and clients' presenting issues. As emerging research indicates the importance of integrating clients' RS and the clinical implications of doing so, it is important to recognize that your setting can play a significant role in what and how clients' RS can be integrated.

For example, a social worker in private practice who meets with clients weekly for an hour will likely have more freedom to navigate and explore each client's history and current situations, including the role of RS in their clients' lives, as compared to a social worker in a hospital who has limited time to connect the client with resources upon discharge. Both may have opportunities to at least ask about the clients' RS, but the amount of time and scope of services will influence what and how RS is integrated. Similarly, social workers must

recognize and respect constraints around government-funded settings (such as the Veteran's Administration or public schools), which will be more limited in terms of RS integration than in a private practice or hospital setting. Even in these government-funded locations, however, it may be appropriate to ask about the client's belief system as an element of culture and in light of evidence-based practice process or refer the client to a chaplain in their tradition to discuss any RS struggles or concerns.

Regardless of the setting you work in, if the discussion shifts into exploring deep RS struggles beyond your training, it is perfectly appropriate to refer to a faith leader within the client's faith tradition in the same way you may refer a client to a medical doctor for a health assessment, an educational psychologist for a developmental assessment, or a financial manager for financial concerns. Without specific training to navigate the complexity of RS, you are ethically obligated to refer clients to a trained professional in that area (see NASW, 2017, standard 1.16).

## **Recommendations**

In light of the three conclusions noted above along with research on client preferences and outcomes, I offer six recommendations to social work practitioners:

1. *Practice self-awareness.* This first recommendation is especially important given that intrinsic religiosity—the deep motivation to fully internalize, embrace, and live out religious beliefs (Allport & Ross, 1967)—is the top predictor of LCSWs' attitudes, self-efficacy, perceived feasibility, behaviors, and overall orientation to integrating clients' RS. Paying attention to our RS beliefs and practices and ways these may be infused into the work we do with clients is critical to ensure we avoid imposing our beliefs. Certainly, many social workers' faith leads them to this profession of service (Garland, 2015) and motivates them to engage in high-quality practice (Oxhandler, Chamiec-Case, & Wolfer, 2019). However, as we are called to continually practice mindfulness around potential biases and blind spots in our social work practice, the same is true of our intrinsic religiosity and the need to monitor our motivations to live out our faith, regardless of what we believe, ensuring we are not imposing our beliefs onto others. Some practical methods of doing this would be finding your own therapist and/or spiritual director, seeking supervision and consultation, journaling, or engaging in contemplative practices that are connected to your faith tradition. (See *Gravity: A Center for Contemplative Activism's* [n.d.] website for a list of contemplative practices to consider).

2. *Utilize assessment tools.* Remembering that many clients prefer the helping professional to initiate the conversation on RS, it would be worth assessing clients' RS in the same way we ask about their medical background, family (including their family of origin, partner, children), sexuality, work, or mental health. Not only does including RS as one element in the assessment phase let clients know they can talk about this area of their lives if they would like, but it helps the social worker better understand the complexity of RS in each

client's life. As a reminder, it is critical to approach this with humility, recognizing the diversity of faith traditions and beliefs, the spectrum of identifying as religious and/or spiritual, the various views of God and coping mechanisms (positive/negative/mixed), Fowler's (1979) stages of faith, and the risk of spiritual trauma being a part of clients' history. For example, spiritual trauma may exist for a young adult who is deeply religious but has been asked not to return to his congregation after identifying as bisexual (see Cole & Harris, 2017), a woman who has lost her faith community after divorcing an abusive husband, or a child who was sexually abused by a faith leader. Each instance requires the social worker to engage with careful attention and sensitivity. Some RS assessment tools worth considering include the FICA (Puchalski, & Romer, 2000), CSI-MEMO (Koenig, 2002), RCOPE (Pargament, Feuille, & Burdzy, 2011), Four God survey (Froese & Bader, 2010), or the Religious and Spiritual Struggles Scale (Exline et al., 2014). Certainly, you may want to ask about the client's religious affiliation, recognizing how that may affect treatment, but it is recommended that you couple it with one of the above tools to understand the current role of RS in their life.

3. *Engage in the evidence-based practice process.* Social workers should continue to read about emerging research on RS as it relates to their area of practice, to account for clients' RS as part of their culture and preferences, to utilize empirically-supported interventions that discuss how to integrate clients' RS (e.g., Pearce, 2016), and to evaluate their practice appropriately.

4. *Refer clients to a faith leader when appropriate.* Though you may assess and integrate clients' RS in the same way you would other areas of their lives, be careful not to practice outside of your training. Just as it would be unethical for you to provide medical or financial advice to your clients without that training, the same is true for RS. Specifically, if you do not have training to offer spiritual guidance and support, your ethical responsibility is to refer your client to a religious leader or spiritual director to provide the spiritual support needed. Before referring your client though, it is critical you know whom you are referring your clients to and their perspectives or approaches, just as you would for other referrals, to reduce the risk of harm. Further, it is important that your referral list be diverse, recognizing your clients have unique preferences and circumstances. Perhaps you and a team of local social workers might create a shared list of diverse, local faith leaders and spiritual directors and meet with them to learn their perspectives on various topics, especially sensitive topics that your clients may face (e.g., views on marriage/divorce, sexuality, mental health, suicidal ideation, or approaches to healthcare). Having a diverse list of RS leaders to refer clients to can help support their bio-psycho-social-spiritual needs.

5. *Monitor what is happening within your practice setting.* If you are in an administrative position at your agency, it may be worth assessing the degree to which clients' RS is being integrated and to assess change over time—the Religious/Spiritually-Integrated Practice Assessment Scale (Oxhandler & Parrish, 2016) is a free tool just for that. If you are an educator or a field instructor, you may also use this tool to evaluate students' self-efficacy, attitudes, perceived

feasibility, behaviors, or overall orientation to this practice area. You may also consider it as a self-assessment, as previous participants have shared with me that they have a better idea of how to integrate clients' RS simply by taking it.

6. *Seek consultation and training.* If this is an area you do not feel comfortable with or need to strengthen, please feel empowered to seek training, especially knowing only 13% of LCSWs have taken a class on this topic (Oxhandler et al., 2015) and few programs offer a course on this topic (Moffatt & Oxhandler, 2018). As explained in this chapter, this area of clients' lives and our lives is complex, including the beliefs and practices of diverse religious traditions, various forms of religious coping and views of God, a wide understanding of RS, and infinite experiences with and expressions of our RS. Approaching this topic with humility and gentle curiosity will truly serve us best as we seek to serve our clients.

## Conclusion

Though social work has an interesting history with RS, a growing recognition of this area in clients' lives, in social workers' lives, and in research findings calls us to pay attention to this topic as it relates to social work practice. Specifically, the NASW code of ethics, the evidence-based practice process, client preferences and coping mechanisms, the complexity of RS within clinical circumstances, the role of our own RS and how it influences practice, and many other considerations suggest the importance of continuing exploration of RS. Social workers who are informed can ethically and effectively consider this area of our holistic, bio-psycho-social-spiritual clients, as we simultaneously explore our holistic selves. My hope is that through this chapter you have come to better understand the rationale for considering our clients' RS, our own RS, and have some recommendations to reflect upon and implement as you serve others within our beloved social work profession.

## References

- Allport, G. W., & Ross, J. M. (1967). Personal religious orientation and prejudice. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 5, 432–443.
- Barrera, T. L., Zeno, D., Bush, A. L., Barber, C. R., & Stanley, M. A. (2012). Integrating religion and spirituality into treatment for late-life anxiety: Three case studies. *Cognitive and Behavioral Practice*, 19(2), 346–358.
- Canda, E. R., Furman, L. D., & Canda, H. (2020). *Spiritual social work practice: The heart of helping* (3rd ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Cole, C., & Harris, H. (2017). The lived experiences of people who identify as LGBT Christians: Considerations for social work helping. *Social Work & Christianity*, 44(1–2), 31–52.
- Dudley, J. (2016). *Spirituality matters in social work: Connecting spirituality, religion, and practice*. New York: Routledge.
- Exline, J. J. (Ed.). (2013). Religious and spiritual struggles. In K. I. Pargament, J. J. Exline, & J. W. Jones (Eds.), *APA handbooks in psychology. APA handbook of psychology, religion, and spirituality* (Vol. 1): Context, theory, and research (pp. 459–475). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

- Exline, J. J., Pargament, K. I., Grubbs, J. B., & Yali, A. M. (2014). The Religious and Spiritual Struggles Scale: Development and initial validation. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, 6, 208–222.
- Fowler, J. W. (1979). *Stages of faith: The psychology of human development and the quest for meaning*. San Francisco: Harper Collins.
- Froese, P., & Bader, C. (2010). *America's four Gods: What we say about God and what that says about us*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Garland, D. R. (2015). *Why I am a social worker: 25 Christians tell their life stories*. Botsford, CT: NACSW.
- Gravity: A Center for Contemplative Activism. (n.d.) *Practice*. Retrieved from <https://gravitycenter.com/practice/>
- Harris, K., Randolph, B., & Gordon, T. (2016). What do clients want? Assessing spiritual needs in counseling: A literature review. *Spirituality in Clinical Practice*, 3, 250–275.
- Hill, P. C., Pargament, K. I., Wood, R. W., McCullough, M. E., Swyers, J. P., Larson, D. B., & Zinnbauer, B. J. (2000). Conceptualizing religion and spirituality: Points of commonality, points of departure. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 30(1), 51–77.
- Hodge, D. R. (2002). Equally devout, but do they speak the same language? Comparing the religious beliefs and practices of social workers and the general public. *Families in Society*, 83, 573–584. doi:10.1606/1044-3894.56
- Hodge, D. R. (2014). *Spiritual Assessment in Social Work and Mental Health Practice*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Koenig, H. G. (2002). An 83-year-old woman with chronic illness and strong religious beliefs. *JAMA*, 288, 487–493.
- Koenig, H. G., King, D. E., & Carson, V. B. (2012). *Handbook of religion and health* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Koenig, H. G., McCullough, M. E., & Larson, D. B. (2001). *Handbook of religion and health*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Moffatt, K., & Oxhandler, H. K. (2018). Religion and spirituality in master of social work education: Past, present, and future considerations. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 54, 543–553.
- Nambiar, A. K. K. (1979). *Namaste: Its philosophy and significance in Indian culture*. Delhi: Spiritual India Publishing House.
- National Association of Social Workers. (1980). Code of ethics. Retrieved from [www.socialworkers.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=eKQXR46sasc%3d&portalid=0](http://www.socialworkers.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=eKQXR46sasc%3d&portalid=0)
- National Association of Social Workers. (2017). Code of ethics. Retrieved from [https://www.socialworkers.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket\\_ms\\_ArtLqze1%3d&portalid](https://www.socialworkers.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket_ms_ArtLqze1%3d&portalid)
- Oxhandler, H. K. (2017). Namaste theory: A quantitative grounded theory on religion and spirituality in mental health treatment. *Religions*, 8(9), 168. doi:10.3390/rel8090168
- Oxhandler, H. K., Chamiec-Case, R., & Wolfer, T. (2019). The Development and validation of the Social Workers' Integration of their Faith—Christian (SWIF-C) Scale. *Social Work and Christianity*, 46, 57–78. doi: 10.34043/swc.v46i2.67
- Oxhandler, H. K., Ellor, J. W., & Stanford, M. S. (2018). Client attitudes toward integrating religion/spirituality in mental health treatment: Scale development and client responses. *Social Work*, 63, 337–346. doi: 10.1093/sw/swy041
- Oxhandler, H. K., & Giardina, T. D. (2017). Social workers' perceived barriers to and sources of support with integrating clients' religion/spirituality in practice. *Social Work*, 62, 323–332. doi: 10.1093/sw/swx036
- Oxhandler, H. K., Moffatt, K., & Giardina, T. D. (2018). Clinical helping professionals' perceived support, barriers, and training to integrate clients' religion/spirituality in practice. *Spirituality in Clinical Practice*. Advance online publication. doi: 10.1037/scp0000189

- Oxhandler, H. K., Narendorf, S. C., & Moffatt, K. (2018). Religion and spirituality among young adults with severe mental illness. *Spirituality in Clinical Practice*, 5(3), 188–200 doi: 10.1037/scp0000164
- Oxhandler, H. K., & Pargament, K. I. (2014). Social work practitioners' integration of clients' religion and spirituality in practice: A literature review. *Social Work*, 59(3), 271–279. doi:10.1093/sw/swu018
- Oxhandler, H. K., & Parrish, D. E. (2016). The development and validation of the Religious/Spiritually Integrated Practice Assessment Scale. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 26(3), 295–307. doi: 10.1177/1049731514550207
- Oxhandler, H. K., Parrish, D. E., Torres, L. R., & Achenbaum, W. A. (2015). The integration of clients' religion/spirituality in social work practice: A national survey. *Social Work*, 60(3), 228–237. doi: 10.1093/sw/swv018
- Oxhandler, H. K., Polson, C., & Achenbaum, W. A. (2018). The religiosity and spiritual beliefs and practices of clinical social workers: A national survey. *Social Work* 63(1), 47–56. doi: 10.1093/sw/swx055
- Oxhandler, H. K., Polson, C., Moffatt, K., & Achenbaum, W. A. (2017). The religious and spiritual beliefs and practices among practitioners across five helping professions. *Religions*, 8(11), 237. doi:10.3390/rel8110237
- Pargament, K. I. (1997). *The psychology of religion and coping: Theory, research, practice*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Pargament, K. I. (2007). *Spiritually integrated psychotherapy: Understanding and addressing the sacred*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Pargament, K. I., Feuille, M., & Burdzy, D. (2011). The Brief RCOPE: Current psychometric status of a short measure of religious coping. *Religions*, 2, 51–76.
- Parrish, D. E. (2018). Evidence-based practice: A common definition matters. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 54, 407–411.
- Pearce, M. (2016). *Cognitive behavioral therapy for Christians with depression: A practical tool-based primer*. West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press.
- Pearce, M. J., & Koenig, H. G. (2016). Spiritual struggles and religious cognitive behavioral therapy: A randomized clinical trial in those with depression and chronic medical illness. *Journal of Psychology & Theology*, 44, 3–15.
- Pearce, M. J., Pargament, K. I., Oxhandler, H. K., Vieten, C., & Wong, S. (2019). A novel training program for mental health providers in religious and spiritual competencies. *Spirituality in Clinical Practice*, 6, 73–82. doi: 10.1037/scp0000195
- Pew Research Center. (2015, May). U.S. religious landscape study. Retrieved from [www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/](http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/)
- Puchalski, C., & Romer, A. (2000). Taking a spiritual history allows clinicians to understand patients more fully. *Journal of Palliative Medicine*, 3(1), 129–137.
- Rosmarin, D., Pargament, K. I., Pirutinsky, S., & Mahoney, A. (2010). A randomized controlled evaluation of a spiritually integrated treatment for subclinical anxiety in the Jewish community, delivered via the Internet. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, 24, 799–808.
- Sackett, D. L., Rosenberg, W. M. C., Gray, J. A. M., Haynes, R. B., & Richardson, W. S. (1996). Evidence based medicine: What it is and what it isn't. *British Medical Journal*, 312, 71-72.
- Sackett, D. L., Straus, S. E., Richardson, W. S., Rosenberg, W.M.C., & Haynes, R. B. (2000). *Evidence-based medicine: How to practice and teach EBM* (2nd ed.). New York: Churchill Livingstone.

- Smith, T. B., Bartz, J., & Richards, P. S. (2007). Outcomes of religious and spiritual adaptations to psychotherapy: A meta-analytic review. *Psychotherapy Research*, 17, 643–655.
- Smith, T. W., Davern, M., Freese, J., Morgan, S. L. (2019). General social surveys, 1972–2018 cumulative file. Chicago: National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago.
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration. (2013). Behavioral health, United States, 2012. Rockville, MD: Center for Mental Health Services. Retrieved from: <https://www.store.samhsa.gov/product/Behavioral-Health-United-States-2012/SMA13-4797>
- Wachholtz, A. B., & Pargament, K. I. (2008). Migraines and meditation: Does spirituality matter? *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 31, 351–366.
- Xu, J. (2016). Pargament's theory of religious coping: Implications for spiritually sensitive social work practice. *British Journal of Social Work*, 46, 1394–1410.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Baylor's Management and Entrepreneurial departments (especially Drs. Emily Hunter and Matthew Wood) for welcoming me to their writing retreat in spring 2019. It was during this retreat that I wrote this chapter between times of fellowship, prayer, and walking the labyrinth. What a gift, indeed. I would also like to thank the John Templeton Foundation (grant #60971) and the Spencer Foundation (grant #201900208) for supporting two of the studies mentioned in this chapter.

<sup>2</sup> Drs. Ken Pargament, Michelle Pearce, Cassandra Vieten, and I collaborated to develop and evaluate an online training to address this interdisciplinary gap (Pearce, Pargament, Oxhandler, Vieten, & Wong, 2019; Templeton Foundation grant #60971). Duke University's Center for Spirituality, Theology, and Health also has a five-part video series on integrating spirituality in patient care and many other resources: <https://spiritualityandhealth.duke.edu>. The North American Association for Christians in Social Work, Society for Spirituality and Social Work, and their journals (*Social Work & Christianity* and *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought*) are also great resources. Finally, some recommended books include Canda, Furman, & Canda's (2020) *Spiritual Diversity in Social Work Practice: The Heart of Helping*, Dudley's (2016) *Spirituality Matters in Social Work*, or Hodge's (2014) *Spiritual Assessment in Social Work and Mental Health Practice*.



# Working with LGBT Clients: Promising Practices and Personal Challenges

---

*Allison Tan and Michael S. Kelly*

My client is gay. I am a Christian social worker. Now what do I do? This is a scenario many Christians in social work practice will inevitably face at some point in their professional journey. To be sure, Christian social workers are themselves diverse in terms of their own sexual orientations and their beliefs about homosexuality. However, it is well-known that many Christian denominations have historically held a negative view of homosexuality, and this results in many Christian social workers struggling to reconcile their professional and spiritual lives. If you have not yet encountered lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) clients in your practice, it is only a matter of time. Goldfried (2008) found that LGBT individuals and same-sex couples are actually more likely to seek mental health therapy or treatment than heterosexuals. This may be due to the stigma and discrimination they face (Harper and Schneider 2003; Meyer, 2003). The good news is that the past decade has seen a proliferation of research building the literature base on culturally competent practice with the LGBT population. Drawing from that evidence, this chapter aims to ask questions and raise important issues to help you wrestle with the personal and professional challenges that can come with providing quality, ethical care to LGBT clients while holding to a Christian worldview and faith. Through a critical review of the literature and our personal and professional experiences as Christian social workers and researchers on LGBT issues, we utilize multiple case vignettes to represent the common themes and challenges associated with working with the LGBT population. The chapter begins with an investigation into the literature on promising practices for intervention with the LGBT population. It also addresses literature on the religious and spiritual lives of LGBT individuals. We conclude with a case vignette about a Christian practitioner in social work in order to guide discussion about how one social worker might apply her professional role, rooted in her Christian faith, to her work with the LGBT community. Our overarching aim here will be to support Christians in social work as they consider ways to work competently with the LGBT population, based on a deep-seated belief in the call of both our faith and our profession to provide quality services to all people in a rich, diverse world. Toward that end, it is important first and foremost to be clear about what this chapter is not. It is not an attempt to engage in a scriptural debate or argument

around the issues of homosexuality; such a hermeneutical discussion is beyond our expertise and is also not necessarily integral to a discussion of social work practice. The stance of this chapter is not a political or theological one. Instead, it takes an evidence-based stance—the recommendations and practice-related discussion herein are rooted in the literature and the NASW Code of Ethics. Finally, while we believe every student and practitioner should prepare to serve a diverse range of clients, we know that there are some practitioners who may try to avoid serving LGBT clients as a regular part of their social work practice. As we will discuss in more detail later, if there is any client population, LGBT or otherwise, that a social worker feels he or she cannot provide competent services to, it is better to ethically and professionally refer the client to someone better able to help, while simultaneously examining why they believe they are not competent to serve this population, perhaps with a supervisor or mentor.

### Promising Practices with the LGBT Population

As we encounter LGBT clients in our practice, many of us will be challenged by the question of how to best serve them. In line with our obligation as social workers to provide evidence-based interventions to our clients, Figure 1 outlines the critical review strategy we utilized to explore what is known about promising practices for working with LGBT individuals. “LGBT” was combined with four different sets of key phrases to arrive at a solid base upon which to review the literature. This process, while not definitive, does reflect what I was able to find from a transparent and clear search of the extant mental health literature at the time of each iteration of this current chapter (2011/2015/2019). If nothing else, this shows a clear and exponential increase in available literature on these topics over the past decade.

**Figure 1: Overview of Critical Review Strategy**

Database Searched: Academic Search Premier (ASP)

Keywords	Number of “Hits”		
	2019	2015	2011
LGBT + ‘best practices’	77	36	7
LGBT + ‘evidence-based practice’	14	8	1
LGBT + ‘therapy’	<u>581</u>	<u>365</u>	<u>144</u>
Total number of unique hits:	487	314	117

The goal of this review was to understand which techniques, interventions, and theoretical orientations are commonly associated with culturally-competent work with this population. Students and practitioners reading this chapter are encouraged to do their own regular searches of the literature in these areas, as doing so is necessary to remain current on findings and improve their clinical skills with LGBT individuals. Much of the literature represented in Figure 1 is discussed in detail in the “Review of the Literature: Findings” section later in this chapter.

### *The Importance of Terminology*

It is essential to speak briefly to the term “LGBT population,” which is used throughout this chapter to describe lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals. This term was specifically chosen because it was found to be the one most commonly used in both the popular and research literature, though it is a term that is still considered controversial. Some prominent researchers and practitioners within the field argue against this phraseology because it lumps all gay men, lesbian women, and bisexual men and women, along with transgender individuals, into one category (see Fassinger & Aresenau, 2008). Additionally, much of the research that claims to represent the LGBT population is actually heavily weighted with lesbian and gay individuals and weakly includes bisexual and transgender individuals, if at all (Fisher, Easterly & Lazear, 2008). Therefore, many researchers are in favor of a more narrow “LGB” term, because transgender individuals are quite different in terms of their needs and often highly underrepresented in the literature (Harper & Schneider, 2003; Israel, Gorcheva, Burnes & Walther, 2008; Smith, 2005). In truth, the acronym for this community varies greatly from one person to the next and sometimes grows to as lengthy a term as “LGBTTIQQ2SA” (Lamoureux & Joseph, 2014). One of the alternative terms to describe this population is “sexual minority clients” (Dworkin & Gutierrez, 1992), which also may be seen as controversial. However, the LGBT terminology was selected instead simply because of its prevalence in the literature. In working with clients, we would strongly encourage the social work practitioner to ask what terminology the client is most comfortable with and how the person wishes to be identified. Using the client’s desired language is a vital first step toward building competent social work practice.

### *History of Research and the LGBT Movement*

The current state of research on promising practices for working with the LGBT population is perhaps best understood by examining the history of LGBT research on this area of practice. Harper and Schneider (2003) summarized historical trends in four phases of study. (See Figure 3). Prior to 1973, homosexuality was generally understood as a mental illness and research focused on homosexuality as pathology. In 1973, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) removed homosexuality as a mental illness (Spitzer, 1981), resulting in a significant shift in research efforts. Once views of homosexuality shifted from pathological to a diversity issue, research (and social work practice) began to take a more open-minded and inquisitive stance. The second phase of research then focused on the experience of LGBT life and included broad approaches to understanding experiences of LGBT men and women. As HIV/AIDS emerged, research included HIV risk behaviors, which led to the third phase of research in a new millennium. At that time, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) committed large amounts of grant funding specifically for researching LGBT health issues. This third phase, while health-focused, remained inquisitive in nature; yet, it was driven by government funding and the medical community,

each carrying its own set of values, agendas, and hypotheses. This medical and public health phase of research certainly brought important issues into the public arena, but also perpetuated a certain level of LGBT stigma.

The fourth and current phase of LGBT research is noted not for a change of topic studied, but rather a change in approach. This phase is characterized by a commitment to strengths-based research and to the resiliency of LGBT men and women. Croteau, Bieschke, Fassinger, and Manning (2008) summarized this historical overview by indicating that the pathology-focused research of the past (i.e. aimed at “curing” homosexuality and creating problem-focused interventions) has been replaced by current affirmative approaches to research, which see the problem as institutional and societal rather than individual. Also, within this most recent phase of the LGBT movement, it is important to note the speed at which the Gay Rights Movement is advancing nationwide. Using just the issue of same-sex marriage as a litmus test of the changing atmosphere for gay rights, we have seen an influx of states passing laws in favor of gay marriage since the mid-2000s; prior to the landmark Supreme Court decision in Summer 2015, 36 states and the District of Columbia had begun issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples. Now with *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015), same-sex marriage has been legalized nationwide (Denniston, 2015). Regardless of a social worker’s personal values or beliefs on the subject, this evidence of the changing legal and social landscape of LGBT rights is striking, and it has a range of important and lasting implications for social work practice.

**Figure 2: Overview of Historical Trends in LGBT Research**

WHEN	FOCUS OF RESEARCH	TRANSITION
Phase One: Prior to 1973	Homosexuality as pathology Homosexuality as mental illness	Removal from DSM
Phase Two: 1973-1990	The experience of LGBT life The coming-out process Relationship patterns and practices Effects of discrimination/violence	HIV epidemic
Phase Three: 1985-2000	LGBT health outcomes HIV risk behavior and reduction	Reduced HIV funding and Affirmative practice
Phase Four: 2000-present	Resiliency of LGBT people Strengths of LGBT community Institutional stigma Expansion of Gay Rights Movement	

The trends in social work practice with the LGBT population can be clearly seen in tandem with these trends in the LGBT research. Clients like Eric, Josie, and Clara have likely experienced the gamut of attitudes fueled by these trends in various interactions with people in the helping professions. They may remember a time when they were told their sexual orientation meant they were sick or needed to be ‘cured’; they may recall a time when a counselor asked pointed, albeit curious, questions about behaviors and experiences. Hopefully, they will also experience an affirmative social worker able to help them recognize their strengths and resilience as they face life’s struggles. The following section turns our attention toward how we, as Christian social workers, can strive toward culturally competent practice with LGBT clients.

### ***Review of the Literature: Findings***

Figure 3 below gives an overview of ten of the key studies/publications on LGBT promising practices and summarizes their influence on this topic; many of their conclusions are referenced throughout the entirety of this chapter.

#### *Key Themes*

Perhaps the most crucial theme in the LGBT literature is the consensus in support of the uniqueness of LGBT “best practices” because of the compounding factors the LGBT client faces; these factors can include stigma and lack of familial support. This research suggests tailoring interventions to meet the unique barriers and needs associated with the LGBT population. While the presenting problem of an LGBT client may not appear significantly different than one of a heterosexual client (i.e. relationship problems and general feelings of depression), research indicates that these presenting problems are possibly more severe for LGBT clients because of unique factors including their experiences of prejudice, oppression, and homophobia in our society (Dworkin & Gutierrez, 1992; Meyer, 2003) as well as the possibility of having less social and familial support (Lam, Naar-King & Wright, 2007). In other words, the LGBT client’s presenting problems might be similar, but they are confounded and compounded by “specific psychosocial stressors unique to this population” including victimization, harassment, fear of rejection, discrimination, past abuse, and isolation from family and friends (Berg, Mimiaga & Safren, 2008, 294). These unique barriers and the corresponding importance of tailored LGBT-specific interventions are referenced in the studies in Figure 3.

**Figure 3: Key Studies/Contributions**

Source	Research Design/Methods	Major Contributions
Berg, Mimiaga & Safren, 2008	Qualitative/Quantitative study—based on a chart review of 92 gay men in mental health treatment	Demographics and history variables characterizing gay men who seek services; implications for interventions tailored to unique needs of population
Goodrich, Harper, Luke & Singh, 2013	Review of literature on best practices for working with LGBT youth in school settings	Offers valuable insight into strategies, education, prevention, response, and advocacy for and with LGBT youth
Israel, Gorcheva, Burnes & Walther, 2008	Qualitative study based on 42 LGBT clients' experiences in counseling	Delineates 'helpful' and 'unhelpful' counseling experiences; includes discussion of variables at the levels of client, therapist, and intervention
Israel, Ketz, Detrie, Burke & Shulman, 2003	Qualitative study based on feedback from LGBT experts, practitioners, and clients	Outlines specific competencies counseling professionals should exhibit in working with LGBT population
Lamoreux & Joseph, 2014	Practice-based case study describing model of Transformative Practice with LGBT mental health clients	Adds richly to the discussion of what 'affirmative practice' needs to include
Langenderfer-Magrude, Walls, Whitfield, Brown, & Barrett, 2016	Study of 120 LGBTQ youth measuring rates and risk factors for partner violence	Provides strong data on high rates of partner violence and associated factors, including substance abuse and homelessness
Omoto & Kurtzman, 2006	Review of several large quantitative and qualitative LGBT datasets	Overviews state of LGBT research, including limitations; establishes use of qualitative research as effective with hard-to-reach populations
Ploderl & Tremblay, 2015	Systematic literature review	Summarizes recent literature on mental health issues in sexual minority populations; points to increased risk of mental illness
Ross, Doctor, Dimito, Kuehl & Armstrong, 2007	Quantitative uncontrolled trial—based on 7 Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) Groups	Suggests a model for intervention, which tailors CBT to meet the unique needs of the LGBT population
Smith, 2005	Quantitative dissertation	Creates and validates a scale (LGBT Hardiness Scale) for use in assessment of LGBT client needs

In one study, 86.4% of LGBT clients who were engaged in mental health treatment stated the importance of the intervention being LGBT-specific (Ross, Doctor, Dimito, Kuehl & Armstrong, 2007). One way to think about tailoring interventions to the specific needs of the LGBT population is to approach promising practices as an issue of cultural competence and diversity training. Logan & Barret (2005) outline a set of guidelines for working with the LGBT population as recommended by leaders of the Association for Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Issues in Counseling. Some researchers encourage practitioners to view effective practice with the LGBT population as a cross-cultural competency issue (Amadio & Perez, 2008), while others note that a framework for planning interventions with ethnic minority LGBT clients called the Racial Ethnic and Sexual Orientation (RESIC) has been developed (Ohnishi, Ibrahim & Grzegorek, 2006). Considering the identification of promising practices for work with the LGBT population as one component of their overall cultural competence may persuade some Christian practitioners to view this work differently.

Describing effective practice with the LGBT population, Israel, Gorcheva, Burnes, and Walther (2008) polled a set of LGBT individuals currently engaged in mental health treatment regarding examples of 'helpful and unhelpful' counseling experiences. After reviewing their qualitative data, these researchers summarized the key findings in three categories of variables: client, therapist, and intervention. This suggests that promising practices with the LGBT population require consideration of multiple components of efficacy. These three categories will be utilized in the pages that follow to structure the themes emerging not only from this key qualitative study, but also from the entirety of the literature on the subject, as a means to considering how best to serve LGBT clients like those in the vignettes provided.

#### *Client Variables and Characteristics*

*Eric is a 34-year old African American male with an MBA degree. He is attractive, charismatic, and well-spoken. After working for several years in advertising in downtown Chicago, he has recently changed careers in order to start a non-profit organization in his childhood neighborhood aimed at reaching young men with positive messages of healthy relationships and prevention of HIV and STDs. Eric grew up in a strong Christian family with a single mother and three young siblings. He had many relationships with girls and women throughout high school and college, and he was even named Homecoming King. While he appeared to be the "all-American guy" during those years, he wrestled silently with two secrets he feared would destroy his family. First, he experienced several instances of sexual abuse at the hands of an alcoholic uncle. Second, he felt attracted to men.*

*The first of these secrets, the sexual abuse, he has never disclosed to his family. Only his current partner and his therapist and social worker are aware of this past. The perpetrator passed away decades ago and Eric feels he has "moved on" and that disclosing this history at this point would only hurt his mother. Last year, he finally disclosed the second of these secrets, his sexual orientation, to his family and friends. Generally, his family's response has been supportive. His mother cried*

*and still chooses not to share her son's sexual orientation with most of her "church friends," but she has remained loving and supportive toward Eric. His friends have had mixed reactions. Eric indicates that his "church friends" have slowly "fallen away," and he spends most of his time now with non-churched people. Eric has also reported a very difficult time meeting other gay men in his community. His current partner, whom he has been living with for the past 14 months, is Caucasian, and they live in a predominantly Caucasian area. His partner, Frank, is HIV-positive. Eric and Frank are highly educated on HIV prevention strategies, engage in safe sex practices, and ensure Frank places high priority on his health. Eric is HIV-negative.*

*Eric sees an LCSW counselor twice a month to work on his ongoing issues associated with the "coming out process" and his personal challenges associated with finding reconciliation with his "church home" community, which holds a set of important relationships of which he still mourns the loss. His counselor supports and challenges him with inspirational readings from the popular media and the academic literature on the coming out process. He enjoys these resources and finds value in discussing them with her during their sessions. It is as a result of his work with this counselor that he has chosen to leave his job and focus on empowering other African American youth growing up in communities like his.*

In the study by Israel and colleagues (2008), the researchers found that the strongest client-level variable associated with 'helpful' experiences in counseling was providing the client with the highest possible level of autonomy. Clients like Eric are likely to feel empowered and valued when they are given independence and autonomy in the counseling session. Considering the challenges some Christian social workers might face in working with the LGBT population, this can become a challenge since giving the LGBT client independence and autonomy often means granting him or her the freedom to discuss all issues, even those that might make some Christian social workers uncomfortable.

Another major client-level theme in the literature is the concept of conflict in acculturation. Acculturation refers to the level of assimilation, connection, and sense of belonging or isolation individuals feel toward their cultural groups. It refers to how well Eric feels he fits in with the various cultural groups to which he belongs. The caution here for practitioners, then, is to understand the common conflicts LGBT clients may be facing in attempts to acculturate with the LGBT community as well as with their other (sometimes conflicting) cultures. "Dual acculturation" is often used in the literature to describe the challenge of finding identity in belonging in one's LGBT community and one's ethnic culture of origin (Ohnishi, Ibrahim & Grzegorek, 2006). Acculturation may serve as a challenge even beyond sexual orientation and ethnicity when one seeks to identify with other groups, including family of origin and religious community (Bieschke, Perez & DeBord, 2007). In fact, the most recent literature on LGBT youth especially suggests that a significant segment of the LGBT community values their religious/spiritual beliefs and seeks to remain integrated with religious communities, churches, or spiritual groups (Johnston & Stewart, 2011). Harper and Schneider (2003) refer to this as "double, triple, and quadruple minority status."

Lastly, it must be acknowledged that LGBT clients like Eric bring into the helping relationship a history of both trauma and resiliency. While it is never safe to assume that every LGBT person has a personal history of abuse, trauma, or targeted discrimination, we do know from literature and mainstream media that history of such trauma is common. That history calls for best practice interventions, which include acknowledgement of likely trauma and corresponding “trauma-informed treatment strategies” (Drabble & Eliason, 2012). At the same time, it is important also to acknowledge that, as is the case with many populations in society who have roots in oppression and discrimination, “The LGBTQ community has demonstrated significant strengths, resiliency, creativity and transformative potential” (Lamoureux & Joseph, 2014, 218). In terms of client-level characteristics, this spirit of resiliency is perhaps the greatest hope for meaningful social work intervention.

### *Therapist Variables and Characteristics*

*Rebecca is a seasoned mental health professional who has spent most of her career working with youth and families in the foster care system. Due to recent funding cuts in the DCFS system and her desire for stability in her social work career, she opened a private practice two years ago in an area of the city which is predominantly Hispanic and low-income. She is Caucasian, but bi-lingual in Spanish. One of her first clients was a 24-year-old man named Jose. Jose initially came to Rebecca seeking counseling to address relationship issues and feelings of rejection from previous sexual partners as well as from his parents, who are still living in Mexico. He has regular sessions with Rebecca over the course of about six months. Then, he stopped returning phone calls from her and missed several appointments.*

*After about nine months, Rebecca was very surprised to hear what sounded like Jose’s voice on her confidential message line, asking for an appointment. There was something different about his voice, but she knew it was him. She left him a message in response confirming an appointment later in the week.*

*At the time of Jose’s scheduled appointment, Rebecca heard the outer door to her office lobby open and she walked out to greet him. She was taken aback to see Jose standing there in women’s clothing and with clear differences in his appearance including enhanced cheek bones, breasts, and a more slender build. He reached out his hand to her and said, “Call me Josie.” She welcomed Josie into her office. Josie immediately began sharing her story. She had begun the process of gender reassignment about six months previously, was on strong doses of female hormones, and was seeking Rebecca’s counseling in order to meet the psychological requirements for evaluation needed to complete the process of gender reassignment surgery. After explaining the reason for her visit, Josie began to “test” Rebecca with a series of questions clearly aimed to assess her response to transgender issues. Josie wanted to know if she was the first transgendered client Rebecca had seen. Rebecca said yes. Josie wanted to know if Rebecca was okay discussing with her issues related to the differences in sexual activity as a male versus a female. Rebecca said yes. Josie asked Rebecca a series of “do you know about...” questions. Rebecca responded honestly that what she did not know she was certainly willing to find out.*

*At the end of the 50-minute session, Josie seemed satisfied enough with Rebecca's non-judgmental response to continue meeting with her over the course of the next several months. As Josie walked out of the office, Rebecca wondered whether she had responded "correctly" to what was certainly an unexpected turn of events in her day.*

Israel and colleagues (2008) also identified a larger set of therapist-related variables associated with 'helpful' experiences in counseling, which includes a therapist who openly shares his or her perspective and opinion, provides positive and encouraging feedback, exhibits strong basic counseling skills, can develop a close and trusting therapeutic relationship, and has specific LGBT training and practice experience. The larger literature base echoes some of these themes and adds some additional therapist-level considerations.

In one qualitative study, Romeo (2007) addresses the need for practitioners to receive updated and on-going training regarding practice with this population by implementing a set of LGBT-focused training workshops for practitioners and seeking to measure behavior changes in the practitioners' post-training. This study reported several significant behavior changes, including increased likelihood to seek out and read LGBT-related books, engaging more regularly in conversations with co-workers about LGBT issues, and changing language used in reference to and in practice with the LGBT population. Such trainings are needed for social workers in particular. As one study of English social work students documented, many new graduates report low confidence levels when asked about their preparedness to work with sexual and gender minority clients (Inch, 2017). Interestingly, in the numerous literature reviews done for the this current chapter, there appears to be a lack of research on best practices for equipping social workers specifically for competent practice with LGBT clients. There are a number of studies published which give best practice recommendations and set competence standards for other helping professions including psychologists (Borough, Bedoya, OCleirgh, & Safren, 2015), speech pathologists (Hancock & Haskin, 2015), nursing students (Orgel, 2017), school nurses (Wilging, Green & Ramos, 2016). This seems to be an important area for future social work practitioners and researchers to consider.

One major area of research on therapist preparedness for work with LGBT clients is in the area of self-awareness and self-reflection (Butler, 2010). Josie, and clients like him, might experience prejudice and discrimination from others on a daily basis; he should be able to expect a competent social work practitioner who will not perpetuate that prejudice in the counseling session. This is a highly important point for practitioners looking to improve competency with this population, as it emphasizes the detrimental effects that unrecognized bias, prejudice, and judgmental attitudes can have on the practice environment. Interestingly, while this is a theme common in the most current literature, it has been emphasized over the past several decades, with one researcher almost two decades ago stating the need for a "call for priority to be placed on counselor awareness" (Dworkin & Gutierrez, 1992).

Perhaps the most researched therapist-related factor influencing competent practice with the LGBT population has been the sexual orientation of the counselor. Some researchers emphasize the value of a therapist with the same sexual orientation as the client. One such study reported 95.5% of their respondents stated the importance of their mental health group therapy sessions being facilitated by a therapist who is of the same sexual orientation (Ross, Doctor, Dimito, Kuehl & Armstrong, 2007). Yet, several studies report otherwise; various samples of LGBT clients reported that the therapist/counselor's sexual orientation is not as significant as his or her competence as a counselor (Bieschke, Paul & Blasko, 2007). Interestingly, that same study also found that LGBT clients have a preference for social workers and counselors over psychiatrists. From the questions Josie asked, it is clear the value she places on knowing her social worker is competent in the transgender experience she faces.

Another study by Israel and colleagues (2003) presents a specific set of competencies for counselors in working with LGBT clients. One of the strengths of this study is the involvement of LGBT clients who were polled along with expert practitioners. Clients and practitioners were asked about the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary for competent practice with the LGBT population. In its entirety, the study rank orders 85 different categories of such competencies. According to those surveyed (and clearly echoed in the case of Josie), the top three characteristics of competent counselors working with LGBT clients are: 1) knowledge about discrimination, oppression, prejudice, homophobia, and heterosexism, 2) a non-homophobic attitude (i.e. not feeling one's sexual orientation is evil and in need of changing), and 3) sensitivity to LGBT client's issues, including ethics and confidentiality and a willingness to listen to all aspects of LGBT life.

#### *Intervention Variables and Characteristics*

*Clara is a 38-year-old Caucasian woman. She has an Associate's degree in health care services and works as a Certified Nursing Assistant (can) in a nursing home. After her mother died last year, Clara's coworkers noticed a significant change in her demeanor. She had become withdrawn, distant, and visibly depressed. Her supervisor suggested that she seek grief counseling through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) their health insurance provided. Clara was hesitant, but agreed to give it a try. Having never gone to counseling, she had no idea what to expect. The counselor, Dan, was an African American man in his late 40s. He explained his counseling process to her in a way that was both straight-forward and compassionate at the same time. She felt comfortable with him; his office was calming, and his approach was open. During the first session, he asked her to just "share her story" with him. To her own surprise, she talked for the next 30 minutes almost completely uninterrupted. She shared with him that she had been very close to her mother, that she had early childhood memories of Sundays in church with her, and that she missed her very much. Then, she opened up even more and shared with him that she has been in a closeted lesbian relationship with her partner Sofia for the past seven years, and that one of her greatest regrets now is that she never shared her sexual orientation*

*with her mother before she passed away. She kept this important relationship hidden from her mother because she had not been prepared to answer questions about sexual orientation and religion—a topic she was sure would have been her mother's first concern. When Dan asked her more about this, Clara said she has not herself come to a really good conclusion on what her sexual orientation means for her personal faith in God, but that she is "working on it."*

*Toward the end of the first session, Dan challenged Clara to write a letter to her mother. He wanted her to put into writing everything she wished she had had a chance to say. While this sounded initially like a strange activity to Clara, she agreed to do it and to bring a copy to their next session. As she left Dan's office, she realized that just the act of "doing something" made her feel better.*

*The letter that resulted was nearly 10 pages in length. Dan asked Clara to read it out loud at the beginning of their second session. As she read, Dan was struck both by the simultaneous level of emotion and critical thinking Clara was able to articulate. More than that, he was impressed by the eloquence with which she wrote. As she finished reading, he remembered a poster he had seen hanging in the local coffeehouse he frequented on his way to work every day. Dan told Clara about an Open Mic Night/Spoken Word event at the coffeehouse later that week. He thought she might really enjoy participating and also might find it personally therapeutic to do so. To her own surprise, Clara agreed immediately, and after a few more sessions, she decided that she was going to read some of her writing at the Open Mic event.*

*For the past six months, Clara has been performing at Open Mic events regularly. She writes pieces on grief and loss, pieces on the mother-daughter relationship, and pieces on sexual orientation and faith. She has become a crowd favorite at these events. She has also continued in counseling with Dan and has found him to be surprisingly non-judgmental toward her, open to dialogue about issues of faith (although he is not himself religious), and supportive in assisting her to connect with community resources to aid her in the coming out process. Clara's supervisor and co-workers have observed marked improvements in her demeanor at work, and her partner has also noted improvements in their relationship.*

Regarding variables and characteristics directly related to the actual intervention and counseling strategies utilized in 'helpful' experiences, Israel and colleagues (2008) reported that LGBT individuals benefited most from counseling conducted from specific approaches or theoretical bases. Those approaches most commonly identified were cognitive behavioral (CBT), dialectical behavior (DBT), imagery, and relaxation therapies. The study's participants also reported direction and structure to be most "helpful," citing confrontation, goal setting, and homework as beneficial components of counseling.

Studies have attempted to demonstrate the effectiveness of specific therapeutic interventions with the LGBT population. Several such studies have begun to legitimize adaptations of cognitive behavioral therapy for working with LGBT clients (Berg, Mimiaga & Safren, 2008; Ross, Doctor, Dimito, Kuehl & Armstrong, 2007). The latter study mentioned above (Ross et.al) describes a model of CBT adapted to the specific needs of LGBT group work; the model augments

traditional CBT work with specific curriculum addressing anti-oppression, the coming out process, and experiences of homophobia. In their intervention trial, a 14-week group saw significant decreases in depression and increases in self-esteem. In the case scenario, the use of “homework” in counseling (common in cognitive-behavior-oriented therapy) could certainly be helpful to Clara and her social worker.

Another set of researchers offered theoretical support for the incorporation of liberation psychology (defined as work that seeks to bridge the gap between personal mental health issues and societal oppression) in work with LGBT clients, citing the interwoven nature of personal and social change as uniquely applicable to the LGBT experience (Russell & Bohan, 2007). Other authors suggest the innovation of using art therapy with the LGBT population, based on research indicating the relationship between creative expression and healthy sexual identity development (Pelton-Sweet & Sherry, 2008). Clara found this therapeutic activity to be particularly valuable.

While each of the interventions mentioned above may very well result in some measure of effectiveness in practice with the LGBT population, the most dominant theme in all of the literature on the subject is the concept of “affirmative” counseling (Amadio & Perez, 2008; Bieschke, Perez & DeBord, 2007; Croteau, Bieschke, Fassigner & Manning, 2008; Dworkin & Gutierrez, 1992; Logan & Barret, 2002; Whitman, Horn & Boyd, 2007). Defining affirmative practice is a bit challenging. Bieschke, Perez & DeBord (2007) say this about the definition of affirmative counseling: “Existing definitions tend to reflect more of an attitude than a set of behaviors or specific instructions” (p.7). One understanding of affirmative practice is to value homosexuality and heterosexuality equally (Dworkin & Gutierrez, 1992). Another way to consider affirmative practice is by asking the question, “How have you either created barriers or built bridges” for the LGBT community?” (Logan & Barret, 2002). In short, the rationale for an atmosphere of affirmation rests in a belief that clients like Clara deserve therapy free from the “the medicalizing of difference,” the “pathologization of gender and sexual orientation,” and “the reproduction of Othering through labeling and stigmatization” (Lamoureux & Joseph, 2014, ). This discussion of affirmative practice is a major theme in the literature and one of the linchpins of promising practices for working with all LGBT clients like Eric, Josie, and Clara. More discussion of affirmative practice, specifically related to instances of discordant social worker-client beliefs, is provided in a later section of this chapter.

These techniques reflect a strong support for a model of narrative therapy, which has been presented by some in the social work and counseling fields as particularly applicable and empowering for work with the LGBT population (Walters, 2009). Clients like Clara might prefer to be given the opportunity to simply “talk” and, in doing so, she is given a powerful opportunity to create her own story—to describe and define for herself the trajectory of her life and the ways in which her sexuality has an impact on her mental health and well-being. The narrative therapy approach may be most applicable in instances where the

client's opinions and beliefs are discordant with the practitioner's beliefs and values (which will be addressed further in a later section of this chapter).

### *Spiritual and/or Religious LGBT Clients*

*"All Saints' Episcopal Church in Chicago is a welcoming, inclusive and prayerful community, which celebrates and embodies the love of God for all people (period)."*

*Sam vividly remembers the first time he read that mission statement on his church's website. He was feeling lost without a church home, having recently moved to Chicago after graduate school, and realizing that his identity as a gay man wasn't working well with being Catholic anymore. He needed a new home, and he had found it at All Saints.*

*But Sam didn't start out as an Episcopalian. A cradle Catholic, Sam loved the church, and loved being in it: first an altar boy, then a lector, and even helping lead his church's youth group. When he finally came out to his family on a trip home from college, his parents and friends weren't surprised and (mostly) supported him right away. The one nagging issue, though, was one his mother said to him that stayed with him: "What should we tell people at church when they ask about you?" He wasn't worried though, as he was busy with college and a new dating world. However, as he started to date more seriously, he realized that his mom's question was more than just a worry for her; it was one he was starting to think about more and more, even at his university's Catholic Newman Center masses he attended: what would he tell people, especially as he hoped to one day marry some special guy, something the Catholic Church wouldn't endorse?*

*After graduate school, he moved to be near friends in Chicago, and met and fell in love with Tim, a man who had surprised him on their first date with saying sheepishly, "Don't be too weirded out, but I go to church and sing in a choir." Sam wasn't fazed at all, as he had always loved church music, and was eager to learn more about Tim's faith experience. "I found this church I like, I'm kind of a Christian mutt when it comes to these things, but I think you might like it too." That was four years ago, and after some ups and downs and couples counseling, Sam and Tim found themselves sitting with the Rector of All Saints, planning their wedding ceremony.*

For some of this chapter's readers, this vignette may seem impossible to fathom, or at least like something that could only happen in a big secular urban context like Chicago. In fact, there are many Christian denominations (and within them, Christian churches) that in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century self-identify as "affirming," meaning that they support and welcome LGBT congregants, and do not endorse the interpretation of scripture that defines homosexuality as a sin. Sam and his partner Tim found one in Chicago that was affirming (in this case, an Episcopalian church) and that seemed to be fairly close to some of the Catholic traditions that Sam grew up loving. This ability to "church shop" is certainly not exclusive to LGBT Christians, but in the current climate, many LGBT Christians are keen to find spaces that support them fully.

We share this vignette here as well to help Christian social workers reflect on the spiritual and religious needs of our LGBT clients. Despite all the difficulties and traumas that some LGBT clients report about their formative faith experiences, many still seek to practice their Christian faith, and yearn for a church home. Additionally, a narrative approach may be beneficial in giving clients like Eric and Clara a forum to share experiences and internal struggles in navigating through multiple cultures and social circles—especially the tensions of their own faith journeys, which have, at times, been very misunderstood and even dismissed by helping professionals. Especially for practitioners who hold conservative religious beliefs and values that define homosexuality as sinful, the fact that a gay or lesbian client may also be a committed religious or spiritual person may seem confusing. Yet, there are many (perhaps most) LGBT individuals like Eric and Clara who view themselves as members of both LGBT communities and religious (including Christian) or spiritual communities. Just as the research on LGBT issues in general has increased rapidly in recent years, the research specifically on LGBT individuals and spirituality is on the rise. In 2011, Academic Search Premier found 34 articles meeting the keywords ‘LGBT’ and ‘spirituality’; in 2015, that same search yields 92 results and growing. In one study of the newest generation of LGBT individuals, a large dataset of LGBTyouth (n=6,872) showed that nearly 60% of respondents report strong religiosity/spirituality (Johnston & Stewart, 2011). Some work is certainly being done to better understand the challenges these LGBT men and women face, but promising practices for helping clients like Eric and Clara find meaning and acceptance are few. Clearly, bridges must continue to be built between religious communities and LGBT communities (Marin, 2009), as there are members of each group who genuinely seek to understand and engage with members of the other.

Having gleaned multiple important lessons from the literature to inform practice with LGBT clients, we now turn our attention to the second part of the chapter, which focuses on the personal challenges many Christian social workers may experience. At the conclusion of the chapter, we return briefly to the aforementioned literature and draw some overarching conclusions about the promising practices for working with the LGBT population.

### **Personal Challenges for Christian Social Workers**

*Christine is a social work practitioner who works at a faith-based mental health center. She has recently had a number of LGBT clients present in her office for counseling. Two of these recent clients were young gay men; one came seeking help with depression and the other has severe substance abuse issues. Another of her ongoing clients recently revealed her lesbian sexual orientation in a counseling session.*

*Christine generally avoids discussion of sexuality with these clients, especially with the gay men (with whom she is especially hesitant). However, because the clients know of Christine’s faith and the mission of the agency, several of them have begun to ask her direct questions about her ability to accept them and their sexual orientations. The clients have not expressed any desire to be referred to another counselor*

or agency. In fact, one of the gay men seems to be quite interested in the faith-based aspect of the health center. The lesbian client comes from a Christian family and has had a generally positive experience with her family's faith community. Yet, Christine admits to feeling uncomfortable addressing sexuality with these clients.

Challenged by how to integrate her own personal beliefs and Christian faith, as well as the faith-based mission of her agency, into the provision of competent care for these clients, Christine recently emailed me to ask for advice. Christine's email spoke of her desire to provide her clients with best practices tailored to their unique needs. She spoke openly about the complete lack of familiarity she and her agency have in working with the LGBT population, calling it "uncharted and daunting territory." Christine also expressed with honesty and humility her feelings of discomfort in talking with her clients about their sexuality. She and her co-workers have talked privately amongst themselves about these challenges and several of them have recognized in themselves an unfortunate tendency to judge the clients in "their sin."

What is Christine to do? Her particular Christian views are an undeniable part of who she is and what she brings into the helping relationship. She should, first and foremost, be commended for having the self-awareness and professional integrity that led her to ask for help in the first place. Certainly, her situation is not uncommon—in fact, some who are reading this chapter might be able to identify with Christine. So, to broaden the question—what is any social worker to do when working with clients whose beliefs or practices are discordant with our own?

#### *A Word about Conversion Therapy*

For some Christian social workers, scenarios like Christine's raise questions about the possibilities of conversion. Conversion therapy, also called reparative therapy, refers to counseling homosexual clients with the intended purpose of changing their orientation. Yet, most professional organizations in the helping professions have developed official position statements opposing the use of conversion therapy. Evidence that conversion therapy can be harmful, coupled with the definitive stances against conversion therapy taken by the leading professional mental health organizations, is likely to discourage Christine and others like her from suggesting conversion as a therapeutic end.

The National Association of Social Workers' position statement on conversion and reparative therapies states clearly the belief

...that such treatment potentially can lead to severe emotional damage. Specifically, transformational ministries are fueled by stigmatization of lesbians and gay men, which in turn produces the social climate that pressures some people to seek change in sexual orientation. No data demonstrate that reparative or conversion therapies are effective, and in fact they may be harmful (NASW, 2000).

Similarly, the American Psychological Association has concluded that insufficient evidence exists to support the idea that sexual orientation can be altered through therapeutic aims. Therefore, their formal resolution echoes the NASW:

The American Psychological Association encourages mental health professionals to avoid misrepresenting the efficacy of sexual orientation change efforts by promoting or promising change in sexual orientation when providing assistance to individuals distressed by their own or others' sexual orientation (APA, 2009).

While the aforementioned resolutions cite the inconclusive nature of this literature on conversion therapy, some research does exist which presents compelling data suggesting potential harmfulness (e.g. Halderman, 1994; Shidlo & Schroeder, 2002) and a lack of evidence of any long-term 'success' in changing one's sexual orientation (Bieschke, Paul & Blasko, 2007; Blackwell, 2008; Butler, 2010; Shidlo & Schroeder, 2002;). In more recent years, the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Association (SAMHSA) agency released a report collecting the most recent evidence, arguing for a prohibition of conversion therapy with LGBT youth (SAMHSA, 2015). As of January 2019, conversion therapy has been banned in 15 states and the District of Columbia by legislative statute and an additional 50 counties and municipalities have banned it by local ordinance.

#### *Culturally Competent Practice within Discordant Belief Scenarios*

In contrast to the controversy about conversion therapy, there is much by way of new literature encouraging social workers to embrace the challenge of reconciling conflicting religious and sexual identities. Rather than see religion as inherently a problem for working with LGBT clients, it should be understood that religious beliefs have the potential to be viewed and utilized as both positive or negative forces in social work practice for LGBT men and women (Greene, 2007). Harris and Yancey (2017) published some of the first practice tips specifically for Christian social workers wrestling with the "values dissonance" between the profession and their personal faith. One particularly telling indication of the growing acceptance of and interest in developing rigorous research and publication of this connection between religion and sexual orientation is the recent efforts of CSWE Press to publish an edited textbook entitled *Conservative Christian Beliefs and Sexual Orientation in Social Work Practice* (Dessel & Bolen, 2014). This book includes a collection of 18 different chapters authored by a wide range of practitioners, academics, and researchers across both the religious and sexual orientation spectrums. The result is a book which has allowed for growing dialogue and resources available to social workers like Christine.

The first step for any practitioner seeking to ensure his or her competency in practice with diverse clients is to develop one's own self-awareness, and Christine's email requesting help is a very positive first step. The profession of social work demands that practitioners achieve a level of cultural competence (which includes instances of discordant religious and/or spiritual beliefs). The NASW Standards of Cultural Competence set two interrelated standards expressing

these challenges (although the standards do not explicitly refer to spirituality and/or religion) (NASW, 2001). Standard One states: “Social workers shall function in accordance with the values, ethics, and standards of the profession, recognizing how personal and professional values may conflict with or accommodate the needs of diverse clients.” Standard Two focuses on the development of the social worker’s self-awareness: “Social workers shall seek to develop an understanding of their own personal, cultural values and beliefs as one way of appreciating the importance of multicultural identities in the lives of people.” For some Christian social workers like Christine, these social work standards raise a crucial and controversial question: Can I maintain my Christian beliefs about sexual orientation and also serve LGBT clients with integrity and respect? The answer is yes, but not without intentional soul-searching and exceptionally strong self-awareness. In the aforementioned text from CSWE Press, one chapter articulated the challenge this way:

Although the profession would not encourage practitioners to treat such clients in an oppressive fashion, social workers are often called to suppress their personal beliefs when working with particular clients, and *it is possible* that those social workers who hold conservative beliefs about same-sex relationships may be able to hold these competing beliefs between the personal and the professional; however, awareness of personal values and how they may play out in practice is a critical first step (Chonody, Woodford, Smith & Silverschanz, 2014, 57, *emphasis mine*).

Beyond the introspective work of self-awareness, Christian social workers must also seek out external opportunities to expand this area of their practice. Research done among Christian social work practitioners found that the single most significant predictor of increased level of comfort with and affirmative attitudes toward LGBT clients is exposure to LGBT individuals (Tan, 2014). In this study, those Christian social work practitioners who reported higher numbers of LGBT family members, friends, and/or clients also reported greater comfort and competence at achieving this delicate balance of personal and professional values. While this certainly suggests that the best way to grow in this area of practice is to seek out exposure to and interaction with the population, this may or may not be a natural first step. The next best option is to seek out training in best practices with the LGBT population. As one would with any diverse population, one must seek out continuing education to develop culturally competent practice with LGBT clients. Workshops, webinars, conferences, and podcasts are available nationwide on this topic. Local NASW chapters have been intentional about such topics. NACSW has included workshops on this subject at annual conventions. And both local and national LGBT-affiliated organizations have generated quite a bit of opportunity for continuing education units (CEUs) on the topic. This type of professional exposure would do a world of good for Christian social work students and practitioners who want to learn more about working with LGBT clients.

What, then, does it look like for Christine to move toward 'affirmative practice'? How can she be authentic to her own religious and spiritual beliefs and sort out how to help her LGBT clients?

### *Establishing an Affirmative Practice*

Perhaps the greatest pioneer in the quest to integrate the Christian faith with social work practice was Alan Keith-Lucas. In one of the most widely-read primers for Christian social work students, he articulates very clearly what he saw as the essence of social work practice for Christians:

As a Christian committed to the dissemination of what I believe to be the truth, our task as a social worker is not so much to convince others of this truth, as to provide them with the experience of being loved, forgiven and cared for so that the Good News I believe in may be a credible option for them (Keith-Lucas, 1985, 35).

This emphasis, not on conversion, but on creating an atmosphere where the client feels loved and cared for, can serve as a significant platform for meaningful social work practice in the face of discordant client/counselor beliefs.

This environment Keith-Lucas suggests also fits well with the literature on the value of affirmative practice with the LGBT population. The practitioner's personal religious and spiritual beliefs, if not handled well, could lead the practitioner to create barriers detrimental to the helping process. In this case study, it seems Christine has begun to recognize this danger in her own practice. Engaging in a time of self-reflection and the building of self-awareness can address and prevent these barriers. Guidelines for affirmative practice models can be an important foundation for the competent integration of spirituality into social work practice—especially with LGBT clients.

As described earlier in this chapter, affirmative practice is defined by the creation of a respectful space for dialogue in which the values and beliefs of the clinician do not cloud the progress and goals of the client. Affirmative practice can be done when "practitioners can be allies by addressing sexual history, being aware of gay-affirmative mental health services in their area, and advocating for services where none exist" (Lamoureux & Joseph, 2014, 218). What is presented in this chapter is intended to equip the social work practitioner with the knowledge and skills to make such a respectful dialogue possible. Yet, for some, these skills will not be enough. For those practitioners who remain challenged by or hesitant toward affirmative practice in this way, the following section discusses avenues for appropriate and ethical referral.

### *Is it Time to Refer?*

If Christine (or any other practitioner like her) is reading this chapter and thinking, "I'm not sure I can do this," there are additional options she can consider that still allow her to be helpful to her LGBT client, though these options are full of ethical and possible legal challenges for the practitioner. For some Christian social work practitioners, the task of creating such an affirmative

environment for LGBT clients may prove to be too difficult. Practitioners who, after a time of honest introspection and self-awareness searching, cannot reach a place of sincere affirmation should take appropriate next steps to ensure that their LGBT client gets the mental health support they need.

The challenge for these practitioners is that the fields of social work, counseling, and clinical psychology are far from settled on how best to make such a referral to another counselor. Additionally, considerable academic and legal debate still exists in the field about whether mental health professionals (social workers, counselors, and psychologists) should even feel empowered to make such a referral at all; a number of scholars and resources in the field argue that the most ethical response to LGBT clients is for all mental health professionals to provide competent counseling services to LGBT clients regardless of the practitioner's personal views on homosexuality (Hermann & Herlihy, 2006; Janson, 2002; Murphy, Rawlings, & Howe, 2003; Pearson, 2003; Reamer, 2014).

With regard to Christine's situation, it might be best to ask her: "Where do you, as a practitioner, stand in your ability to help LGBT clients?" and "If you feel compelled to refer your LGBT clients to another social worker, does this reflect best practice on your part for this specific client and their specific needs, or is this evidence of your own discrimination against LGBT clients more broadly?" If Christine cannot genuinely ensure that her personal values and beliefs will not be imposed upon the LGBT client, it is, in our opinion, best for the client to be referred to another service provider who can provide competent and ethical service. We would strongly encourage all Christian practitioners to prepare for such possibilities by developing and maintaining a list of appropriate referral sources in the local area; purposefully seeking out networking opportunities to meet with and get to know practitioners in one's community with experience working with the LGBT population can also be helpful. Likewise, in order to effectively respond to clients like those described in this chapter, practitioners should also familiarize themselves with the various faith communities in the area, identifying particularly gay-affirming church congregations. Lastly, it is our firm belief that a social worker's persistent need to make referrals in instances like these should also suggest to Christian practitioners like Christine the importance of seeking out continuing education in the areas of culturally-competent practice with LGBT clients. Without this constant self-reflection, social workers like Christine can veer into an area where they are actively discriminating against their LGBT clients by refusing to provide them social work services. It is, and always will be, an obligation of our profession that we seek career-long learning and constant expansion of arenas of competent practice.

We recognize that this process of referral can be difficult, especially if the practitioner presently has a low comfort level engaging in conversation with LGBT clients. That said, the language used to communicate the reason for the referral to another service provider must be carefully chosen and articulately spoken. If she reaches a point of referral, Christine should be sure to state the reason for referral clearly, directly, and non-judgmentally. She may wish

to say something like, “I have been thinking about our progress thus far, and I feel that you might benefit from a counselor with more experience working with LGBT clients.” This statement puts the focus on providing the client with the best possible care, rather than on the counselor’s personal discomfort or beliefs. When the social worker is not prepared to create an affirming space for dialogue, choosing to refer a client with discordant beliefs and practices, while developing one’s own self-awareness around the issues, may be in the best interests of the client.

### *Is It Time for Real Conversation?*

The challenges impacting a social worker’s ability and competence to serve a particular population apply to *every client/worker relationship*, not just those with LGBT clients. These challenges also apply to social work faculty themselves and their students in undergraduate and graduate-level contexts, as there is some evidence that the religious beliefs of faculty and students can create attitudes toward LGBT clients that are less accepting than attitudes towards heterosexual clients (Dessel, Woodford, & Gutierrez, 2012). The need for ongoing self-reflection and intergroup dialogue is needed for all social work students and faculty, to enhance our professional development and increase our capacity to ethically serve all client populations, particularly historically marginalized groups (Dessel et al., 2012; Martin et al., 2009; Morrow & Messinger, 2006; Nagda et al., 1999). After one such dialogue experience, social work students reported very positive learning and perspective changes after engaging in a conversation together about Christianity and sexual minority issues (Joslin, Dessel & Woodford, 2016).

Beginning in 2014, a very intentional and productive connection has been cultivated between the authors, NACSW leadership, and members of the Caucus of LGBTQ Faculty and Doctoral Students in Social Work, under the auspices of CSWE’s Council on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Expression. This group began holding regular conference calls to discuss the intersections and challenges between Christians, social workers, and the LGBT community. Those conference calls led to collegial relationships that flourished into a number of publications and workshop presentations both at NACSW conventions and social work conventions, including CSWE’s Annual Program Meeting. Perhaps the greatest legacy of those calls and the work of the group as a whole is a new emphasis within NACSW on the value of constructive conversations—even when it is difficult. Toward that end, in 2017, NACSW formed a formal partnership with Essential Partners which has allowed twelve leaders in the organization to become trained in a model for such conversations called Reflective Structured Dialogue. We look forward to seeing how continuing this LGBT conversation (as well as similar conversations around equally divisive issues) will model for the social work profession what it can look like to move beyond tension toward more competent social work practice.

### **In Summary**

For some who read this chapter, concluding at this point will be, perhaps, unsettling. This chapter does not conclude with a neatly wrapped package of evidence-based interventions, nor does it conclude with permission granted to Christian practitioners to ‘save’ their LGBT clients. Much gray area remains. Still, it is our hope that this chapter serves to stimulate further thinking and discussion among Christian social workers like Christine who are engaged in work with LGBT men and women, and to equip those practitioners with new literature to consider in the process.

Ultimately, Christian practitioners like Christine will best serve her LGBT clients by developing an ability to engage in genuine dialogue about the client’s history of oppression and the baggage that history may bring into the helping relationship. As such, the solutions to the LGBT client’s situation are rarely exclusively clinical in nature; there are social and spiritual ends that must also be addressed (as in the cases of Eric and Clara and their exclusion from the Church). Finally, should the practitioner feel unable to provide the type of affirmative practice suggested in this chapter, the best step might be to sensitively and positively refer the client elsewhere, while continuing to examine his or her ability to provide all clients “with the experience of being loved, forgiven and cared for” (Keith Lucas, 1985, 35).

### **References**

- Amado, D.M., & Perez, R.M. (2008). Affirmative counseling and psychotherapy with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender clients. In Negy, C. (Ed). *Cross-cultural psychotherapy: Toward a critical understanding of diverse clients* (2nd ed.). Reno, NV: Bent Tree Press.
- American Psychological Association. (2009). *Resolution on the appropriate therapeutic responses to sexual orientation distress and change efforts*. Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/about/governance/council/policy/sexual-orientation.aspx>.
- Berg, M.B., Mimiaga, M.J., & Safren, S.A. (2008). Mental health concerns of gay and bisexual men seeking mental health services. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 54(3), 293-306.
- Bieschke, K.J., Paul, P.L., & Blasko, K.A. (2007). Review of empirical research focused on the experience of lesbian, gay, and bisexual clients in counseling and psychotherapy. In K. J. Bieschke, R. M. Perez, & K.A. DeBord, K.A. (eds). *Handbook of counseling and psychotherapy with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender clients* (2nd ed.). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Bieschke, K.J., Perez, R.M., & DeBord, K.A. (Eds.) (2007). *Handbook of counseling and psychotherapy with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender clients*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Blackwell, C.W. (2008). Nursing implications in the application of conversion therapies on gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender clients. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*, 29 (6), 651-65
- Boroughs, M.S., Bedoya, C.A., O’Clérigh, C., & Safren, S.A. (2015). Toward defining, measuring, and evaluating LGBT cultural competence for psychologists. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 22(2), 151-171.

- Butler, C. (2010). Sexual and gender minorities: Consideration for therapy and training. In C. Butler, A. O'Donovan, & E. Shaw, (eds.), *Sex, sexuality and therapeutic practice: A manual for therapists and trainers*. New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.
- Chonody, J., Woodford, M.R., Smith, S., & Silverschanz, P. (2014). Christian social work students' attitudes toward lesbians and gay men: Religious teachings, religiosity, and contact. In A. B. Dessel, & R.M. Bolden, (eds.) *Conservative Christian beliefs and sexual orientation in social work*. Alexandria, VA: CSWE Press:
- Croteau, J.M., Bieschke, K.J., Fassinger, R.E., & Manning, J.L. (2008). Counseling psychology and sexual orientation: History, selective trends, and future directions. In S. D. Brown, & R. W. Lent, (eds.) *Handbook of counseling psychology, 4th Edition*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Denniston, L. (2015, June 26). *Opinion analysis: Marriage now open to same-sex couples*. SCOTUSblog, retrieved from <http://www.scotusblog.com/2015/06/opinion-analysis-marriage-now-open-to-same-sex-couples/>.
- Dessel, A.B. & Bolen, R.M. (2014). *Conservative Christian beliefs and sexual orientation in social work*. Alexandria, VA: CSWE Press.
- Dessel, A. B., Woodford, M. R., & Gutiérrez, L. (2012). Social work faculty's attitudes toward marginalized groups: Exploring the role of religion *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought*, 31(3), 244-262.
- Drabble, L., & Eliason, M. J. (2012). Substance use disorders treatment for sexual minority women. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling*, 6(4), 274-292.
- Dworkin, S.H., & Gutierrez, F.J. (1992). *Counseling gay men & lesbians: Journey to the end of the rainbow*. Alexandria, VA: American Association of Counseling and Development:
- Fassinger, R.E., & Arseneau, J.R. (2008). "I'd rather get wet than be under that umbrella": Differentiating the experiences and identities of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. In K. J. Bieschke, R. M. Perez, & K. A. DeBord, (eds). *Handbook of counseling and psychotherapy with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender clients* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Fisher, S.K., Easterly, S., & Lazear, K.J. (2008). Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender families and their children. In T. P. Gullotta, & G. M. Blau, (eds.). *Family influences on childhood behavior and development: Evidence-based prevention and treatment approaches*. New York, NY, US: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.
- Goldfried, M.R. (2008). Integrating knowledge of lesbian, gay, and bisexual issues in clinical practice and training. *The Behavior Therapist*, 31(7), 131-132.
- Goodrich, K.M., Harper, A.J., Luke, M., & Singh, A.A. (2013). Best practices for professional school counselors working with LGBTQ youth. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling*, 7, 307-322.
- Greene, B. (2007). Delivering ethical psychological services to lesbian, gay, and bisexual clients. In K. J. Bieschke, , R. M. Perez, , & K. A. DeBord, (eds). *Handbook of counseling and psychotherapy with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender clients* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Halderman, D. (1994). The practice and ethics of sexual orientation conversion therapy. *Journal of Counseling and Clinical Psychology*, 62, 221-227.
- Hancock, A., & Haskin, G. (2015). Speech-language pathologists' knowledge and attitudes regarding lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) populations. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 24, 206-221.
- Harper, G.W., & Schneider, M. (2003). Oppression and discrimination among lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered people and communities: A challenge for community psychology. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 31(3/4), 243-253.

- Harris, H.W., & Yancey, G. (2017). Values, dissonance, and rainbows: Practice tips for Christian social workers in a polarized world. *Social Work & Christianity, 44*(1), 123-142.
- Hermann, M.A., & Herlihy, B. R. (2006). Legal and ethical implications of refusing to counsel homosexual clients. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 84* (4), 414-418.
- Inch, E. (2017). Are you ready? Qualifying social work students' perception of their preparedness to work competently with service users from sexual and gender minority communities. *Social Work Education, 36*(5), 557-574.
- Israel, T., Gorcheva R., Burnes, T.R., & Walther, W.A. (2008). Helpful and unhelpful therapy experiences of LGBT clients. *Psychotherapy Research, 18*(3), 294-305.
- Israel, T., Ketz, K., Detrie, P.M., Burke, M.C., & Shulman, J.L. (2003). Identifying counselor competencies for working with lesbian, gay, and bisexual clients. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Psychotherapy, 7*, 3-21.
- Janson, G. R. (2002). Family counseling and referral with gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered clients: Ethical considerations. *The Family Journal, 10* (3), 328-333.
- Johnston, L.B., & Stewart, C. (2011). Rethinking GLBTQ adolescent spirituality: Implications for social workers in the twenty-first century. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies, 7*(4), 388-397.
- Joslin, J.Y., Dessel, A.B., & Woodford, M.R. (2016). Social work students' experiences in a Christianity and sexual minority intergroup dialogue. *Social Work Education, 35*(5), 547-559.
- Keith-Lucas, A. (1985). *So you want to be a social worker: A primer for the Christian student*. St. Davids, PA: North American Association of Christians in Social Work.
- Lam, P.K., Naar-King, S., & Wright, K. (2007). Social support and disclosure as predictors of mental health in HIV-positive youth. *AIDS Patient Care and STDs, 21*(1), 20-29.
- Lamoureux, A., & Joseph, A. J. (2014). Toward transformative practice: Facilitating access and barrier-free services with LGBTTIQ2SA populations. *Social Work in Mental Health, 12*(3), 212-230.
- Langenderfer-Magruder, L., Walls, N.E., Whitfield, D.L., Brown, S.M., & Barrett, C.M. (2016). Partner violence victimization among lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth: Associations among risk factors. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, 33*, 55-68.
- Logan, C.R., & Barret, R. (2005). Counseling competencies for sexual minority clients. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling, 1*(1), 3-22.
- Logan, C.R., & Barret, R.L. (2002). *Counseling gay men and lesbians: A practice primer*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole Thomson Learning.
- Marin, A. (2009). *Love is an orientation: Elevating the conversation with the gay community*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press.
- Martin, J. I., Messinger, L., Kull, R., Holmes, J., Bermudez, F., & Sommer, S. (2009). *Council on Social Work Education's Lambda Legal study of LGBT issues in social work*. Retrieved from [https://www.lambdalegal.org/sites/default/files/publications/downloads/bkl\\_study-of-lgbt-issues-in-social-work\\_1.pdf](https://www.lambdalegal.org/sites/default/files/publications/downloads/bkl_study-of-lgbt-issues-in-social-work_1.pdf)
- Meyer, I, H. (2003). Prejudice, social stress, and mental health in lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations. Conceptual issues and research evidence. *Psychological Bulletin, 129*, 674-97.
- Morrow, D. F., & Messinger, L. (eds.). (2006). *Sexual orientation and gender expression in social work practice: Working with gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people*. New York Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press.

- Murphy, J.A., Rawlings, E. I., & Howe, S.R. (2003). A survey of clinical psychologists on treating lesbian, gay, and bisexual clients. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 33* (2), 183-189.
- Nagda, B. A., Spearmon, M. L., Holley, L. C., Harding, S., Balassone, M. L., Moise-Swanson, D., & Mello, S. D. (1999). Intergroup dialogues: An innovative approach to teaching about diversity and justice in social work programs. *Journal of Social Work Education, 35*(3), 433-449.
- NASW (National Association of Social Workers). (2000). *Position statement on reparative/conversion therapies*. Retrieved from <http://www.socialworkblog.org/practice-and-professional-development/2015/06/nasw-updates-position-statement-on-sexual-orientation-change-efforts-soce/>
- NASW (National Association of Social Workers), (2001). *Standards for Cultural Competence*. Washington, DC: NASW.
- Obergefell v. Hodges. 576. U.S. 2015. Retrieved February 8, 2020, from [https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/14pdf/14-556\\_3204.pdf](https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/14pdf/14-556_3204.pdf)
- Ohnishi, H., Ibrahim, F.A., & Grzegorek, J.L. (2006). Intersections of identities: Counseling lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Asian-Americans. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling, 1*(3), 77-94.
- Omoto, A.M., & Kurtzman, H.S. (eds.) (2006). *Sexual orientation and mental health: Examining identity and development in lesbian, gay, and bisexual people*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Orgel, H. (2017/Winter). Improving LGBT cultural competence in nursing students: An integrative review. *The ABNF Journal, 14-18*.
- Pearson, Q. M. (2003). Breaking the silence in the counselor education classroom: A training seminar on counseling sexual minority clients. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 81* (3), 292-300.
- Pelton-Sweet, L.M., & Sherry, A. (2008). Coming out through art: A review of art therapy with LGBT clients. *Art Therapy, 25*(4), 170-176.
- Ploderl, M., & Tremblay, P. (2015). Mental health of sexual minorities. A systematic review. (2015). *International Review of Psychiatry, 27*(5), 367-385.
- Reamer, F. (2014). Ethical issues and challenges: Managing moral dilemmas. In A. Deszel and R. M. Bolen (eds.). *Conservative Christian beliefs and sexual orientation in social work: Privilege, oppression, and the pursuit of human rights* (pp. 233-256). Alexandria, VA: CSWE Press.
- Romeo, A.N. (2007). Challenging heterosexism and homophobia: Qualitative research to improve health professionals' behaviors. *Dissertation Abstracts International Section A: Humanities and Social Sciences, 68*(3-A), 892.
- Ross, L.E., Doctor, F., Dimito, A., Kuehl, D., & Armstrong, M.S. (2007). Can talking about oppression reduce depression? Modified CBT group treatment for LGBT people with depression. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services, 19*(1). 1-15.
- Russell, G.M., & Bohan, J.S. (2007). Liberating psychotherapy: Liberation psychology and psychotherapy with LGBT clients. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Psychotherapy, 11*(3/4), 59-75.
- Shidlo, A., & Schroeder, M. (2002). Changing sexual orientation: A consumers' report. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 33*(3), 249-259.
- Smith, M.S. (2005). The development and psychometric evaluation of a rapid assessment instrument measuring hardiness in lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons. *Dissertation Abstracts International Section A: Humanities and Social Sciences, 67*(10-A), 3983.

- Spitzer, R.L. (1981). The diagnostic status of homosexuality in DSM-III: A reformulation of the issues. *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, 138(2), 210-215.
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Association. (2015). *Ending conversion therapy: Supporting and affirming LGBTQ youth*. Retrieved from <https://store.samhsa.gov/product/Ending-Conversion-Therapy-Supporting-and-Affirming-LGBTQ-Youth/SMA15-4928>
- Tan, A. M. (2014). Understanding the tension: Christian practitioner perspectives on working with LGBT clients. In A. B. Dessel, & R. M. Bolden, (eds.) *Conservative Christian beliefs and sexual orientation in social work*. Alexandria, VA: CSWE Press:
- Walters, H. (2009). Empowering people who are gay and lesbian in the context of Christian community: The use of narratives to bridge the social divide between personal faith and institutional oppression. Presented at North American Association of Christians in Social Work Annual Conference: Indianapolis, IN.
- Whitman, J. S., Horn, S. S., & Boyd, C. J. (2007). Activism in the schools: Providing LGBTQ affirmative training to school counselors. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Psychotherapy*, 11(3/4), 143-154.
- Willing, C. E., Green, A. E. & Ramos, M. M. (2016). Implementing school nursing strategies to reduce LGBTQ adolescent suicide: A randomized cluster trial study protocol. *Implementation Science*, 11, 145-156.

# Social Work with People who have Experienced Trauma: Implications for Practice and Faith-Based Interventions

---

*Hope Haslam Straughan*

Social workers routinely interact with people who have experienced traumatic events, ranging from natural disasters, school or church/mosque shootings, sexual assault, early life neglect or abandonment, war, famine, and community violence, to name a few. The client may have recently been traumatized by such an event, or they may have experienced it many years before. Recent research particularly highlights the reach of the on-going impact of trauma experienced as a young child, through a variety of adverse childhood experiences, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) (Harris, 2018; Van der Kolk, 2014). Trauma is “defined as an exposure to an extraordinary experience that presents a physical or psychological threat to oneself or others and generates a reaction of helplessness or fear” (Levenson, 2017, p. 105). The psychological reaction to emotional trauma is called post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and its symptoms include depression, anxiety, flashbacks, and recurring nightmares (Merriam-Webster, 2018).

“Trauma, by definition, is unbearable and intolerable” (Van der Kolk, 2014, p. 1). “Trauma-informed care is a way of providing services by which social workers recognize the prevalence of early adversity in the lives of clients, view presenting problems as symptoms of maladaptive coping, and understand how early trauma shapes a client’s fundamental beliefs about the world and affects his or her psychosocial functioning across the life span” (Levenson, 2017, p. 105). Though much has been learned about assessment and interventions to utilize when working with people who have experienced various types of trauma, social workers must remain in a place of humility and awareness that many of these approaches are still emerging and the evidence-base is far from settled as to these interventions’ effectiveness with the diverse clients that social workers typically serve. By its nature, the insidious complexity of trauma coupled with the unique lived experiences of those who have experienced such trauma, must necessarily lead the reflective social worker to remain modest in assuming that our efforts can successfully address our clients’ trauma.

This chapter will explore ACEs, and the implications over the lifespan for someone’s typical development and emotional and spiritual health and the devastating lifelong impact of these experiences as a backdrop to looking at specific types

of trauma conditions. A brief overview of the neurobiological understandings of the impact of trauma and its implications for one's health, and for treatment will set the context for a general look at trauma-informed social work practice and the confluence of trauma and faith. Finally, the chapter will explain commonalities and uniqueness of trauma experienced in various life events such as people seeking asylum, refugees and others experiencing political oppression; individuals affected by war or torture; and childhood sexual and physical trauma and abuse, within the context of foster care, child welfare, and adoption.

### **Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)**

Harris (2018), van der Kolk (2014) and others have further developed the critical implications of the Adverse Childhood Experiences originally documented by Anda and Felitti, and note that up to 67% of the adult population in the United States had at least one category of ACE and 12.6% had four or more ACEs. ACEs are made up of multiple exposures to abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction during childhood and include the following:

- “1. Emotional abuse (recurrent)
2. Physical abuse (recurrent)
3. Sexual abuse (recurrent)
4. Physical neglect
5. Emotional neglect
6. Substance abuse in the household (e.g., living with an alcoholic or a person with a substance-abuse problem)
7. Mental illness in the household (e.g., living with someone who suffered from depression or mental illness or who had attempted suicide)
8. Mother treated violently
9. Divorce or parental separation
10. Criminal behavior in household (e.g., a household member going to prison)” (Harris, 2018, p. 37).

Felitti, et al. (1998) completed early ACE studies, and discovered that the more ACEs children experience, the higher the prevalence of mental illness, chronic illness, and disability in adulthood, and even early death. Children who are exposed to multiple adverse experiences and who are not consistently supported by a capable and reliable caregiver, experience toxic stress which impacts healthy brain and other organ development. Toxic, or chronic stress experienced over a prolonged time period during childhood is related to changes in the brain architecture, “which in turn heighten the risk of engaging in risky behaviors that can lead to a host of negative physical and mental health concerns” (Slack, Font, & Jones, 2016, p. 24). If an adolescent or adult were to experience a traumatic event, the detrimental impacts which have already been activated in their bodies will further the extent to which they are negatively impacted by this newly experienced trauma. They have fewer resiliency factors to mitigate the impact.

Social workers who care for adults have the opportunity to make a significant impact in “mitigating the mental and physical health effects of ACEs” (Esden, 2018, p. 20). In addition to individual work with clients who have experienced trauma, the social worker, from our ethical mandate to practice with macro implications in mind, coupled by our person-in-environment understanding, can look to exploring and advocating for policy change which would positively impact the population with whom we work. “We can actively move from thinking about decreasing trauma and increasing resiliency on only an individual practice level to thinking about building strong communities and supporting policies that increase resilience and prevent trauma collectively” (Watson, Chaffin, & Mallory, 2018, p. 29). Because there is a direct correlation between the number of ACEs an individual experienced in childhood, and greater risk to his or her health, attending to these early life circumstances is an important building block when working with people who have experienced trauma at both the individual and macro practice levels (Harris, 2018).

Critics of the ACEs framework and application to individual interventions note that there are concerns about the “self-reported retrospective nature of the data” (p. 8), or using a “mixture of prospective and retrospective approaches” (p. 8) leading to differences in how ACEs are defined which directly impacts the validity of the studies completed (Kelly-Irving & Delpierre, 2019). Additionally, concerns are noted about the individualized use of the original ACEs questionnaire (Hartas, 2019; Kelly-Irving & Delpierre, 2019). Kelly-Irving and Delpierre, leaders in the public health arena, see the value of research described on ACEs for population-level or structural policy-level intervention, but have great caution about the efficacy of assuming that an ACE score suggests specific and evidence-based interventions for an individual. Dube (2018) further suggests a caution about “widespread” screening, while balancing the need to protect and serve communities and take reasonable action.

Social workers, like all helping professionals, must continually assess new knowledge and potential application to practice, and understanding the potential impact of ACEs on client systems as noted previously, could lead to mezzo and macro interventions towards family and community change more effectively than individual (micro) interventions. Slack, Font, and Jones (2016) reiterate the need for social work practitioners in health care settings to have access to ACEs assessment tools, as well as an ability to assist clients with “connecting to resources and treatment services designed to address the impact of past trauma, given its potential link to current and future health problems” (p. 30). Social workers can extend their strengths-based theoretical approach to interventions by focusing on the interplay between protective factors and resiliency in general, and effective family and community support more specifically, when working with people who have experienced ACEs.

## **Neurobiological Impacts of Trauma and the Implications for our Clients**

“The most important job of the brain is to ensure our survival, even under the most miserable conditions” (van der Kolk, 2014, p. 55). By using technological advances such as the functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), researchers and scientists have been able to literally see and measure the impact of someone’s traumatic experience as mapped on the brain. To do this, a researcher or physician works with a patient to write up a script of the traumatic event they have experienced. The patient often reads the script over for accuracy prior to being put into the fMRI machine. Once inside the machine, the script is read aloud to them while the machine records the brain activity responding to the account (van der Kolk, 2014). During such tests, remarkable consistencies have been found in the brain’s response. It is common for the amygdala to be the biggest area of brain activation to light up during such a test. The amygdala, which is a key part of the limbic system, helps to “identify and react to threats in your environment” (Harris, 2018, p. 67).

The base of our brain, or the reptilian brain, is located in the brain stem, and is responsible for “regulating basic functions such as reflexes, the cardiovascular system, and arousal”, and along with the cerebellum “coordinates motor, emotional, and cognitive functioning” (Malchiodi, 2015, p. 8). Along with the hypothalamus, the brain stem works to ensure that the basic life-sustaining systems are functioning. Right above the reptilian brain is where the limbic system is housed, which is our emotional regulation zone in the brain. Taken together, the reptilian brain and limbic system activate stress-response reactions like the fight or flight response, which are automatic, without any intentional thought (Harris, 2018).

Finally, we come to the top level of the brain, or the neocortex. The medial prefrontal cortex (MPFC), located directly above our eyes, provides a perspective of the data we are receiving from the amygdala informing our judgment and abstract thinking (Rogers, 2019). In addition, our two halves of our brain have different functions. “The right brain is intuitive, emotional, visual, spatial, and tactual, and the left is linguistic, sequential, and analytical” (van der Kolk, 2014, p. 44). “Human behavior is limited by physiology” (Rogers, 2019, p. 341). Our neural circuits in our brains provide defense behaviors that either mobilize or immobilize us, when we are scared or feel threatened, even before we are consciously aware of what is happening around us. Neuroimaging actually shows that when a person is in a highly emotional state experiencing extreme fear, anger, or sadness due to trauma, the stress hormone region of the brain is activated, and the frontal lobe (MPFC in particular) activities of reasoning are severely decreased, causing the person to react with fight, flight or in some cases, to shut down completely and be numb.

To look further at the impacts on the brain due to experiencing trauma, we will explore the limbic system further, as well as the impact of on-going hyperarousal of this system on the entire human experience. The limbic system is an emotional regulation hub within the brain. The limbic system “evaluates experi-

ences for emotional significance and reacts to these experiences” (p. 8) through fight, freeze or flight responses (Malchiodi, 2015). “Ideally our stress hormone system should provide a lightning-fast response to threat, but then quickly return us to equilibrium” (van der Kolk, p. 30). When this system cannot maintain a healthy balancing act, as is often the case with someone experiencing PTSD, the continued secretion of stress hormones can wreak havoc on their behavior and reactions, often panic-based, as well as have long-term implications for their health. The effects of PTSD due to constantly elevated stress hormones include intrusive thoughts about the traumatic event, disrupted sleep, and extreme anxiety (Perry & Szalavitz, 2017).

People may find themselves in a hyper-attentive or hyper-aroused state, when no true threat warrants that level of focus and inability to be fully present in the moment (Herman, 2015). “Traumatized people feel and act as though their nervous systems have been disconnected from the present” (Herman, 2015, p. 35). This enhanced focus, often due to previously experienced trauma, keeps the person from experiencing a full array of emotions, including joy and pleasure in the present moment.

The trauma survivor’s nervous system has literally been changed. “A disrupted stress response doesn’t affect only the neurological system, it affects the immune system, the hormonal system, and the cardiovascular system as well” (Harris, 2018, p. 65). After experiencing trauma, their energy is spent focusing on suppressing inner chaos, often at the expense of active engagement within their current lives. Malchiodi (2015) and Harris (2018) suggest this demands that treatment of trauma focus on the whole person—mind, body and brain.

From a social worker’s holistic perspective, I would add that the most complete response to someone having survived trauma would incorporate attention to spirit, as well. This is partially due to the fact that a core component of spirituality and faith experience is seeking meaning and purpose in one’s life, a preoccupation and on-going desire of many who have experienced trauma and are attempting to accept and understand this reality. Making room for this component of a person’s journey in the supportive, therapeutic relationship, allows for a more complete healing process. “Our ongoing (spiritual) developmental challenge is to integrate all our experiences into a sense of self as a whole person” (Canda & Furman, 2010, p. 84). Additionally, a person’s spiritual expression and faith journey often includes connections to others attending to this part of themselves, and perhaps they can be explored as potential resources for support, care, understanding, and insight. For as Perry (2017) notes, through human relationships we can “both create and destroy, nurture and terrorize, traumatize and heal each other” (p. 5).

### **Trauma-Informed Care**

As reviewed in the introductory comments of this chapter, the potential impact of trauma on an individual’s or community’s lives, is profound. Historically, the term “trauma” originates from the Greek term *troma*, which means “wound” (Merriam-Webster, 2018). The wounds of our clients left by traumatic events are

often not fully known to them, or visible to those working with them, as they are fragmented, or hidden through efforts to cope and survive. Malchiodi notes that posttraumatic stress reactions may result when an individual is unable to access language, or the context associated with the traumatic event, leading to difficulties in verbalizing experiences (2015). With this in mind, it is important to keep the goal of trauma treatment central in the work, as it is not only to deal with one's past, but even more, to enhance the quality of the day-to-day experience, towards an ability to "live fully and securely in the present" (van der Kolk, 2014, p. 73).

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), trauma-informed care is a systemwide approach to caring for patients that is cognizant of the impact of childhood trauma on the person, the family, the community, and society as a whole (SAMHSA, 2014b). Social workers preparing to engage with clients who have experienced trauma, benefit from learning and implementing trauma informed care practices. "Being trauma informed is not only an approach, but also a way of thinking. It is strengths based and focused on better understanding human behavior, coping mechanisms, and how one processes traumatic experiences. It requires that the practitioner understand the nature of trauma and the neurobiology of trauma while simultaneously being able to view the whole person and not as solely a victim of the traumatic incident(s)" (Bent-Goodley, 2019, p. 5).

The Institute for the Study of Spirituality and Trauma (n.d.) further notes that the experience of trauma involves the whole person. It cannot simply be seen "as a cognitive, behavioral, psychological, or sociological encounter. It is all of these. Yet, essentially, it is a spiritual experience, if for no other reason than it forces a partial, if not total, reorganization of the value system and world view of the victims as they work to be survivors" (Parlotz, 2007). The work of the social worker, to join with the person who has experienced this trauma from a stance of assumed strength and movement towards wholeness, requires shared trust and an ability to hold the space when deeply painful memories are shared. The social worker must hold out the belief and understanding that the client is, though focused on internal work related to the traumatic event(s), also a complex and complete human being, greater than the trauma experienced. Trauma-informed care guides the social worker to build rapport, establish trust, and begin work in a manner which allows for this whole person to be welcomed and acknowledged.

Trauma-informed care (TIC) can be defined as "ways in which violence, victimization, and other traumatic experiences may have impacted the lives of the individuals involved and to apply that understanding to the design of systems and provision of services so they accommodate trauma survivors' needs and are consonant with healing and recovery" (Carello & Butler, 2015, p. 264). There are specific components which have been carefully tested and identified which make up this trauma-informed approach to practice.

The National Center for Trauma-Informed Care has identified six core principles of what it means to be trauma informed: 1.) safety; 2.) trustworthiness and transparency; 3.) peer support; 4.) collabo-

ration and mutuality; 5.) empowerment, voice and choice; and 6.) being responsive to cultural, historical, and gender issues. (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014a).

Though many of these concepts naturally correlate to foundational social work principles, such as the importance of a trusting relationship, and responsiveness to cultural, historical and gender issues (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2017), intentionally approaching a client with a mature ability to integrate the TIC components will likely improve the outcomes for the client. For instance, it has been observed that when trauma-informed care is not the foundational approach within child welfare, the system tends to create additional traumatic experiences (Beyerlein & Bloch, 2014). Conversely, utilizing TIC within a trauma-informed child welfare system can lead to avoiding re-victimization and help children heal from prior trauma (SAMHSA, 2014a, b).

Social workers providing emergency care, assessment, and even on-going care for people who have experienced trauma, will benefit from the holistic approach of working within a trauma-informed organization. These organizations might include Veteran Affairs (VA) facilities, hospitals, mental health clinics, community health centers, schools, churches, shelters and other contexts where people who have experienced trauma are being helped to heal. Qualities of trauma-informed organizations include:

- “Realizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery
- Recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in patients, families, staff, and other individuals involved with the system
- Responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices
- Actively seeks to resist retraumatization” (Esden, 2018, p. 17).

The context and environment within which services are provided directly impacts the quality of the help and support provided for the client systems. Intentional training and preparations for all staff and personnel a client might come into contact with while seeking aide, ensures a greater likelihood of appropriate and comprehensive trauma-informed care.

Given the complex nature of trauma itself, and the insidious impacts trauma can have on an individual, family or community, it is possible to enhance effective approaches by utilizing hope theory (Counts, Gillam, Perico, & Eggers, 2017). “Hope theory offers a way to build on a trauma-informed approach” (Counts, Gillam, Perico, & Eggers, 2017, p. 229). There are multiple components to the concept of hope including a sense of hopefulness, capacity to identify pathways to personal goals, and personal agency to move towards them. Hope is not a static characteristic of individuals, and can be developed as a tool for personal change (Lopez, 2013). Neuroscience has found that hope has the opposite effect as toxic stress on the brain; research has shown that hope actually can heal the brain (Ornstein & Sobel, 1999).

## Faith and Trauma

When people experience trauma, it is common for them to consider the implications of this life event or events on their faith or belief system. Additionally, people experiencing forced migration, intimate partner violence (IPV), and other traumatic experiences often turn to their beliefs, faith-based practices, and faith community in order to cope and make meaning of the events. The potential effects of spiritual and religious beliefs on coping with traumatic events and in fostering resilience in trauma survivors have been widely recognized (Peres, Moreira-Almeida, Nasello, & Koenig, 2007; and Fontana & Rosenheck, 2004). As a resource, faith encompasses the support obtained from both prayer and church attendance, family, community, and friends. As a strength, faith includes having hope and goals, a positive attitude, and perceptions of growth and resilience (Shakespeare-Finch & Wickham, 2009).

Faith plays a dual role for refugee women including both a communal and interactive resource one can lean upon, as well as a personal strength promoting resilience (Schweitzer, Kagee, & Greenslade, 2009). Canda and Furman (2010) note that Indigenous People's involvement in their religion helps them move towards balance, harmony, empowerment, and the resolution of historical trauma. Faith informs one's interpretation of life events, giving them a coherent meaning, and may contribute to a successful psychological integration of traumatic experiences in one's life (Koenig, 2006). Larkin, Felitti, and Anda (2014) suggest that spiritual resources, as well as social networks are protective factors that might promote for development and growth even in the face of adversity. As a social worker, this can provide an entry point to building rapport, identifying natural support systems and areas of strength and resiliency, as well as potential intervention approaches with your client systems.

Faith and spirituality “[refer] to a person's strong belief, based on spiritual convictions” (Starnino & Sullivan, 2017, p. 1095). This strong belief can contribute to coping with new situations and accompanying shocking experiences such as forced migration, sexual assault, or military combat. Tedeschi and Calhoun (1995) explore religious and psychological roots of understanding the experiences of trauma. Overall, there is an understanding that to know “life profoundly requires times of testing, and life involves continuous struggle” (p. 7). If a client has this basic belief about times of suffering and trauma, their ability to cope with it, as well as grow and transform towards healing can be enhanced.

Every tribulation is a medicine or blessing in disguise, provided men accept and use it in the right spirit. This is so because God sends tribulation either to inspire us to repentance for past sin; or to prevent us from falling into potential sin; or to test our patience (Miles, 1965, p. 25).

One can see in just this short introductory exploration, how deeply a person's assumptions about the origin of the trauma, its impact on their lives, and the meaning one makes of it can be impacted by their faith and belief system.

Social workers must take the opportunity as they work with clients to explore these sometimes deeply held beliefs, and often intimate assumptions and understandings about themselves and the trauma they've experienced.

Social workers may encounter "victims for whom a catastrophic event is contributing to a newly discovered spiritual awareness, victims who turn to their religious and spiritual beliefs, values, practices, and support systems as sources of strength and resilience in response to catastrophic circumstances, and victims who may be questioning their faith and belief in a benevolent God" (Furman et al., 2016, pp.83-84). Tuning into a client system's belief-based response can assist in building rapport and establishing appropriate interventions and supports. Faith and religious frameworks can give direction to how a person might understand, cope with, and make meaning from a traumatic event. A person might experience a reduced "loss of control and helplessness" (Pargament, Smith, Koenig, & Perez, 1998, p.721), decreased suffering, a strengthened purpose and meaning in the face of trauma, and attribute meaning and purpose to suffering.

## **Addressing Trauma with Social Work Clients**

### **People Experiencing Trauma through Displacement & Political Oppression**

Due to great political strife and uncertainty, war, and internal conflict, the issue of in-country-displacement, and leaving a home country to seek asylum has increased dramatically worldwide. Under the 1951 Geneva Convention, an "asylum seeker" is a person who has applied for refugee status. Their status shifts to that of "refugee" once their application has been accepted (Drywood, 2014). A refugee is a person who,

owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country. (United Nations General Assembly, 1951, art. 1, para. 2)

"They flee seeking safety" (Ostrander, Melville, & Berthold, 2017, p. 66). The refugee experience is one of a continuum of displacement, transition, and resettlement (Catolico, 2013) spanning pre-migration, migration, and post-migration trauma and transitions (George, 2012).

The loss of home, family and community supports, economic fragility, threat to personal safety, and likelihood of human trafficking and sexual exploitation due to war, conflict and political persecution are profound and traumatic (Ginesini, 2018). Women are reportedly at greater risk of PTSD, depression, and anxiety related to lack of social support, poverty, poor health conditions, and discrimination, which are natural outcomes of migration or forced displacement (Shishehgar, Gholizadeh, DiGiacomo, Green, & Davidson, 2017). The need for trauma-informed supports for refugees is critical, considering the multiple losses, transitions, and frequent discrimination experienced by them,

compounded by the lack of understanding/speaking of the English language, knowledge of social and cultural norms within the United States, and a deep feeling of isolation and vulnerability.

Multiple authors have noted the role of spirituality (defined as non-religious spirituality), or a belief in a higher power as resiliency factors for many asylum seekers and refugee women in particular (Baird, 2012; Shishehgar et al, 2017; Sossou, Craig, Ogren, & Schnak, 2008). Additionally, it is often coalitions which include “churches, Buddhist temples, Mosques, and other faith-based organizations which traditionally have served as safe havens for many refugees and as a critical community support” (Ostrander, Melville, & Berthold, 2017). In the life of refugee women, faith plays a double role: it represents a social and community resource to draw upon and an inner strength promoting resilience (Schweitzer, Kagee & Greenslade, 2009). Social workers, functioning from a value base of respect for human dignity, and cultural humility, are uniquely positioned to collaborate with faith communities to assist in connecting refugees for support of their religious health, and tangible community and acceptance.

### **People Experiencing Trauma through Military Service and Torture**

The maladaptive stress response described above in the Neurobiology section is a key component of the PTSD experienced by many soldiers returning from the front lines. Identifying the constellation of symptoms which make up PTSD “gave a name to the suffering of people who were overwhelmed by horror and helplessness” (van der Kolk, 2014, p. 19). “This condition is an extreme example of the body remembering too much. With PTSD, the stress response repeatedly confuses current stimuli with the past in such a dramatic way that it becomes hard for these vets to live in the present” (Harris, 2018, p. 47). PTSD can become entrenched; “the stress response is caught in the past, stuck on repeat” (p. 47), and the vet believes they are in mortal danger. For many people experiencing PTSD due to war or torture, the stress response was compromised during the actual traumatizing event, sometimes because of being held down, or unable to escape or reach safety, and can easily be triggered within one’s everyday life events.

The VA estimates that 11 percent to 20 percent of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans and 30 percent of Vietnam veterans experience PTSD (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d.). Stressful events like combat can lead to PTSD, as can military sexual trauma, which is reported in 23 percent of veterans (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d.). Veterans may also deal with depression and anxiety among other mental health issues, and are more likely to have other psychiatric diagnoses, are at increased risk for committing suicide, have higher rates of unhealthy behaviors, and higher rates of physical health problems (Jaycox & Tanielian, 2008). In addition towards diminishing the impact of a veterans’ PTSD symptoms, researchers have noted the importance of acknowledging and bearing witness to the moral injury of some veterans.

The internal experience of the soldier is now being explored through the concept of moral injury, which involves deeply disturbing emotional reactions to voluntary acts of perpetrating, failing to prevent, or bearing witness to acts that transgress the soldier's deeply held moral beliefs. (Dombo, Gray, & Early, 2013, p. 198)

Fontana and Rosenheck (2004) offer the potential that a leading motivation for veterans' continuing pursuit of treatment for PTSD may be driven by their search to find meaning and purpose in their traumatic experiences. Meaning and purpose, are typically associated with spiritual and religious exploration.

### **People Experiencing Trauma through Childhood Sexual and Physical Abuse and Neglect**

Social workers often work with children who have experienced physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, or abandonment. Some of these children are in foster care, some have found an adoptive home or guardianship after being in foster care, and others have been reunified with their family of origin. All of these children have experienced some form of child abuse and/or neglect, and these experiences must be kept in mind while helping to support these children towards a healthier life. The scale of this problem is larger than many people realize.

Each year about three million children in the United States are reported as victims of child abuse and neglect. One million of these cases are serious and credible enough to force local child protective services or the courts to take action. (van der Kolk, 2014, p. 20)

The fact that most of the abuse and neglect leading to services of support for children, has occurred within the most intimate and private places for children, at the hands of their caregivers in their own homes, can make it even more difficult for growing children to recover.

When children are abused, they sometimes have been immobilized or trapped during the traumatic event, and this can have long-term impacts on a persons' functioning. This is often seen when someone experiences an additional threat, and their fight or flight response has been thwarted such that though they are actually physically able to escape, they freeze and "the result is either extreme agitation or collapse" (van der Kolk, 2014, p. 30). "Victims of childhood sexual abuse may anesthetize their sexuality and then feel intensely ashamed if they become excited by sensations or images that recall their molestation, even when those sensations are the natural pleasures associated with particular body parts" (van der Kolk, p. 67). Like all people impacted by trauma, children from hard places have experienced changes in their bodies, brains, behaviors, and belief systems, and our work with them must keep this understanding at the center of our approaches (Trust-Based Relational Intervention, n.d.).

Some children respond to abuse and neglect by acting out, which often leads to getting attention, and eventually getting help. However, some children respond to traumatic events by blanking-out, or turning inward and being quiet,

and tend not to bother anyone. This can be a particular problem for traumatized children, because without attention and care, these children are left to “lose their future bit by bit” (van der Kolk, 2014, p. 73). However, Straughan (2016) asserts that with trauma-informed care and support:

healing, hope and transformation can be offered to the child who is certain that they cannot be loved, who fears that the abuse and separation experienced in early life is her fault, and who believes she is invisible and irrelevant to everyone else, even their foster or adoptive families. (Straughan, 2016, p. 104).

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) was established by the United States Congress in 2000 and brings a singular and comprehensive focus to childhood trauma based on information from frontline providers, researchers, and families. “Combining knowledge of child development, expertise in the full range of child traumatic experiences, and dedication to evidence-based practices, the NCTSN changes the course of children’s lives by changing the course of their treatment” (NCTSN Core Curriculum on Childhood Trauma Task Force, 2012, p. 2).

The NCTSN has identified 12 Core Concepts for Understanding Traumatic Stress Responses in Childhood as follows:

1. “Traumatic experiences are inherently complex
2. Trauma occurs within a broad context that includes children’s personal characteristics, life experiences, and current circumstances
3. Traumatic events often generate secondary adversities, life changes, and distressing reminders in children’s daily lives
4. Children can exhibit a wide range of reactions to trauma and loss
5. Danger and safety are core concerns in the lives of traumatized children
6. Traumatic experiences affect the family and broader caregiving systems
7. Protective and promotive factors can reduce the adverse impact of trauma
8. Trauma and posttrauma adversities can strongly influence development
9. Developmental neurobiology underlies children’s reactions to traumatic experiences
10. Culture is closely interwoven with traumatic experiences, response, and recovery
11. Challenges to the social contract, including legal and ethical issues, affect trauma response and recovery,
12. Working with trauma-exposed children can evoke distress in providers that makes it more difficult for them to provide good care” (pp. 3-5).

Understanding these 12 Core Traumatic Stress Responses within Children informs the work one does with such a child. One approach based on this understanding is the Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI).

TBRI is an attachment-based, trauma-informed intervention that is designed to meet the complex needs of vulnerable children. TBRI uses Empowering Principles to address physical needs, Connecting Principles for attachment needs, and Correcting Principles to disarm fear-based behaviors. While the intervention is based on years of attachment, sensory processing, and neuroscience research, the heartbeat of TBRI is connection. (Trust-Based Relational Intervention, n.d.)

This approach is designed for children from 'hard places' such as abuse, neglect, and/or trauma (Purvis, Cross, & Pennings, 2009). Many perplexing behaviors of these children are a result of the difficulty children have trusting their caregivers and the loving adults in their lives, due to the break in that trust in their prior abuse or neglect. As is the case with all people who have experienced trauma, it is critical to remain focused on the whole child in the work towards healing.

### **A Note about the Impact of Working with Clients who have Experienced Trauma**

As noted by NCTSN previously, providing care to children who have experienced extreme trauma can have a deep impact on the worker, causing them to be unable to provide the best services possible (2012). Vicarious trauma, secondary trauma, and burnout can be the result of on-going exposure to clients' recounting traumatic experiences. Active participation in supervision, a comprehensive self-care plan, and focus on a work-life balance can enhance a social worker's ability to maintain appropriate mental health and an ability to provide the best possible supports to their clients. Dombo and Gray (2013) discuss "the importance of rest, spiritual activities with others, professional help, spiritual cleansing, meditation, and consistent maintenance of a spiritual practice for social workers, in order to offset the effects of secondary, or vicarious, traumatic stress" (p. 95).

### **Conclusion**

As we have explored, "trauma is not just an event that took place sometime in the past; it is also the imprint left by that experience on mind, brain, and body" (van der Kolk, 2014, p. 21). The profound nature of this imprint and its implications on the healthy living and relationships of those who have experienced trauma may be lessened through the usage of trauma-informed social work interventions. The trauma-informed social worker "understands that one's biology may be affected by a variety of traumatic experiences: interpersonal, catastrophic environmental events, medical mishaps and procedures, military combat, witnessing abuse, and ongoing social oppression" (Courtois, 2008, p. 414). Above all else, "the trauma-informed clinician prioritizes the client's need and right to feel safe in the world" (Szczygiel, 2018, p. 133).

## References

- Baird, M. B. (2012). Well-being in refugee women experiencing cultural transition. *Advances in Nursing Science, 35*(3), 249-63.
- Bent-Goodley, T. B. (2019). The necessity of trauma-informed practice. *Social Work, 64*(1), 5-8.
- Beyerlein, B. A., & Bloch, E. (2014). Need for trauma-informed care within the foster care system: A policy issue. *Child Welfare, 93*(3), 7-21.
- Canda, E. R., & Furman, L. D. (2010). *Spiritual diversity in social work practice: The heart of helping* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Carello, J., & Butler, L. D. (2015). Practicing what we teach: Trauma informed educational practice. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work, 35*, 262-278.
- Catolico, O. (2013). Seeking life balance: The perceptions of health of Cambodian women in resettlement. *Journal of Transcultural Nursing, 24*(3), 236-245.
- Counts, J. M., Gillam, R. J., Perico, S., & Eggers, K. L. (2017). Lemonade for life—a pilot study on a hope-infused, trauma-informed approach to help families understand their past and focus on the future. *Children and Youth Services Review, 79*, 228-234.
- Courtois, C. A. (2008). Complex trauma, complex reactions: Assessment and treatment. *Psychological Trauma, Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy, 5*(1), 86-100.
- Dombo, E. A., & Gray, C. (2013). Engaging spirituality in addressing vicarious trauma in clinical social workers: A self-care model. *Social Work and Christianity, 40*(1), 89-104.
- Dombo, E. A., Gray, C., & Early, B. P. (2013). The trauma of moral injury: Beyond the battlefield. *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought, 32*(3), 197-210.
- Drywood, E. (2014). Who's in and who's out? The court's emerging case law on the definition of a refugee. *Common Market Law Review, 51*(4), 1093-1124.
- Dube, S. R. (2018). Continuing conversations about adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) screening: A public health perspective. *Child Abuse and Neglect, 85*, 180-184.
- Esden, J.L. (2018). Adverse childhood experiences and implementing trauma-informed primary care. *Nurse Practitioner, 43*(12), 10-21.
- Felitti, V. J., Anda, R. F., Nordenberg, D., Williamson, D. F., Spitz, A. M., Edwards, V. Koss, M.P., & Marks, J. S. (1998). Relationship of childhood abuse and household dysfunction to many of the leading causes of death in adults: The adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) study. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 14*(4), 245-258.
- Fontana, A., & Rosenheck, R. (2004). Trauma, change in strength of religious faith, and mental health service use among veterans treated for PTSD. *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease, 192*(9), 579-584.
- Furman, L. D., Benson, P. W., Moss, B., Danbolt, T., Vetvik, E., & Canda, E. (2016). Reflections on collective trauma, faith, and service delivery to victims of terrorism and natural disaster: Insights from six national studies. *Social Work & Christianity, 43*(1), 74-94.
- George, M. (2012). Migration traumatic experience and refugee distress: Implications for social work practice. *Clinical Social Work Journal, 40*, 429-437.
- Ginesini, G. (2018). Forced migration, trauma, faith, and resilience. *Social Work & Christianity, 45*(4), 98-121.
- Harris, N.B. (2018). *The deepest well: Healing the long-term effects of childhood adversity*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
- Hartas, D. (2019). Assessing the foundational studies on Adverse Childhood Experiences. *Social Policy and Society, 18*(3), 435-443.

- Herman, J. (2015). *Trauma and recovery: The Aftermath of violence—From domestic abuse to political terror*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Parlotz, R.D. (2007). The Institute for the Study of Spirituality and Trauma. Retrieved from <http://www.geocities.ws/frbobparlotz/issstparlotz.html>
- Jaycox, L. H., & Tanielian, T. (2008). *Invisible wounds of war: Psychological and cognitive injuries, their consequences, and services to assist recovery*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation.
- Kelly-Irving, M., & Delpierre, C. (2019). A critique of the Adverse Childhood Experiences framework in Epidemiology and Public Health: Uses and misuses. *Social Policy and Society*, 18(3), 445-456.
- Koenig, H.G. (2006). *In the wake of disaster: Religious responses to terrorism and catastrophe*. Philadelphia, PA: Templeton Foundation Press.
- Larkin, H., Felitti, V. J., & Anda, R. F. (2014). Social work and Adverse Childhood Experiences research: Implications for practice and health policy. *Social Work in Public Health*, 29(1), 1-16.
- Levenson, J. (2017). Trauma-informed social work practice. *Social Work*, 62(2), 105-113.
- Lopez, S. J. (2013). *Making hope happen: Create the future you want for yourself and others*. New York, NY: Atria Books.
- Malchiodi, C. A. (Ed.). (2015). *Creative interventions with traumatized children* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Merriam-Webster. (2018). Trauma. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/trauma>
- Miles, L. (Ed.). (1965). *Saint Thomas More: A dialogue of comfort against tribulation*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- National Association of Social Workers. (2017). Code of ethics. Retrieved October 30, 2019 from <https://www.socialworkers.org/About/Ethics/Code-of-Ethics/Code-of-Ethics-English>
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network Core Curriculum on Childhood Trauma Task Force. (2012). *The 12 core concepts: Concepts for understanding traumatic stress responses in children and families. Core Curriculum on Childhood Trauma*. Los Angeles, CA, and Durham, NC: UCLA-Duke University National Center for Child Traumatic Stress.
- Ornstein, R. E., & Sobel, D. S. (1999). *The healing brain: Breakthrough discoveries about how the brain keeps us healthy*. Cambridge, MA: Malor Books.
- Ostrander, J., Melville, A., & Berthold, S. M. (2017). Working with refugees in the U.S.: Trauma-informed and structurally competent social work approaches. *Advances in Social Work*, 18(1), 66-79.
- Pargament, K. I., Smith, B. W., Koenig, H. G., & Perez, I. (1998). Patterns of positive and negative religious coping with major life stressors. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 37(4), 710-724.
- Peres, J. F. P., Moreira-Almeida, A., Nasello, A. G., & Koenig, H. G. (2007). Spirituality and resilience in trauma victims. *Journal of Religion & Health*, 46(3), 343-350.
- Perry, B., & Szalavitz, M. (2017). *The boy who was raised as a dog: And other stories from a child psychiatrist's notebook: What traumatized children can teach us about loss, love, and healing*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Purvis, K. B., Cross, D. R., & Pennings, J. S. (2009). Trust-based relational intervention: Interactive principles for adopted children with special social-emotional needs. *Journal of Humanistic Counseling, Education, and Development*, 48, 3-22.
- Rogers, A. T. (2019). *Human behavior in the social environment: Perspectives on development and the life course* (5th ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.

- Schweitzer, R., Kagee, J., & Greenslade, A. (2009). Coping and resilience in refugees from the Sudan: A narrative account. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry, 41*(3), 282-288.
- Shakespeare-Finch, J., & Wickham, K. (2009). Adaptation of Sudanese refugees in an Australian context: Investigating helps and hindrances. *Integration Migration, 48*(1), 23-46.
- Shishehgar, S., Gholizadeh, L., DiGiacomo, M., Green, A., & Davidson, P. M. (2017). Health and socio-cultural experiences of refugee women: An integrative review. *Journal of Immigrant Minority Health, 19*, 959-973.
- Slack, K. S., Font, S. A., & Jones, J. (2016). The complex interplay of adverse childhood experiences, race, and income. *Health and Social Work, 42*(1), 24-31.
- Sossou, M-A., Craig, C. D., Ogren, H., & Schnak, M. (2008). A qualitative study of resilience factors of Bosnian refugee women resettled in the southern United States. *Journal of Ethnic, and Cultural Diversity in Social Work 17*(4), 365-385.
- Starnino, V. R., & Sullivan, W. P. (2017). Early trauma and serious mental illness: What role does spirituality play? *Mental Health, Religion & Culture, 19*(10), 1094-1117.
- Straughan, H. H. (2016). Parenting a transracially adopted child with a history of trauma. In J. Hoyt-Oliver, H. H. Straughan, & J. E. Schooler (Eds.). *Parenting in transracial adoption: Real questions and real answers* (pp. 93-107). Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger.
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2014a). Guiding principles of trauma-informed care. *SAMHSA News, 22*(2). Retrieved from [https://www.samhsa.gov/samhsaNewsLetter/Volume\\_22\\_Number\\_2/trauma\\_tip/guiding\\_principles.html](https://www.samhsa.gov/samhsaNewsLetter/Volume_22_Number_2/trauma_tip/guiding_principles.html)
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2014b). Trauma and Justice Strategic Initiative. SAMHSA's concept of trauma and guidance for a trauma-informed approach. Retrieved from <https://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content/SMA14-4884/SMA14-4884.pdf>
- Szczygiel, P. (2018). On the value and meaning of trauma-informed practice: Honoring safety, complexity, and relationship. *Smith College Studies in Social Work, 88*(2), 115-134.
- Tedeschi, R. G., & Calhoun, L. G. (1995). *Trauma and transformation: Growing in the aftermath of suffering*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Trust-Based Relational Intervention. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://child.tcu.edu/about-us/tbri/#sthash.wBEitck7.dpbs>
- United Nations General Assembly. (1951, July). *Convention relating to the status of refugees*. Retrieved from <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3be01b964.html>
- United States Department of Veterans Affairs. (n.d.). How common is PTSD? Retrieved from <https://www.ptsd.va.gov/understand/common/index.asp>
- Van der Kolk, B. (2014). *The body keeps score: Brain, mind, and body in the healing of trauma*. New York, NY: Viking.
- Watson, C. M., Chaffin, K. M., & Mallory, K. C. (2018). Clinical Practice, Social Justice, and ACEs: Bridging the gap with science. *The New Social Worker, 25*(3), 28-29.

# Faith as a Resource for Healing from a School Shooting

---

*Bree Alexander*

The United States (U.S.) has been consistently dealing with the aftermath of numerous school shootings in recent years. Since the 1999 shooting at Columbine High School, shootings all over the country have taken the nation by storm devastating schools, families, and communities and leaving them to deal with the broken pieces (Richmond, 2018). In the wake of these shootings, many reports have considered a number of factors related to the prevention and intervention of school shootings including, warning signs that such an incident was on the brink of occurring, safety precautions in place at various schools to prevent or reduce harm of a shooting, and staff interventions used to address students at risk for violent or aggressive behavior (Chen, Purdie-Vaughns, Phelan, Yu, & Yang, 2015; Duplechain & Morris, 2014; Gelkopf & Berger, 2009; Hansel et al., 2010; Lee, 2013). A less common approach to trauma following a school shooting is the integration of faith in the healing process, which the author will explore further.

## **Response to School Shootings**

What is often limited in reports of gun violence, is the longer-term trauma response in the aftermath of a school shooting once the initial shock has passed; the crisis intervention teams have moved on to the next crisis, and the schools and their surrounding communities are left to adjust to a new normal. This year, on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1999 Columbine High School shooting, some survivors discussed the importance of long term mental health resources and reducing the stigma of mental illness, since this prevents some from seeking services (Shapiro, 2019). Frank DeAngelis, Principal of Columbine High School at the time of the shooting, noted the discouragement he received regarding disclosing that he saw a therapist following the incident due to risk of appearing unfit (Shapiro, 2019). As a result of similar experiences, many school shooting survivors navigate the healing process on their own, which can increase risk of mental health symptoms and maladaptive behaviors. In fact, recent reports highlighting multiple suicides of school shooting survivors all in the same week remind us that trauma continues long after a school shooting has taken place and in many cases is not being addressed adequately (Yan & Park, 2019). Research indicates the healing process following a traumatic event can vary depending on the event, but often includes resilience, an increase in positive views of new possibilities, personal strength and spiritual change (Bruns, 2014). In fact, faith, defined as a strong belief in God or

in the doctrines of a religion, as a resource for healing is a method that is gaining more attention in trauma literature, and more people report using faith to cope with traumatic life experiences (Bryant-Davis & Wong, 2013). Faith has also been reported as a protective factor in the prevention of violence in youth and adolescents (Windham, Hooper, & Hudson, 2005; Maxina, 2007).

**Faith as a Response to School Shootings.** Relationship with God, interactional parts of one's being, and cultural influences are all related to the way a person responds to a traumatic incident and their ability to recover long-term (Branton, 2006; Brennan & Bally, 2007; Cohen, Mannarino, & Deblinger, 2006; Giordano & Engebretson, 2006; Goetz & Caron, 2005; Vis & Battistone, 2014; Westerman, 2008). When presented with trauma and loss, many use a form of faith functioning to cope or search for understanding of the event through faith-based assumptions (Daniel, 2012). Trauma, grief, and loss can threaten one's beliefs about good and evil, the nature of God, and one's place in the world, but these experiences also have the potential to produce significant psychological and spiritual growth (Daniel, 2012). Responses regarding the incorporation of faith in managing trauma after a school shooting have been recorded by various news and media outlets. For example, many survivors of the 2018 Santa Fe High School shooting cited their faith and the power of prayer as a healing agent following the shooting (Yee & Harmon, 2018). One survivor stated, "For my family, prayer is a great source of strength and comfort; a peace washes over you when you know you don't have the strength, and someone can intercede for you" (Yee & Harmon, 2018).

Others have expressed ambivalent views regarding faith as a response to school shootings. While many acknowledge the positive role faith plays in healing, they also express frustration with the media's sole mention of prayer and faith as a resolution for grief and trauma symptoms. They caution the public from being inundated with mere words of faith and opting for more of a faith praxis approach (i.e., the process by which a person's faith couples with love to transform communities and societies for the better) in addition to more practical responses like change in gun control laws and school safety measures. Some prominent examples of this come from the 2018 Parkland, Florida shooting at Stoneman Douglas High School in which many people spoke out to dismiss the phrase "thoughts and prayers" that were offered by several prominent figures including the President of the United States (Mazza, 2018). They demanded that the government do something more tangible to alleviate their pain and fear of future shooting incidents (Mazza, 2018). Such sentiments align with teachings in James 2:14, "What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has not deeds? Can such faith save them?" Thus, the call for active faith and the need for trauma intervention reveals a unique opportunity for the integration of both to help school shooting survivors heal.

**Theoretical Framework.** After experiencing a traumatic event like a school shooting, previously held beliefs are challenged and thoughts of mortality become more prominent and thus, a greater desire to engage with fundamental

existential and faith-related issues arises (Tedeschi & Riffle, 2016). LeMothe (1999) suggests that if a person holds religious beliefs including a supernatural power that is supposed to provide security or safety, these beliefs are inevitably challenged by traumatic experiences. However, this does not automatically lead to abandonment of one's faith. Viktor Frankl, holocaust survivor and founder of Logotherapy, suggests that the primary motivational force of a traumatized individual is finding meaning in life (Frankl, 1988). Frankl's three main tenets of meaning include: 1.) Freedom of will (i.e., one has the freedom to find meaning in personal experiences), 2.) Will to meaning (i.e., one's motivation to find meaning in life) and 3.) Meaning of life (i.e., one's understanding that life has meaning under all circumstances) (Dezelic, 2014). This can only be achieved by the movement through feelings such as grief, depression, and anxiety (often experienced following a trauma like a school shooting) to a sense of purpose or serving something greater, often a faith tradition for many people. This draws on a fundamental feature of the human spirit, which is

the capacity to change, redirect oneself, or take on a new outlook on life by which one can address the realities of pain, suffering, and death with a sense of empowerment, responsibility, and courage to face and change the future (Morgan, 2010, p.110).

Since trauma response is directly related to one's experience of the traumatic event, faith has the potential to be instrumental in the meaning-making process (Altmaier, 2013). When reflecting on the monstrosities inflicted upon children in concentration camps in Germany, Irving Greenberg argued that "no statement theological or otherwise, should be made that would not be credible in the presence of burning children" (Greenberg, 1977, p.34). This suggests that "theology that does not make sense in the presence of burning children is not adequate theology" (Theuring, 2014, p.549). This suggests that religion can offer us something more in the midst of suffering. Faith often offers answers to important questions that relate to trauma such as, why has this happened to me? How is this event relevant to my present and future?; "the integration of faith and meaning is present in the content of religious belief and the process of spirituality" (Altmaier, 2013, p. 109). In other words, the integration of faith-based coping strategies helps in understanding the role of religion in processing the aftermath of a traumatic experience (Altmaier, 2013). Religious coping strategies can include the redefining of the experience as a part of God's will, seeking control through prayer with God, and finding comfort in engaging in religious activities with like-minded individuals (Altmaier, 2013). These strategies are linked to better adjustment and improved physical health when they allow the individual to create post-traumatic cognitions that are beneficial (Altmaier, 2013). In contrast, faith practices linked to poorer outcomes after experiencing trauma involve a view of God as "punitive or distant, or assigning personal blame" (Altmaier, 2013, p. 110).

***Integrating a Faith Perspective in Trauma Intervention.*** The varying responses of those grieving the loss of people killed or injured in school

shootings have remained just that, varied. While some individuals feel led to express their grief through their faith, others may push it away completely. The literature suggests that there is a relationship between the role of faith and the trauma healing process. Specifically, a correlation between Christian-based intervention strategies and decreased risk of post-traumatic symptoms have been identified (Vis & Bastitone, 2014). For example, students who have a positive relationship with God can experience positive effects in their ability to recover from adversity and trauma (Ball, Armistead & Austin, 2003; Vis & Bastitone, 2014). Other benefits of faith-based trauma intervention include decreased symptoms of depression, anxiety, and memory loss (Brennan & Bally, 2007; Westerman, 2008). Faith-based trauma intervention can include enhancing a positive relationship with God through journal writing and self-reflection, developing safety plans based on spiritual literature to enhance acceptance of the unknown and responsibility for personal decisions, seeking support from God during times of stress through prayer, and using expressive arts and verbal processing to discuss how the incident affects relationship with God, explore the role God plays in recovery, and/or develop meaning of experiences (Vis & Battistone, 2014).

Social workers have an ethical obligation to understand this relationship and utilize it effectively in practice. The following retrospective case study discusses the integration of faith as a resource for healing through trauma after a school shooting. To keep identities confidential, names were changed, and other identifying information collected during the interview portion of the study was omitted. The research is also supplemented with publicly available information and background information about the shooting. Using the theoretical framework of Viktor Frankl's existential theory, the incident is explored and connected to one's capacity for faith concepts and meaning-making. Reflecting on application to school shootings, the research findings synthesize the role of faith in the healing process following a school shooting and how it relates to social work practice.

### **Surviving Columbine: Kate's Story**

As a teenager preparing to embark on new adventures in college, Kate unexpectedly became a survivor of the 1999 Columbine High School shooting, one of the deadliest and most highly publicized mass school shootings in U.S. history until 2018. Her memories of hiding under a lunch table, running to a safer location inside the school amid gunshots, and warning other students of the danger in the process are still engraved in the back of her mind. Now in her mid-thirties and just a few months prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Columbine High shooting, Kate agreed to be interviewed to discuss how her Mennonite-Christian faith played a role in her healing process since Columbine. Kate discusses the effects the shooting had on her emotional well-being and how she managed to find peace with the help of her faith. As she recalled the events of that day, Kate notes the questions she now asks herself about faith, the unknown factors that contributed to her actions that day, and how she has

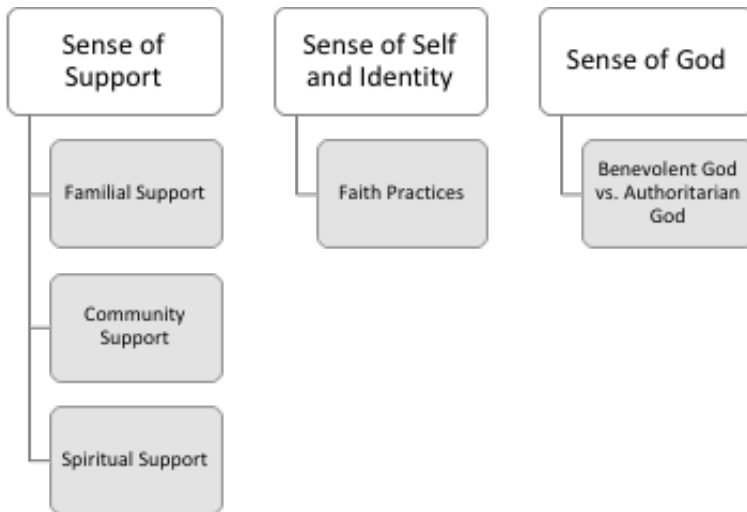
chosen to move forward with her life. Kate is currently working as a public-school teacher in the U.S. where she has had the opportunity to fulfill the lifelong goal of teaching students for the past 16 years.

**Methods.** The author used a case study design approach to offer an in-depth look at the experience of one school shooting survivor, her healing process over time, and her integration of faith in that process. The rationale for this method aligns with Creswell and Roth's (2018) assertion that case studies take a naturalistic approach that is sensitive to the complexities and interactions of a variety of scenarios. Given the complex nature of the relationship between trauma and faith, a case study offered rich insight to some of the challenges of this experience. Thus, the purpose of this study is to learn from an individual experience and make case assertions, rather than generalize broadly to school shooting survivors (Creswell & Roth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 1995).

The author collected data via two semi-structured telephone interviews to better understand Kate's experience of the public-school shooting and the role her faith played in coping in the aftermath. The instrument included 31 open-ended questions designed to collect data from the participant specific to her experiences and perceptions (See Appendix A). Interviews included one, 60-minute initial interview and one, 30-minute follow-up interview which were tape recorded for transcription and data analysis. The author obtained approval for interviews from Baylor University's institutional review board (IRB) and consent was obtained verbally via telephone. Interview questions encouraged Kate to discuss various strategies used to manage any trauma-related symptoms following the school shooting, including faith-based strategies. Interviews were transcribed by the author for analysis. Data were grouped into various clusters of ideas or wording to determine common themes (Moustakas, 1994). Additionally, content analysis methods were used to analyze data from news articles and reports used to express feelings and thoughts of survivors in the aftermath of the Columbine shooting to triangulate data obtained in interviews.

**Results.** When asked about her initial reaction in the aftermath of the shooting, Kate commented that she felt a significant level of distress in the beginning of the grieving process. Although never formally diagnosed with a mental health disorder until a few years after the shooting, making her experience more complicated, Kate identified feelings including fear, depression, and guilt. Specifically, when discussing guilt, survivor's guilt was strongly indicated as Kate mentioned the many deaths that occurred on the day of the incident and how this could have easily been her. When questioned about how she managed to overcome some of the lingering emotions after the shooting incident, Kate cited her faith as a contributing factor, stating that she never once felt a desire to renounce her beliefs in the face of the tragedy, but instead leaned in closer and found comfort. Further research using content analysis from news reports and online reflections of survivors during the time of the school shooting confirmed community involvement from faith-based organizations following the shooting which appeared to assist survivors in healing. This aligns with Kate's recollection of her persistent faith in the aftermath of the shooting.

Three overarching themes emerged from the interview data. The first theme was *sense of support*. This theme included three subthemes which were familial support, community support and spiritual support. The second overarching theme that emerged from the data was *sense of self/identity*. Sense of self and identity included one subtheme, faith practices. Lastly, the third overarching theme was *sense of God*. This theme includes one subtheme which is benevolent God (i.e., loving, forgiving, protecting, etc.) versus authoritarian God (i.e., controlling, demanding, punishing, etc.). An outline of the various themes from the interview data is displayed to contextualize how faith can be intermingled in coping methods following a school shooting (see Figure 1). As previously mentioned, it should be noted that we cannot generalize these themes broadly from one case, but rather draw attention to one individual's experience that may shape individual conceptions of trauma following school shootings and faith.



**Figure 1. Thematic flow chart of data and information received during interviewing process. Chart indicates correlated sub-themes across three major overarching themes.**

### **Sense of Support**

The first overarching theme began to emerge when the participant discussed positive and negative effects of using faith as a resource for coping and how that seemed to help her manage stress or distress in the aftermath of the school shooting. There was a strong emphasis placed on the perception of support in many areas of life, particularly support from family members, the surrounding community, and the church. These themes were consistent with previous literature on the relationship between perception of social support and trauma

recovery (Salloum & Overstreet, 2012; La Greca et al., 2010; La Greca et al., 1996; Moore & Varela, 2010; Vis & Battistone, 2014). That is, perception of trauma is significantly influenced by exposure to support, or lack thereof, from family, community and church (Vis & Battistone, 2014). Additionally, perceived support is inversely correlated with PTSD symptoms (i.e., high levels of perceived support suggest lower levels of PTSD symptoms) (Lee, 2013).

**Familial Support.** At several points throughout the interview Kate referenced her family and the important role they played in her processing of the shooting. Kate recalled a conversation that she had with her father: “One of the main tenets of [my faith] is peace and not violence...reconciliation, and I think my experiences have made me gravitate toward that. My dad and I have had a lot of conversations over the years about it.”

It also appeared that despite the several years that had passed since the shooting; Kate is still able to identify ways in which she receives familial support that are directly related to her experiencing a school shooting. When discussing some of the long-term impacts of the incident on her personal relationships she stated that:

My dad still admits to this day that when he can't get a hold of us, he still worries a little bit. I mean, it makes me remember and be grateful for the people that I do have. As far as the students, we were about to leave anyhow, but my class was pretty close as far as a big class could be. I think it just solidified it when we had our reunion. It just felt different than it would've been if it was just a regular reunion because we were grateful for all of the people that were there even if we weren't really close in school. So, we bonded after that in a strange way.

Reflections suggest that not only did the bond with family members become grounded in a deep sense of gratitude, but the bond with fellow survivors deepened to a family-like connection.

**Community Support.** The surrounding community's support of survivors can be critical to the healing process. Many systems within the community are influenced by the occurrence of a school shooting such as neighborhoods, families, local businesses, etc. When discussing Kate's sense of support, community support emerged as a subtheme and was emphasized as something that can benefit survivors.

As far as after things happen, I think there are groups of survivors who have been supportive of each other and I have friends who have started a faith support group and that helps students and other people. I think it's important for anyone who has experienced a shooting to have access to counseling and for churches to continue to support people if they have members of their community. I think it's also helpful to have remembrance days. I know I have friends who always remember me on the anniversary of the shooting and just check in on me and see how the day is going.

It was clear during the interview that community support can be both formal and informal and is effective in both forms for survivors of school shootings. For example, a candle light vigil sponsored by the city or the entire local community can be just as effective as a group of friends getting together to have open discussion about the event and their feelings related to it. In each scenario, healing can be fostered through remembrance, discussion, and a sense of community.

**Spiritual Support.** When discussing in what ways Kate received spiritual support to foster healing and management of distress following the shooting, she was unable to identify many formal resources that were offered either by the school or a community agency. However, the interviewee recalled one spiritual experience that appeared to be impactful for her and her healing process.

As far as the school is concerned, I can't remember. I know our local church offered space and we all went there one day, but I don't know who set that up. I think with my church family, at the time, and my youth group, it was helpful to be there and be supported... They had the local animal shelter bring puppies for us to hold. This is still one of the memories that stands out the most to me from those first few days after the shooting: puppy hugs. It felt safe and comforting to hold a puppy and it was healing to see fellow students of all types hugging puppies together.

Despite the sense of support received from her local church and religious-affiliated organizations, Kate made it clear that not all forms of spiritual support were helpful. For example, "cliché" advice, such as "you're alive because God has a purpose for you," was destructive to her view of God and triggered feelings of anger and confusion. She stated:

I do think it was not helpful for me to hear [things like that]. I just thought I will live a life hopefully that's faithful, but that didn't compute for me because, well, those people died either for no reason or because that was what was supposed to happen. I don't think that my faith works like that. That's been an ongoing question though for me over the years, like what was that? I didn't know what to make of that.

### **Sense of Self and Identity**

The second overarching theme that emerged from the interview data was the Sense of Self and Identity. Literature suggests that traumatic events such as school shootings challenge previously held beliefs about oneself, the world, and God which may trigger faith crises, identity issues and/or search for meaning (Altmaier, 2013; Frankl, 1988; LeMothe, 1999; Tedeschi & Riffle, 2016). This theme occurred during times of self-reflection when the interviewee discussed existential issues and faith questions that were triggered by the school shooting.

I wouldn't say that I struggled [with my faith], I just think over the years it's still a hard thing to understand, like the afterlife, and an unknown being that I don't see. It's like really, these are the things that I say I believe and these things sound crazy, but so does daily life in general. So, the whole metaphysical thoughts, and I don't even know what a human is exactly...it's this essence of a person and all of a sudden they're gone, they're not there anymore, but what were we? So, I think it's more of a philosophical question.

**Faith Practices.** Faith in trauma intervention literature is identified as a protective factor and is associated with lower risk of developing trauma symptoms and higher levels of resilience (Vis & Battistone, 2014). In discussing some of these issues, the interviewee shared some of the specific faith practices that were helpful in alleviating the issues of questioning of self and struggling with identity following a traumatic experience. Some of the things that were identified as helpful were attending church on Sundays, reading the Bible, being involved in small groups and volunteering with the church. She made it clear that there were questions right away that were related to existentialism and identity; however, to seek answers Kate sought out relationships with her "church family."

I went from high school to a small Christian school where I had classes in Bible for the first time and was trying to figure out what it meant to live more daily what I believed. I think those things helped immediately.

## Sense of God

The third and final overarching theme from the interview data was the Sense of God. A positive relationship with God can influence ability to recover from adversity or trauma (Ball et al., 2003; Vis & Battistone, 2014). Specifically, if one perceives God as warm, loving, and supportive, it enhances a secure attachment and thus, increases self-esteem and self-worth (Sim & Yow, 2011; Vis & Battistone, 2014). Perception of God seemed to be a critical factor in the interviews which informed the interviewee's response to the shooting, methods of coping, and overall meaning-making process in the aftermath of the shooting.

**Benevolent God vs. Authoritarian God.** The concept of a benevolent versus authoritarian God was deeply immersed in the interviewee's meaning-making process following the shooting. In this conceptualization, the authoritarian God is one that is judgmental and punitive while the Benevolent God is one that demonstrates non-judgment and is loving (Johnson & Cohen, 2016). Specifically, the interviewee identified her faith and view of God following the shooting as one that embodied mercy and grace, not one that penalizes or punishes.

As far as faith crisis, I didn't feel like because I endured this it meant that God doesn't care about me because, I mean, life is pretty random it seems. Sometimes I questioned that, like why are there things in the world like this? But I just didn't feel like God picked

me out. The way that I was able to hold to that was that I also didn't hold that God necessarily spared me. I mean, maybe God did, but I don't want to claim that because then that means that God didn't spare the people who did die. I don't think that I just immediately put God as the direct agent in it [shooting]. Some people, I think they felt that, oh God saved this person, that's wonderful! And I'm like, doesn't that mean that God didn't save this other person? So, that would have been hard to maintain and hold an idea of God if He really were doing that. I think that's just been something that I've processed and thought about over the years. What does that mean? And about God's involvement in our everyday life. I don't know if I have a perfect theological answer to it yet, but I don't think that God is out for our demise.

## Discussion

***Faith as a Resource for Healing and Meaning-Making.*** While there is quite a bit of literature available related to public school shootings in the U.S., there is a gap in the literature regarding trauma intervention in the aftermath of school shootings. Many research studies focus on the prevention of school shootings and the risk factors for occurrence of these tragic events, and not how individuals are managing to cope with trauma symptoms in the aftermath. This is particularly true when faith is integrated into coping and the healing process. The overall findings of this study suggest that, when present in one's life, faith is intertwined with coping following a trauma like a public-school shooting. Similar to Frankl's thoughts on finding meaning in life after a traumatic event, faith has the ability to help a traumatized individual navigate through the healing process and toward meaning. Metaphorically speaking, if the healing process is a long winding road, faith is a vehicle that expedites one's transition from trauma (i.e., point A) to meaning (i.e., point B). Additionally, one's sense of support, sense of self and identity, and sense of God are ultimately great indicators of the way in which he or she may choose to cope with trauma symptoms in the aftermath of a school shooting. These themes demonstrate that the process of healing and managing trauma after a school shooting is a collective effort and may likely be easier for those who experience a strong sense of support, sense of self and identity, and sense of God.

The theme of *Sense of Support* shows how Kate utilized the resources that were not only offered to her, but also simply within her ability to obtain for herself. It highlights how her perception of the support she felt from her family, her community and her church, empowered her to make positive choices and steps toward her healing process and alleviating trauma-related symptoms, which is a response consistent with trauma literature (Salloum & Overstreet, 2012; La Greca, et al., 2010; La Greca et al., 1996; Moore & Varela, 2010; Vis & Battistone, 2014). In contrast, those who do not find positive outlooks on their lives or meaning after trauma—like perceived family and community

support—are likely to experience depression and meaninglessness in life, potentially exacerbating trauma symptoms (Frankl, 1988). Kate noted this may have been the experience for the parents of Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris who were ostracized by some groups not willing to mourn with them or show support due to anger about the shooting, herself included. Kate notes that this was a complicated, emotional time and is apologetic about her initial reaction and that these parents mostly suffered alone.

The *Sense of Self and Identity* theme appeared to aid Kate in understanding who she was and how her faith contributed to that. Kate's questioning of her identity following the school shooting challenged her to re-assess her faith, which aligns with Frankl's existential theoretical framework and meaning-making, and trauma literature related to identity (Altmaier, 2013; Frankl, 1988; LeMothe, 1999; Tedeschi & Riffle, 2016). Kate's reassessment of her own identity was also closely tied to her view of God. The *Sense of God* theme emerged due to how it appeared to guide Kate's methods of coping and growth following the school shooting. Kate expressed a positive, but authoritarian view of God citing that she never felt like God was punitive and only out to punish, but did feel more guilt and rule-controlled prior to the shooting. This view shifted after her school shooting experience to a more benevolent view of God. Trauma literature suggests that this type of perception of God is linked to increased self-esteem and self-worth, which could allow for improved trauma recovery (Sim & Yow, 2011; Vis & Battistone, 2014). According to Frankl's (1988) existential theory, such experiences can also facilitate movement through feelings of grief, depression, and anxiety.

Although Kate did confirm that she was diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) after the shooting, she also indicated that her symptoms declined over time. While discussing mental health treatment, Kate shared that she received treatment for several years to alleviate her symptoms following the shooting and although the severity of the symptoms significantly decreased, there are still occasional indicators of residual trauma including some hypervigilance when hearing fire alarms as this was a distinctive sound heard during the shooting incident for an extended period.

***Integration of Faith and Evidence-Based Treatment.*** Kate's combined use of clinical treatment and her own faith-based coping appeared to be an effective strategy for her healing process. Reflections on how she integrated faith-based and evidenced-based coping indicated that in this particular case, it was not difficult to blend the two. The evidenced-based intervention included the use of therapeutic techniques such as thought stopping techniques, deep breathing and relaxation skills to manage symptoms. The faith-based lens encouraged the use of religious practices such as prayer, church attendance, Bible studies, youth groups, individual worship, and spiritual reflection to manage symptoms and philosophical/existential questioning that occurred after the shooting. The use of both of these approaches seems to offer a unique and effective way of coping with trauma.

**Social Work Application.** The discussion of this topic offers some unique approaches for clinical social work practice, school social work practice, and the integration of faith in practice with clients. It has been argued that the integration of faith into social work practice can offer a more holistic care, while others argue that this could be a hindrance to the client's right to self-determination (Hohn, McCoy, Ivey, Ude, & Praetorius, 2017). While this discussion can contribute significantly to the practice of school social work, there are some limits due to the separation of church and state in the United States. However, it can be equally as relevant to the practice of clinical social work outside of the school campus, particularly when a traumatic incident has been endured.

As school shootings continue to occur, the mass trauma treatment of all individuals affected by the shooting is too great a task for social workers and for counselors on staff at a public school. Inevitably, additional trauma counselors are brought into the school for support, or students and faculty members are pointed in the direction of outside resources for treatment. This makes the integration of faith in trauma treatment more of a possibility. Since traumatic incidents often trigger existential dilemmas and questioning of life (Frankl, 1988), it seems natural that the clinical treatment of an individual who experienced a public-school shooting would include some form of faith-related exploration. The question of whether this type of social work practice will impact a client's life positively and holistically or be inappropriate to their treatment would rely on the social worker's ability to assess the client's perception of the role of faith in their own treatment. In these instances, it seems most appropriate to use the social work adage "start where the client is." The client's input is invaluable to the clinical treatment process and when considering the integration of faith into practice, it is likely to be necessary. Many clinical social workers and social work practices today include religious questioning in the initial assessment to help gauge a client's perception on integrating faith into practice. This practice is supported by the ecological perspective which notes the significance of addressing a person's spiritual culture, especially when he or she is coping with the effects of a traumatic event (Branton, 2006; Loser, Klein, Hill & Dollahite, 2008; Vis & Battistone, 2014) Many agencies also offer Christian counseling to help with this and there are other faith traditions that offer support and help in the face of tragedy as well. According to Hohn et al. (2017), "the nature of integration of faith should vary considerably, depending on the competent assessment of the client's needs and appropriate respect for client self-determination" (p. 18).

## **Implications**

Implications for emerging themes suggest that the integration of faith with overcoming school shootings was a critical healing strategy for Kate. Her willingness and ability to express her faith in ways that encouraged growth and healing offered what appeared to be an expedient decline in trauma symptoms for her personally. Kate shared that the integration of her faith was helpful in

her conceptualization of the shooting incident which was in turn helpful for the meaning-making process and allowed her to move forward. In a sense, the faith component of healing from trauma seems to offer the individual peace with the unknown. Theological frameworks offer an individual validation in the concept that human ability to know God and his ways is imperfect much like Isaiah 55: 8 states, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.”

A significant implication for future research posits that policymakers, school districts, and social workers should consider that the integration of faith in coping following a school shooting could potentially protect from development of significant mental health disorders such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) or decline in the initial symptoms of the respective disorders (Hays & Aranda, 2016). One study on faith integration in mental health interventions found that when using faith-focused interventions with trauma survivors, a decrease in depression, anxiety, and somatic symptoms resulted (Hays & Aranda, 2016). Furthermore, the results persisted over time, indicating initial decline in symptoms remained this way for long periods of time (Hays & Aranda, 2016). Thus, faith as a resource for healing should be considered following public-school shootings. Students and faculty members who have experienced school shootings should be offered access to this, if desired.

This is also an important discussion for social work education as the integration of faith and social work has become salient in social work education and practice, and there are varying issues and possibilities related to its use (Knitter, 2010). The influences of a client's faith practices and the faith practices of the social work practitioner are relevant to the discussion of coping with trauma after a school shooting because each can affect the way one views life. Currently, social work education programs encourage the use of cultural competency and reflection to ensure that future social work practitioners are aware of biases, including faith traditions, which may influence the work with clients. This should be a regular practice and tool used in social work education to help prepare social work students for working with clients dealing with trauma. This can also be beneficial for the responsible practice of ethical considerations in the future. Kezar (2013) encourages the use of ethical fitness, ethical decision-making viewed similarly to physical fitness by encouraging routine use rather than in crisis situations when social workers are more likely to make unethical decisions. The integration of faith in trauma treatment may trigger ethical tensions between personal identity and values and professional practice. Hays & Aranda (2016) posit that though the National Association of Social Workers' (NASW) Code of Ethics promotes social justice and social change with clients, it is open to interpretation for clients with diverse religious or spiritual backgrounds, or lack thereof. When taking this approach to faith integration in social work and mental health practice, clients are likely to reach new levels of self-reflection and clinical milestones that lead to long-lasting healing from traumatic events. Such therapeutic gains are helpful in addressing loss, which is an inevitable part of trauma and a major focus in the integration of faith and practice.

Future research should consider how social workers and mental health practitioners ethically approach managing trauma with the integration of faith. Additionally, further qualitative research with students is warranted to understand the impact that various faith traditions, in addition to Christianity, have on survivors of school shootings and their abilities to cope in the aftermath of the shooting and how this might affect the prevention and/or reduction of trauma symptoms. Limitations for this study include inability to generalize case study data to the general population of school shooting survivors. Additionally, the retrospective nature of data collection makes it vulnerable to recall bias.

## Conclusion

Overall, level of perceived support, sense of self, and sense of God were identified as primary connections between faith and trauma intervention in the aftermath of school shootings for Kate. Through the relationships with other survivors, community support from faith-based organizations and personal relationship with God, Kate was able to use her faith to make sense of one of the most difficult times of her life and move toward healing. Research reinforces that social support and a sense of community in the aftermath of a school shooting is crucial in combating symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a result of the incident (Stebbins, Tingey, Verdi, Erickson, & McGuire, 2019). Furthermore, the data showed that a consistent sense of connection to a higher power through acts of faith such as prayer, attending church, and attending youth groups appears to help one process the various feelings that are experienced in the aftermath of a school shooting over time. A crucial part of this finding is that the practice of faith traditions appears to foster Frankl's (1988) meaning-making process after a school shooting which subsequently allows an individual to understand the incident better and find peace with whatever meaning he or she has made. Overall, seeking finite answers to infinite questions inevitably triggered by trauma seems to create further resistance or friction in the healing process. However, when considering faith, one has the potential to be offered peace in the unknown or misunderstandings of the complexities of this world. In the case of healing from school shootings, one is likely to deduce that evidenced-based practice and faith can be integrated for the effective and conscientious healing of a traumatized individual.

## References

- Altmaier, E. M. (2013). Through a glass darkly: Personal reflections on the role of meaning in response to trauma. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, 26, 106-113. doi: 10.1080/09515070.2012.728760
- Ball, J., Armistead, L., & Austin, B. (2003). The relationship between religiosity and adjustment among African-American, female, urban adolescents. *Journal of Adolescence*, 26, 431-446.

- Branton, C. J. (2006). An introduction to religion and ecology. *Environmental Practice*, 8, 221-214.
- Brennan, M., & Bally, S. (2007). Psychosocial adaptations to dual sensory loss in middle and late adulthood. *Trends in Amplification*, 11, 281-300.
- Bruns, A. (2014). *Posttraumatic growth and spiritual well-being in survivors of the Columbine High School Shooting*. Retrieved from Dissertation Abstracts International: Section B: The Sciences and Engineering (2014-99060-033)
- Bryant-Davis, T., & Wong, E. (2013). Faith to move mountains: Religious coping, spirituality, and interpersonal trauma recovery. *American Psychologist*, 68, 675-684. doi: 10.1037/a0034380
- Chen, C. Y., Purdie-Vaughns, V., Phelan, J. C., Yu, G., & Yang, L. H. (2015). Racial and mental illness stereotypes and discrimination: Identity-based analysis of the Virginia Tech and Columbine shootings. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 21, 279-287. doi: 10.1037/a0037881
- Cohen, J. A., Mannarino, A. P., & Deblinger, E. (2006). *Treating trauma and traumatic grief in children and adolescents*. New York, NY: Guilford Publications.
- Creswell, J. W. & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing from among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Daniel, T. (2012). Losing faith vs. gaining perspective: How trauma and loss can create a more spacious form of spiritual awareness. *Journal of Spirituality and Paranormal Studies*, 35, 18-22.
- Dezelic, M. (2014). A comprehensive meaning-centered existential therapeutic approach. Retrieved on July 10, 2018 from <https://www.drmariedezelic.com/single-post/2014/01/07/A-COMPREHENSIVE-MEANING-CENTERED-EXISTENTIAL-THERAPEUTIC-APPROACH>
- Duplechain, R., & Morris, R. (2014). School violence: Reported school shootings and making schools safer. *Education*, 135, 145-150.
- Frankl, V. (1988). *The will to meaning: Foundations and applications of Logotherapy*. New York, NY: Penguin Group Publishing.
- Gelkopf, M., & Berger, R. (2009). A school-based, teacher-mediated prevention program (ERASE-Stress) for reducing terror-related traumatic reactions in Israeli youth: A quasi-randomized controlled trial. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 50(8), 962-971. doi: 10.1111/j.1469-7610.2008.02021.x
- Giordano, J., & Engebretson, J. (2006). Neural and cognitive basis of spiritual experience: Biopsychosocial and ethical implications for clinical medicine. *Hypothesis*, 2, 216-225.
- Goetz, D., & Caron, W. (2005). Systemic healing: An ecosystem biopsychosocial integration applied to clinical practice in the care of sick children. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 10, 53-63.
- Greenberg, R. (1977). Cloud of smoke, pillar of fire: Judaism, Christianity, and Modernity after the Holocaust. In E. Fleischer (Ed.), *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era?* (pp.7-38) New York: Ktav Publishing House.
- Hansel, T. C., Osofsky, H. J., Osofsky, J. D., Costa, R. N., Kronenberg, M. E., & Selby, M. L. (2010). Attention to process and clinical outcomes of implementing a rural school-based trauma treatment program. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 23(6), 708-715. doi: 10.1002/jts.20595
- Hays, K., & Aranda, M. P. (2016). Faith-based mental health interventions with African Americans: A review. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 26, 777-789. doi: 10.1177/1049731515569356
- Hohn, K., McCoy, M., Ivey, D., Ude, P. U., & Praetorius, R. T. (2017). Integrating faith and practice: A qualitative study of staff motivations. *Social Work & Christianity*, 44, p. 3-22.

- Johnson, K. A., & Cohen, A. B. (2016). Authoritarian and benevolent god representations and the two sides of prosociality. *Behavior and Brain Sciences*, 39, e16. doi: 10.1017/S0140525X15000461
- Kezar, A. (2013). *How colleges change: Understanding, leading and enacting change*. Florence, KY: Taylor and Francis.
- Knitter, P. R. (2010). Social work and religious diversity: Problems and possibilities. *Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Social Work*, 29, 256-270. doi: 10.1080/15426432.2010.495632
- La Greca, A. M., Silverman, W. K., Vernberg, E. M., & Prinstein, M. J. (1996). Symptoms of posttraumatic stress in children after Hurricane Andrew: a prospective study. *Journal of Counseling and Clinical Psychology*, 64, 712-723.
- La Greca, A. M., Silverman, W. K., Lai, B., & Jaccard, J. (2010, October 11). Hurricane related exposure experiences and stressors, other life events, and social support: concurrent and prospective impact on children's persistent posttraumatic stress symptoms. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, Advance online publication. doi: 10.1037
- Lee, J. H. (2013). School shootings in the U.S. public schools: Analysis through the eyes of an educator. *Review of High Education and Self-Learning*, 6, 88-120.
- LeMothe, R. (1999). Trauma and development: A faith perspective. *Pastoral Psychology*, 47, 373-388. doi: 10.1023/A:1021362303960
- Lincoln, Y.S. & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.
- Loser, R. W., Klein, S. R., Hill, J., & Dollahite, D. C. (2008). Religion and the daily lives of LDS families: An ecological perspective. *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal*, 22, 1-19.
- Maxina, K. (2007). Does faith matter? A correlational study of spirituality and nonviolence among high school students [Abstract]. *Dissertation Abstracts International Section: A Humanities and Social Sciences*, 68, 1305.
- Mazza, E. (2018, February 15). People sick of thoughts and prayers demand action after Florida school shooting. *The Huffington Post*. Retrieved from [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/florida-shooting-thoughts-prayers\\_us\\_5a851c42e4b0058d5565da26](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/florida-shooting-thoughts-prayers_us_5a851c42e4b0058d5565da26)
- Moore, K.W., & Varela, R. E. (2010). Correlates of long-term posttraumatic stress symptoms in children following Hurricane Katrina. *Child Psychiatry Human Development*, 41, 239-250. doi: 10.1007/s10578-009-0165-6.
- Morgan, J.H. (2010). *Beginning with Freud: The classical schools of psychotherapy*. Lima, OH: Wyndham Hall Press.
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Richmond, E. (2018). Parents fear for kids' safety in schools reaches a two-decade high. *U.S. News & World Report*. Retrieved from <https://www.usnews.com/news/education-news/articles/2018-07-17/parents-fear-for-kids-safety-in-schools-reaches-two-decade-high>
- Salloum, A., & Overstreet, S. (2012). Grief and trauma intervention for children after disaster: Exploring coping skills versus trauma narration. *Behavior Research and Therapy*, 50, 19-179. doi: 10.1016/j.brat.2012.01.001
- Shapiro, E. (2019). 20 years after Columbine, what's changed and what hasn't for school shootings in America. ABC News. Retrieved from <https://abcnews.go.com/US/20-years-columbine-changed-school-shootings-america/story?id=62248885>
- Sim, T., & Yow, A. (2011). God attachment, mother attachment and father attachment in early and middle adolescence. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 50, 264-278.

- Stake, R. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Stebbins, O., Tingey, J., Verdi, E. K., Erickson, T. M., & McGuire, A. P. (2019). Compassionate goals predict social support and PTSD symptoms following a university shooting: A moderated mediation analysis. *Journal of Social & Clinical Psychology, 38*, 277-300. doi: 10.1521/jscp.2019.38.4.277
- Tedeschi, R. G., & Riffle, O. M. (2016). Posttraumatic growth and logotherapy: Finding meaning in trauma. *The International Forum for Logotherapy, 39*, 40-47.
- Theuring, A. (2014). Holding hope and doubt: An interreligious theo poetic response to public tragedies. *Cross Currents, 64*, 549-565. doi: 10.1111/cros.12104
- Vis, J. & Battistone, A. (2014). Faith-based trauma intervention: Spiritual-based strategies for adolescent students in faith-based schools. *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought, 33*, doi: 10.1080/15426432.2014.930636
- Westerman, M. A. (2008). Integrating the parts of the biopsychosocial model. *Philosophy, Psychiatry & Psychology, 14*, 321-326.
- Windham, R. C., Hooper, L. M., & Hudson, P. E. (2005). Selected spiritual, religious, and family factors in the prevention of school violence. *Counseling and Values, 49*, 208-216.
- Yan, H. & Park, M. (2019, March 26). 1 week. 3 suicides. 1 tragic connection to school massacres. *CNN*. Retrieved from <https://www.cnn.com/2019/03/26/us/school-shootings-suicides/index.html>
- Yee, V. & Harmon, A. (2018, May 18). Please pray: Santa Fe is a town that has long found comfort in faith. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/18/us/prayer-santa-fe-high-school.html>

## Appendix A

### Interview Script

#### Demographic Questions

1. Tell me about yourself.... for example, age, gender, employment status.
2. Tell me about your current work. What do/did you find enjoyable about your job? Describe a typical day for you.
3. What led you to this field of work?
4. What are/were some of your duties there?

#### Main Questions

5. Please share with me about the day of the shooting that occurred at your school. How did your day begin? How did you know about the event? Describe what you saw, heard, experienced? Describe what others have told you or you have learned through the news since then? When and how did you know the actual attack and danger were over?
6. Describe the days immediately after the shooting? What responsibilities did you have? Who did you interact with? What was hardest for you? What was helpful to you? How would you describe your reaction to the

event in the days immediately following? What did you need? Did you get what you needed? From whom? Can you say more about that?

7. As you think about the event and the persons who were involved, who and/or what do you believe was most affected by this event? Describe the impact on them. As you think about others who might not have been directly involved, are there others who were affected? How were you involved with them in the days and weeks afterward?
8. What has been the longer-term impact on the school? On you? How have you managed that?
9. Who did you interact with who you felt was significantly affected by the event over the months and years since then?
  - a. How would you describe their responses?
  - b. Are you aware of things that helped? Didn't help? Made it worse?
10. What is your experience and understanding of how the event affected the students; individually? as a whole?
11. What is your experience and understanding of how the event affected faculty? Individually? as a whole?
12. What is your experience and understanding of how the event affected parents/families? Individually? as a whole?
13. What is your experience and understanding of how the event affected other community members? Individually? as a whole?
14. As you reflect back over the years since then, how do you believe you were impacted by the event? What is different about yourself? Your life? As a consequence.
15. How has your faith played a role in your ability to cope with the shooting?
16. What specific changes, if any, have you noticed, or did you notice in your ability to get along with others as a result of the event? In what ways has the event impacted your relationships?
17. Did you experience any positive or negative effects from using faith practices to cope?
18. Was focusing on your faith an immediate reaction for you after the shooting?
19. Did you experience any changes in your faith at all after the shooting?
20. What was your school's plan, both immediate and long-term, for response to school shootings?
21. Were there any spiritual resources provided by the school that were helpful for you? If yes, what were they? If no, what would have been helpful for you?

22. As you experienced this (refer to answer above), how well did this work for you?
  - a. Discuss your assessment of effectiveness/comprehensiveness.
  - b. What do you understand resilience building to be? How have you seen that happen? Discuss what part of your school's response to the school shooting were specific to resilience building?
23. How does this (the above answer) compare to what you know about other schools' response to these types of events?
24. What do you believe are some ways schools can use faith to intervene/respond after a school shooting?
25. What are your thoughts on public schools engaging in any type of intervention (e.g., counseling services, community support, spiritual support, etc.) following these types of events?
26. What barriers may/would prevent you or your school from implementing intervention following a school shooting?
27. What incentives may encourage you or your school to implement intervention following a school shooting?
28. Who or what persons do you feel should be involved in administering/facilitating trauma intervention following a school shooting?
29. Research has suggested that re-establishing faith in schools would help in decreasing school shootings? What are your thoughts on this?
30. What else would you like for me to understand both about what happened and about lessons learned for the future, particularly with respect to helping survivors?
31. What else should I have asked you today?



# Elephant in the Room: Race and Christian Social Workers

---

Tanya Smith Brice<sup>1</sup>

*He loves righteousness and justice;  
the earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord.*

—Psalm 33:5 (English Standard Version)

*But let justice roll down like the waters,  
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.*

—Amos 5:24 (English Standard Version)

In America today, we are currently in a nadir of overt racism. This is evidenced by the number of stories in the media related to the treatment of Black people (Armstrong, 2016; Aymer, 2016; Fox, 2017; Pratt-Harris, Sinclair, Bragg, Williams, Ture, Smith, Marshall, & Brown, 2016). For instance, the recalling of names such as Trayvon Martin, Sandra Bland, Freddie Gray, Tamir Rice, Sam DuBose, Philando Castille, Rekia Boyd, Michael Brown, Korryn Gaines, Botham Jean, and Mya Hall evoke images of Black people being killed for the crime of being Black. There is a running list of things that Black people should not do to avoid being killed or arrested by the police, or having the police called to verify a suspicion of a caller. For instance, Black people have had difficulty engaging in the following seemingly ordinary activities: walking, running, driving, gardening, sitting in a restaurant, standing outside of a restaurant, talking on the phone in a hotel lobby, going to a school friend's swim party, taking pictures of your own child, having a family barbecue, or renting an AirBnB. According to a recent Gallup Poll on Race Relations (2019), Blacks and Whites see a slight difference in the state of race relations. Specifically, 55% of White respondents say that race relations between Blacks and Whites are "very good" or "somewhat good", while only 49% of Blacks see race relations as such. However, respondents in general saw a marked decline in race relations in the US over the past decade. When asked "how much do you personally worry about race relations?", 64% of respondents say a "great deal" or a "fair amount", which is up from 45% a decade ago.

*Religion is racialized and race is spiritualized*

— Emerson, Korver-Glenn, & Douds (2015)

Attitudes towards race relations are even more pronounced among evangelical Christians. Emerson and Smith (2000) found that evangelical Christians tend to have more negative racial attitudes and are more resistant to policies that

aim to address racial inequality than other Americans. Tranby and Hartmann (2008) found that evangelical Christianity is rooted in the defense of White culture and identity. This is evident in the overwhelming support of Donald Trump's presidency by evangelical Christians, in spite of his overt bigotry and his affinity for White nationalism (Goldstein & Hall, 2017; Hayes, 2018; McElwee & McDaniel, 2017; Whitehead, Perry, & Baker, 2018).

It is this context that guides my thoughts about advancing the conversation on race among Christian social workers. While there has always been a tenuous relationship between law enforcement and the Black community, from the use of slave patrols during the institution of chattel slavery to today's iteration of law enforcement (Durr, 2015; Hawkins & Thomas, 2013), the use of videos and social media has put a spotlight on an issue that might have been hidden from broader society. And even with this spotlight, Black men, women, and children are beaten, mishandled, shot, and murdered on film by law enforcement with no justice. It is very rare for law enforcement to be charged, much less convicted, of unjustifiably killing a Black person in the line of duty (Hirschfield, 2015; Park & Lee, 2017; Zack, 2015). However, the municipalities where these crimes are committed are more often prepared to pay millions of dollars to the victims' families for the wrongful death of their loved ones (The Marshall Project, 2017; Wing, 2015). And many Christian social workers are silent.

*Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields,  
which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you,  
and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.*

—James 5:4 (English Standard Version)

While it is very easy to fall into the diversity trap by focusing on gender, ability, geographic location, and other forms of diversity, all of these forms of diversity are affected by race. "Race matters," to quote Dr. Cornell West (1993). And in this country, race is tied to economics. It is significant that White households in the middle income quintile (approximately \$43,500 to \$72,000) own nearly eight times as much wealth as middle income Black earners and ten times as much as middle income Latino earners (McCarthy, 2017; Asante-Muhammad, Collins, Hoxie, & Nieves, 2017). Researchers state that it will take an average Latino family 84 years and the average Black family 228 years to reach the same level of wealth enjoyed by White families today. How can this be? Is it that Whites work harder than Latinos and Blacks? Is it that Whites are more blessed than Latinos and Blacks?

For the purposes of this discussion, the focus is on the Black-White dichotomy. When looking at wealth accumulation, which is less about present income but more about long-term financial security, there is even more of a gap (Jones, 2017). The average wealth of White families is seven times higher than the average Black family. When looking at median wealth, White families have twelve times more median wealth than Black families. More than 25% of Black families have zero or negative net worth, whereas, less than 10% of White

families have zero or negative net worth. Even when looking at age, household structure, education level, income, or occupation, these racialized wealth gaps still exist (Tippett, Jones-DeWeever, Rockey Moore, Hamilton, & Darity, 2014). The typical Black family with a head of household working full time has less wealth than the typical White family whose head of household is unemployed. This holds true for families with college and graduate/professional degrees (Jones, 2017). Median wealth for Black families whose head has a college degree has only one-eighth the wealth of the median White family whose head has a college degree. Even the typical Black family with a graduate or professional degree had more than \$200,000 less wealth than a comparable White family. How could this be? Education is supposed to be the great equalizer (Wales, 2017).

*Doom to you who legislate evil, who make laws that make victims.*

—Isaiah 10: 1 (The Message)

Housing equity makes up about two-thirds of all wealth for the typical household. So, this gap is primarily a housing wealth gap (Assante-Muhammad et al, 2017; Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Coates, 2014; Jones, 2017; Shapiro et al, 2013; Turner, 2013). From the very first moment that Blacks were kidnapped and brought to this country, Blacks have not had full access to the economic system, although Black Americans have always been one of the main drivers of the economic system. Laws have been put in place to limit Black access (DuBois, 1935; Novak, 1978). After the end of legalized, institutionalized chattel slavery in this country, where most enslaved workers received no wages for their labor, there were laws in place to ensure that Blacks provided cheap labor. There is documented discrimination in employment and wage setting that has impacted generations of wealth. There were policies in place that limited the types of employment that Blacks could hold (Roback, 1984; Shaw, 2010). The lasting effects of these policies are still evident to us every day when we walk into our places of employment. Black Codes limited Black employment to laborers and domestic workers. In many states, Blacks had to gain permission from magistrates to seek employment in areas outside of these mandates, or Blacks would move to locations that would allow them to work in their desired fields. This greatly suppressed wage earnings. Even when policies were put in place that could potentially help with wage suppression, such as the minimum wage laws, there were negative consequences for Blacks. For instance, the institution of minimum wage laws resulted in increased unemployment of Blacks, as Whites were not willing to pay Blacks equitable wages (Sowell, 2007; Spero & Harris, 1931).

For those Blacks who did manage to earn a decent income, they were barred from accessing the most important financial market: the housing market. Housing policies were put in place that prevented Blacks from acquiring land, created redlining and restrictive covenants, and encouraged lending discrimination (Coates, 2014; Shapiro, Meschede, & Osoro, 2013). Consequently, Blacks were limited to specific geographic locations with reduced services.

...*what doth the Lord require of thee?*

—Micah 6:8 (King James Version)

So, what does this have to do with Christian social workers? The prophet Jeremiah warns us in chapter 22 verse 3:

This is God's Message: Attend to the matters of justice. Set things right between people. Rescue victims from their exploiters. Don't take advantage of the homeless, the orphans, the widows. Stop the murdering! (The Message)

As Christian social workers, we have an obligation to address issues of injustice and oppression. In the American context, this means that we must address issues of race, specifically the Black-White dichotomy. We cannot turn our faces away and state that we will just pray about it. This is not sufficient. We must acknowledge the sin of racism and our role in supporting this sin...in the name of Jesus. In this country, we have a history of using religion to "pronounce wicked decrees" and to write "harmful laws". As long as the supported lawmaker proclaims to be a Christian, there's a blind eye to the consequences of the law. We must adhere to the prophetic call to "attend to the matters of justice" through our actions. In the name of Jesus, the worst kinds of crimes have been perpetuated against Blacks in this country. Terrorist organizations, such as the Ku Klux Klan, proclaim to be Christian organizations following the teachings of the Bible (Sanchez, 2016; Weinberg & Assoudeh, 2016).

Directly after the emancipation of the formerly enslaved, and with the help of the Reconstruction era (1865-77), Blacks enjoyed great economic successes. This is one of the times that the wealth gap was closed. There were thriving Black towns throughout the country (DuBois, 1935; Silver & Moeser, 2015). They were in Atlanta; Tulsa, Oklahoma; Chicago; Rosewood, FL; Washington, DC; Knoxville, TN; New York City; and, East St. Louis. Each of these communities was destroyed by White terrorists who bombed, burned and massacred in response to Black economic success that often surpassed the successes of many Whites. There were numerous other prosperous Black communities throughout the South and eastern seaboard, such as in Durham, NC and Little Rock, AR, that were destroyed by eminent domain policies that allowed the government to take their land and build interstates through the middle of them. When examining the historical accounts of these and similar events, the White church played a major role in supporting these terroristic behaviors.

So, what does this have to do with Christian social workers today? In our quest to engage more diversity in organizations such as the North American Association of Christians in Social Work, in our work settings and in our churches, there is frustration in the process. Whites often tire of "always having to talk about race" (Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Harries, 2014; Howard, 2016). There is a notion that since we all love Jesus, why can't we see past race? Many Whites don't even see the irony of looking at a picture of a White Jesus and suggesting that we look past race! There is a convincingly strong record of evidence that demonstrates

White Christianity tends to support the oppression of Black people. So, when it comes to talking about reconciliation, there has to be a sincere understanding of the harm inflicted on Blacks by White Christians. It is not about sitting in the same space breathing the same air. It is about truly being in relationship. So, when I say that I hurt, you don't tell me that **I** don't hurt because **you** don't feel pain. Once there is an acknowledgement of the inflicted harm, there must be true repentance, which is a turning away of sinful ways. This means that you can no longer continue to enjoy the spoils of privilege. This harm must be repaired before we can truly be reconciled.

*Fools mock at making reparation, but there is goodwill among the upright*

—Proverbs 14:9 (Christian Standard Bible)

As Christian social workers, we should be leading the discourse and action on reparational reconciliation. Dr. Thema Bryant-Davis, of Pepperdine University, gives a wonderful explanation of what this reparational reconciliation looks like in the following illustration that I paraphrase here: “There was a young boy who had a magnificent bike. One day, his neighbor stole his bike. The neighbor rode that bike up and down the street in front of the little boy. The little boy told everyone who would listen that the neighbor has stolen his bike and is riding it up and down the street, to no avail. The little boy saw no justice. Sometime later, the neighbor comes to the little boy's house and asks the little boy if they could be friends. The little boy looks past the neighbor and sees the bike out there. The little boy said, “If you give me back my bike, then we can be friends.” The neighbor said, “What does the bike have to do with us being friends? You need to get over that. I am here because I want to be friends. I didn't come here to talk about a bike!” The little boy insisted that he wanted his bike back. The neighbor continued to protest the little boy talking about a bike when he is wanting to talk about being friends. This story illustrates the importance of reconciliation. We can't talk about reconciliation until there is an acknowledgement that I don't have my bike. There has been no justice for my stolen bike.”

When I am told by White Christian social work colleagues that the issue is not about race but about abortion, homosexuality, and gun ownership, I am a bit suspicious. How can you be pro-life, which is in support of life at all stages, but be against access to high quality health care, a living wage, access to high quality education, access to clean water and safe communities? How can you be pro-life and in support of a criminal justice system that disproportionately locks up Black people? How can you be pro-life and support the death penalty, that, by the way, disproportionately impacts Black people? How can you be pro-life and support unjustified wars? How can you be pro-life and support massive stockpiling of weapons and the relaxing of gun access laws? How can you be pro-life and then expect for me to explain to you why my life matters? I cannot be reconciled with anyone who does not acknowledge the harm inflicted on Black people, and who seeks to continue to inflict harm through wicked legislation.

## Conclusion

I agree with one of NACSW's leading thinkers: Christian social workers should do less talking about their faith and more demonstrating the love of the Creator (Keith-Lucas, 1981). The prophet Isaiah admonishes us in Isaiah 58:6–12 (The Message)

“This is the kind of fast day I’m after:  
to break the chains of injustice,  
get rid of exploitation in the workplace,  
free the oppressed,  
cancel debts.  
What I’m interested in seeing you do is:  
sharing your food with the hungry,  
inviting the homeless poor into your homes,  
putting clothes on the shivering ill-clad,  
being available to your own families.  
Do this and the lights will turn on,  
and your lives will turn around at once.  
Your righteousness will pave your way.  
The God of glory will secure your passage.  
Then when you pray, God will answer.  
You’ll call out for help and I’ll say, ‘Here I am.’  
If you get rid of unfair practices,  
quit blaming victims,  
quit gossiping about other people’s sins,  
If you are generous with the hungry  
and start giving yourselves to the down-and-out,  
Your lives will begin to glow in the darkness,  
your shadowed lives will be bathed in sunlight.  
I will always show you where to go.  
I’ll give you a full life in the emptiest of places—  
firm muscles, strong bones.  
You’ll be like a well-watered garden,  
a gurgling spring that never runs dry.  
You’ll use the old rubble of past lives to build anew,  
rebuild the foundations from out of your past.  
You’ll be known as those who can fix anything,  
restore old ruins, rebuild and renovate,  
make the community livable again.

We have chosen this profession of social work to support high quality well-being among individuals, families, communities, and organizations. We want the best living for our client systems. We are girded by the word of God that provides guidance in our quest to make our world a better place to live. As Christians,

we are to model the love of the Creator. To be the hands and feet of Jesus. We must be mindful of this when we speak on social issues. We can't be oppressors and then profess to be Christian and social workers. We can't hide behind our keyboards spewing forth hate and then profess to do so in the name of Jesus. The apostle Paul reminds us of the following (Phil 4:8,9): Summing it all up, friends, I'd say you'll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious—the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse. Put into practice what you learned from me, what you heard and saw and realized. Do that, and God, who makes everything work together, will work you into his most excellent harmonies.

## References

- Armstrong, M. J. (2016). Are we nearing the end of impunity for taking black lives? *Santa Clara L. Rev.*, 56, 721.
- Asante-Muhammad, D., Collins, C., Hoxie, J., & Nieves, E. (2017). *The road to zero wealth: How the racial wealth divide is hollowing out America's middle class* (p. 86). Washington, DC: Institute for Policy Studies. Retrieved from [https://prosperitynow.org/files/PDFs/road\\_to\\_zero\\_wealth.pdf](https://prosperitynow.org/files/PDFs/road_to_zero_wealth.pdf)
- Aymer, S. (2016) "I can't breathe": A case study—Helping Black men cope with race-related trauma stemming from police killing and brutality, *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 26:3-4,367-376.
- Bonilla-Silva, E. (2017). *Racism without racists: Color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in America*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Coates, T. N. (2014, June). The case for reparations. *The Atlantic*.
- DuBois, W. E. B. (1935). *Black Reconstruction in America: Toward a history of the part which black folk played in the attempt to reconstruct democracy in America, 1860-1880*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company.
- Durr, M. (2015). What is the difference between slave patrols and modern-day policing? Institutional violence in a community of color. *Critical Sociology*, 41(6), 873–879.
- Emerson, M.O., & Smith, C. (2000). *Divided by faith: Evangelical religion and the problem of race in America*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Emerson, M.O., Korver-Glenn, E., & Douds, K.W. (2015). Studying race and religion: A critical assessment. *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, 1(3), 349-359.
- Fox, S. (2017). Officer-involved homicides of unarmed black males: Perceptions of the African American community. Retrieved from : [https://sophia.stkate.edu/msw\\_papers/735](https://sophia.stkate.edu/msw_papers/735).
- Frankovic, K. (2018). Americans have more concerns-but some hope-about race relations. Retrieved February 15, 2019, from <https://today.yougov.com/topics/politics/articles-reports/2018/01/12/americans-have-more-concerns-some-hope-about-race>
- Gallup, Inc. (2019, February 12). Race Relations. Retrieved February 15, 2019, from <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1687/race-relations.aspx>
- Goldstein, D. & Hall, K. (2017). Postelection surrealism and nostalgic racism in the hands of Donald Trump. *Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 7(1), 397-406.
- Harries, B. (2014). Wales must confront uncomfortable truths about racism. *Manchester Policy Blogs*.
- Hawkins, H., & Thomas, R. (2013). White policing of black populations: A history of race and social control in America. In E. Cashmore & E. McLaughlin (Eds.), *Out of Order? Policing Black People* (pp. 65–86). New York: Routledge.

- Hayes, C. (2018, August 14). 10 times President Trump's comments have been called racist. *USA Today*. Retrieved February 15, 2019, from <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/onpolitics/2018/08/14/times-president-trump-comments-called-racist/985438002/>
- Hirschfield, P. (2015). Lethal policing: Making sense of American exceptionalism. *Sociological Forum*, 30(4), 1109–1117.
- Howard, G. R. (2016). *We can't teach what we don't know: White teachers, multiracial schools*. Teachers College Press.
- Jones, J. (2017). The racial wealth gap: How African Americans have been shortchanged out of the materials to build wealth. *Working Economics Blog*.
- Keith-Lucas, A. (1981). *A theology of social work*. Lecture, Dordt College, Sioux Center, IA.
- McElwee, S., & McDaniel, J. (2017). Economic anxiety didn't make people vote Trump, racism did. *The Nation*, 8.
- Novak, D. (1978). *The wheel of servitude: Black forced labor after slavery*. Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press.
- Park, H., & Lee, J. (2017, May 3). Looking for accountability in police-involved deaths of Blacks. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/07/12/us/looking-for-accountability-in-police-involved-deaths-of-blacks.html>
- Pratt-Harris, N., Sinclair, M., Bragg, C., Williams, N., Ture, K., Smith, B., Marshall, I., & Brown, L. (2016). Police-involved homicide of unarmed Black males: Observations by Black scholars in the midst of the April 2015 Baltimore uprising. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 26(3-4), 377-389
- Roback, J. (1984). Southern labor law in the Jim Crow era: exploitative or competitive? *The University of Chicago Law Review*, 51(4), 1161-1192.
- Sanchez, J. O. (2016). *Religion and the Ku Klux Klan: Biblical appropriation in their literature and songs*. McFarland.
- Shapiro, T., Meschede, T., & Osoro, S. (2013). *The roots of the widening racial wealth gap: Explaining the Black-White economic divide* (Research and Policy Brief) (p. 8). Waltheim, MA: Institute on Assets and Social Policy.
- Silver, C., & Moeser, J. V. (2015). *The separate city: Black communities in the urban south, 1940-1968*. University Press of Kentucky.
- Shaw, S. J. (2010). *What a woman ought to be and to do: Black professional women workers during the Jim Crow era*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Sowell, T. (2007). *Basic economics: A common sense guide to the economy* (3rd ed.). New York: Basic Books.
- Spero, S., & Harris, A. (1931). *The Black worker*. New York: Kennikat Press.
- The Marshall Project: Nonprofit journalism about criminal justice. (2017). *Police misconduct payouts: A curated collection of links*. (Website). Retrieved from <https://www.themarshallproject.org/records/1037-police-misconduct-payouts>
- Tippett, R. M., Jones-DeWeever, A., Rokeymoore, M., & Hamilton, D. (2014). *Beyond broke: Why closing the racial wealth gap is a priority for national economic security*. Center for Global Policy Solutions.
- Tranby, E. & Hartmann, D. (2008). "Critical Whiteness theories and the evangelical 'race problem': Extending Emerson and Smith's *Divided by Faith*". *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 47(3), 341-59.
- Turner, M. A. (2013). *Housing discrimination against racial and ethnic minorities, 2012: Executive summary*. Urban Institute.
- Wales, S. (2017). Education: "Great Equalizer" or Promoter of Inequality? *Honors Program Thesis*. 55. [https://digitalcommons.framingham.edu/honors\\_theses/55](https://digitalcommons.framingham.edu/honors_theses/55).

- Weinberg, L. B., & Assoudeh, E. (2016). Religion and the Radical Right in American Public Life. *Religion Compass*, 10(7), 176-187.
- West, C. (1993). *Race matters*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Whitehead, A., Perry, S., & Baker, J. (2018). Make America Christian Again: Christian Nationalism and Voting for Donald Trump in the 2016 Presidential Election, *Sociology of Religion*, 79(2), 147–171.
- Wing, N. (2015, May 29). We pay a shocking amount for police misconduct, and cops want us just to accept it. We shouldn't. *Huffington Post*. Retrieved from [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/05/29/police-misconduct-settlements\\_n\\_7423386.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/05/29/police-misconduct-settlements_n_7423386.html)
- Zack, N. (2015). *White privilege and Black rights: The injustice of US Police racial profiling and homicide*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

### **Endnote**

<sup>1</sup> This chapter is based upon Dr. Tanya Brice's comments for the Alan Keith-Lucas Lecture presented at the North American Association of Christians in Social Work Annual Meeting, November 2–5, 2017, Charlotte, NC.



## SECTION 4

# Christian Social Workers and Practice Issues

---



# Purity, Power, and Privilege: The Intersection between Christianity, Sex, and Social Work Practice

---

*Melody Y. Zuniga and David K. Pooler*

## **Introduction**

Christians in social work interact with clients and communities that are at their most vulnerable. It can be hard to know how to respond to a client if the topic or situation is something uncomfortable or unfamiliar. For those who have grown up in the Christian tradition, sexuality is often a topic that is not openly addressed (or if it is addressed, it is done so in a way that implies such discussions or activities are unbecoming of a Christian). This includes sexual identity, gender identity, and gender expression, but also includes basic elements of sexuality such as sexual activity prior to or outside of marriage, sexual addictions, and sexual abuse. The Christian church's emphasis on purity and sexuality within the covenant of marriage can be a model and motivator for healthy behaviors in relationships. Other times this narrow focus can leave some people who are Christian uncomfortable and ill prepared or even unaware of the complexities around gender and sexuality that can show up in social work practice. One primary way this may impact a social worker is in a lack of preparedness to work with people who have survived abuses that are sexual in nature. And when inadequate and unclear communication in a congregation is chronic and pervasive, a profound ignorance and naivety around sexuality can prevail. This creates environments where leaders may misuse power to harm people, victims are blamed, and sexual abuse and misconduct are hidden, overlooked, or minimized.

This chapter will not directly address sexual identity or gender identity and expression, but rather focus on essential knowledge around gender, sexuality, and power and will conclude by looking at how a social worker can use this knowledge to best serve clients. We will highlight awareness and conversations that all social workers must be prepared for, regarding the abuse of power through sexual abuse and sexual assault. We also intentionally focus on personal reflection to enhance self-awareness and provide several opportunities to do so through this chapter with the hopes of increasing comfort and competence around sexuality.

To provide a holistic backdrop we will touch on some biblical themes such as purity, commitment and obedience that can at times lead to a disconnect for

Christian social workers trying to understand and respond with integrity, being true to both the principle of their faith and the ethics and values of the social work profession. We also give an overview of the various ways Christians in social work may face this topic in their work, including clergy sexual misconduct, responding to outcries of sexual abuse, and supporting survivors of sexual harassment, sexual abuse, and sexual assault.

We recognize the likelihood that some readers have had experiences with sexual abuse that will connect you to this content in a personal way. Whether this content feels far from your own experience or painfully close, we encourage you to lean in to the potential discomfort of the topic in order to fully engage in the essential work of understanding not only your own viewpoints, but also developing empathy for the viewpoints and perspectives of others (Moles, 2017, p. 176). This process is a critical aspect of social work practice.

### **Sexual violence in the current culture**

If we pay attention to the news, it is clear that the complex issues of sexual abuse, harassment, and violence impact an alarming number of people and permeate the systems we find ourselves in: religious, educational, political, and more (McMahon & Schwartz, 2011; Moles 2017). Allegations course through the media about university students, television and movie stars and producers, political leaders, and the systems around the perpetrators often cover up or endorse the harmful acts. The advent of the Trump presidency in January 2017 coincided with a women's movement on social media (#MeToo) that has seen survivors of sexual assault and sexual violence use their voices with increasing frequency to break their silence, call out the perpetrators by name, bring attention to their experiences, and shatter societal naivete.

Survivors have come forward from every space and place, including the church. Many Christians are outraged by the deepening and growing awareness of the magnitude of clergy perpetrated sexual abuse of both children and adults in Catholic and Protestant churches. We can see society approaching a tipping point of awareness and change around gender discrimination and sexual violence, and churches are now caught in the wave. It is important for social workers who are Christian to have a robust and clear understanding of the gendered nature of power and roles of men and women in institutions, and in particular the church. We cannot address the entirety of the impact or strategies for remedying this ailment that plagues our nation, our churches, and our world. Rather, we will focus on why Christians in social work need clear knowledge about the nuances of sex and gender no matter what one's own thoughts are about personal decisions surrounding physical intimacy and sexuality.

We recognize that readers may connect strongly to the idea of sexual harassment and violence as a problem in today's culture, or struggle to make sense of the social change around this issue. Research shows that conservative Christian college students may be more likely to adhere to traditional gender roles and have difficulty empathizing with a victim of sexual violence

when the act of violence takes place in a setting (such as the church) that may not adhere to traditional expectations or embrace myths regarding where or when abuse may occur (Giovannelli & Jackson, 2013). With that in mind, it is increasingly important for Christian social work students and practitioners to “use reflection and self-regulation to manage personal values” in order to “engage in practices that advance social, economic, and environmental justice” (Council on Social Work Education, 2015, p. 7). In addition to procedural competence in performing particular interventions, social workers must also be mindful of their own meta-competence, defined as “higher order, overarching qualities and abilities of a conceptual, interpersonal, and personal/professional nature. This includes cognitive, critical, and self-reflective capacities” (Bogo et al, 2013, p.260). Examining one’s own ideas, values, and experiences related to sexuality can enhance a social worker’s ability to empathize with clients and use personal reflection to engage in important dialogue regarding sexuality-related matters (Moles, 2017).

### **An historical look at gender and sexuality**

So, let us situate where we are now with a brief glance through the annals of church history to better understand what brought us to this point. Early church fathers and thinkers held what most people today would say are quite negative and disparaging views of women. For example, Clement of Alexandria (150–215) said “Every woman should be filled with shame by the thought that she is a woman.” (as cited in Berry, 2016, p. 33). Augustine (354–430) noted “Woman was merely man’s helpmate, a function which pertains to her alone. She is not the image of God but as far as man is concerned, he is by himself the image of God” (as cited in De La Torre, 2007, p. 18). Almost a thousand years later Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) said “Such is the subjection in which woman is by nature subordinate to man, because the power of rational discernment is by nature stronger in man” (as cited in Di Scipio, 2007).

Martin Luther (1483–1546) remarked “if [women] become tired or die, that does not matter. Let them die in childbirth—that is why they are here” (as cited in Berry, 2016, p. 32). John Knox (1513–1572) said “To promote a woman to bear rule, superiority, dominion, or empire above any realm, nation, or city, is repugnant to nature; contumely [*an insult*] to God, a thing most contrary to his revealed will and approved ordinance; and finally, it is the subversion of good order, of all equity and justice.” (Knox, 2015, p. 6). While we can argue that these ideas are antiquated and no longer held, in the 20th century it still would not be hard to find some people who embrace similar beliefs about women. Such entrenched views, emblematic in history, have created a false dichotomy or dualism around gender that is easily embraced as normative. The following figure illustrates how this dualism creates male-female opposition (adapted from Wright, 2016):

**Figure 1: Mind-Body Dualism ➔ Male-Female Opposition**

<b>Men</b>	<b>: Women</b>
Mind	: Body
Reason	: Emotion
Thought	: Feeling
Activity	: Passivity
Aggression	: Submission
Autonomy	: Dependence
Self-interest	: Selflessness

This dualism that men and women are socialized into legitimizes a masculinity in which sexual harassment and assault are used to exert power and control over women and leads some men to think they can control women with impunity (without consequences). In a survey in December 2017, 43% of adult women reported being a victim of sexual harassment (Rumrill, Stehel, Durana, & Kolencik, 2018). Unfortunately, there continue to be myths and stereotypes around sexual harassment and assault. For example, Kramer (2015) outlines a common false narrative which describes a sexual aggressor who is a stranger to the victim, but the aggressor's actions were caused by a seductive woman who instigated the abuse by virtue of her demeanor or inappropriate clothing. In reality, perpetrators and victims often know one another and sexual assault is always the fault of the one who perpetrates the assault. We should make it clear that sexual assault can happen to men and that perpetrators can be women and that men and women can be abused/assaulted by both genders, but it remains a fact that there is a clear gendered nature of this phenomenon. This whole discussion is situated at the intersection of gender, power, and privilege and in many ways these issues play out more vividly in the church than in any other institution (Goldner, 2004). In the next section we explain why.

**Christian context**

For social workers who have grown up in a Christian faith tradition, the issue of sexuality has often been one that is talked about with a sense of taboo or shame unless it is within the confines of a heterosexual marriage (Moles, 2017; Tukker 2013). Within some Christian circles, even addressing the topic of sex within the marriage commitment is taboo or pathologized if it is not related to the purpose of bearing children. Expectations of purity before marriage and fidelity within marriage are made clear, promoting the importance of family as the key foundation to spiritual and holistic wellness. While we do not intend to refute the importance of the family structure, we do want to note how an emphasis on a purity culture can potentially lead Christian social workers to be either unaware or unprepared to handle to issues of a sexual nature that are likely to be faced in social work practice.

Many Christians growing up in traditional church settings participate in a pledge in adolescence, along with their peers, to maintain sexual purity until marriage. For some individuals this serves as an anchor to a faith commitment

at an age when there are multiple opportunities to make choices about sexual activity that are not supported or encouraged by their faith identity. Fahs (2010), however, asserts that chastity pledges as a whole can be ineffective and at times set teens up to be at a higher risk of unintended pregnancy than their non-pledging counterparts, as they are less likely to be prepared for sexual encounters they recently pledged to avoid (p. 124). Additionally, such chastity pledges can lead adolescents to define sex strictly as vaginal sexual intercourse, thus still feeling free to engage in anal or oral sexual activity without breaking their commitment. Such activities heighten their risk of Sexually Transmitted Diseases that the pledging adolescent often had not even considered was a possibility.

Tukker (2013) outlines this dichotomous nature of the church's approach to sexuality, often asserting sex as sinful while also promoting it as a gift from God to be given to the one you love most. Christians can feel caught between a "do everything" message from popular culture while also receiving a "do nothing before marriage" message from their church (p. 6). The National Association of Evangelicals (2012) published *The Theology of Sex* outlining what they called "four primary reasons for sexual intimacy":

- (1) God gives us sex as a one-flesh union that consummates a marriage
- (2) God gives us sex for procreation
- (3) God gives us sex as a way to express love to our spouse in the covenant relationship of marriage.
- (4) God gives us sex for enjoyment and pleasure (p. 4–6).

The last reason listed does allow for sex as a source of enjoyment and pleasure, but the NAE clarifies that "a morally legitimate sexual act occurs in the context of these divinely given purposes, which can come together only in the covenant marriage of a man and a woman" (p. 6). If this is what many Christians have learned and adopted for themselves as "proper" sexual activity, it is important for social workers to be mindful of its potential impact. For some clients it may be a strength, but it could be a barrier or challenge depending on the experiences of the clients they will encounter in practice. Such an emphasis on sex for marriage as procreation could lead to a promotion of shame, rape myths, or victim-blaming, which could unintentionally re-victimize a survivor (McMahon & Shwartz, 2011).

### **Sexual abuse by clergy**

Over the past twenty years society and the church have had to come to grips with the horrific sexual abuse of children and adolescents (primarily boys) in the Catholic church (Rossetti, 2018). Since 2002 this awareness has proliferated because of watchdog groups, media reports of abuse, the growth of advocacy groups such as the Survivor Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP), and more recent films such as *Spotlight* and *The Keepers*.

Since 2009 and especially since 2016, there is research on the prevalence and scope of an even broader and less known problem; the clergy perpetrated sexual abuse of adults (CPSAA) which is an issue across all Christian denomi-

nations (Chaves & Garland, 2009; Pooler, 2016; Pooler & Frey, 2017). On the heels of the #MeToo movement, which has focused on sexually abusive men, politicians, actors, and business leaders, the #ChurchToo movement has given voice to adults abused by priests and pastors. These survivors are supported by national organizations such as the Hope of Survivors, Into Account, and Faith Trust Institute. This section will focus on CPSAA.

Given some of the challenges associated with Christian culture it is important to understand that blaming a woman for the sexual impropriety of men is an age-old misuse of power. Blaming a woman is at the heart of narratives that maintain the status quo of protecting abusers. This is why the story of Jesus with the woman “caught in adultery” in John 8:1–11 is so profound. The story calls into question whether a woman is really at the heart of this adultery problem. Jesus steps right into the middle of the public ritual of blaming and scapegoating the woman by supporting her publicly. Conspicuously absent was the man. But we wonder who the man was? Was he a priest, a leader, or an ordinary person? The man was not called to account by the people in power and was nowhere to be seen. And given the cultural milieu, a man was certainly the instigator. Perhaps he, with impunity, stepped into the crowd with a stone in his hand. Women were not valued and were viewed as property, but Jesus intervenes on her behalf, humanizes her, and challenges the crowd’s own hypocrisy of blaming her. He asks anyone without blame to throw a stone. No one does. Jesus forces the male accusers to self-reflect and put the focus on themselves. The woman is released in the presence of male accusers. This intervention was radical, but sadly, over the past 2000 years, the church has not made much progress in this area. So, let us explore ways churches today continue this pattern Jesus so vividly tried to disrupt.

Unfortunately, church leaders across denominations sexually abuse adults (and children) in their congregations and then blame their victims (Gravelin, Biernat, & Baldwin, 2019). They misuse their privileged positions and their power to gain sexual access to vulnerable people in their congregations (Pooler & Frey, 2017). These predatory leaders use scripture and religious language to exploit vulnerabilities (usually complex needs) to be sexual with congregants and then blame them for harming the church or causing God’s anointed (the church leader) to sin. Chaves and Garland (2009) found that about 3% of women who regularly attended church had experienced an unwanted sexual advance from a church leader since the age of 18 (about seven women in the average-size congregation of 400). The church is still a place where women can be blamed and abusive men (especially pastors) will be supported by congregations. When the victim is 18 or older, religious institutions tend to label the act “an affair,” which implies consent (full freedom of choice), and fails to recognize the underlying misuse of power that make consent impossible. Unfortunately, few states have laws that criminalize the sexual abuse of adults. As of 2019, there are 13 states that make it illegal for a clergy person to use power or position to be sexual with someone 18 or older and the list of states with pending legislation is growing (Renzetti & Yocum, 2013)

Clergy perpetrated sexual abuse of adults (CPSAA) is primarily an issue of female victimization by men in positions of authority. This is for two important

reasons. The patriarchal nature of religious institutions means that most leadership positions are occupied by men. Secondly, most of these men are heterosexual and attracted to women. It is important for social workers who are Christian, who regularly attend church and participate in congregational life, to be aware of both the prevalence and reality of clergy perpetrated sexual abuse of adults.

**Social work practice connection**

Clients’ needs and life experiences related to sexuality and experiences with sexual violence are not confined to particular social work settings. Social workers in all settings need to be prepared to face what may be a taboo topic, but an essential factor, in their clients’ presenting concerns. The profession’s emphasis on serving vulnerable populations and viewing people in their environments from an ecological perspective means we cannot ignore how such sexual trauma can ripple its effects into the systems surrounding a client. Social workers across all settings will encounter survivors of sexual violence, even when it is not the primary presenting concern, but the impacts of the trauma may be complicating the ways they are struggling or suffering (McMahon & Shwartz, 2011). We created a list of ways social workers may encounter sexually-related issues in their work across various social work settings:

Social Work Host Setting	Potential intersection with Sexual Abuse and Violence
School	Sex education, sexual maturing and exploration pregnant and parenting students, outcries of sexual abuse, dating & intimate partner violence
Mental Health Facility	Sexual victimization and trauma histories
Hospital	Sexual victimization and trauma, outcries of sexual abuse
Congregation	Outcries of sexual abuse and family violence, clergy sexual misconduct
University	Sexual assaults of students, sexual trauma histories, pregnant and parenting students, relationship difficulties among consensual intimate partners, intimate partner violence
Criminal justice	Working with survivors of sexual crimes and perpetrators of sexual crimes, sexual trauma histories of perpetrators
Shelter	In family violence or transitional housing shelters, clients trauma history may include previous sexual abuse as children or forced sex as adults
Older adult facility	Population at risk for exploitation, life review could include stories of past or current victimization, understanding sexual consent and aging
Addiction recovery	Sexual addiction, sexual trauma histories
City government	Zoning and funding decisions re: women’s health clinics, pregnancy centers, etc., that may be resources for survivors of sexual abuse and violence

As faculty members in a school of social work, one of the skills we teach our students is *supporting clients in taboo areas*. According to Lawrence Shulman, taboo areas can include things such as dependency, authority, loss, financial issues, sex, and race (2016, p. 214). A key piece to addressing taboo areas with clients is creating a culture in the helping relationship in which feelings and concerns related to taboo areas are acceptable, even if they remain taboo elsewhere. This serves as another reminder for social workers to name and work through their own potential discomforts and biases around sexual topics in order to best serve their clients.

In fact, social workers who identify strongly with a faith background and want to work in congregational or religiously-affiliated organizations are just as likely, if not more likely, to be a trusted resource for those who have experienced sexual abuse or other forms of sexual exploitation or violence. Parents grieving and struggling over sexual abuse of their children often turn to pastors or pastoral counselors (Gilgun & Anderson, 2016). With this in mind, those who work in congregational or faith-based settings must be careful to not let religious beliefs further shame or traumatize those victimized by sexual violence.

A religious concept like forgiveness may be emphasized in a way that causes victims or those in victims' circles or communities to think that they should not hold a perpetrator of sexual violence responsible for their actions. Rudolphsson and Tidefors (2014) found that Christians who had experienced sexual abuse had complex and painful consequences. Their view of God was impacted and they were affected by how their faith communities responded to their experiences. Participants in the study noted a struggle to feel belonging, a need for validation rather than avoidance, and had challenging feelings of anger and abandonment in their own relationships with God.

### **Self-awareness and the social worker response**

As noted previously, self-awareness and reflection are keys for social work students and practitioners when it comes to effectively and ethically empathizing, communicating, and intervening with clients around topics of a sexual nature (Council on Social Work Education, 2015; Moles, 2017). Moles (2017) calls this process "perspective transformation" as a person becomes aware of one's own assumptions and begins to make decisions based with a more integrated and inclusive understanding (p.177). For students and practitioners, practice situations that include sexual content can feel daunting as it seems each new client file presents situations you have not thought of, studied, or prepared for yet. With that in mind, we encourage you to ask yourself, "What are my assumptions? What do I think or feel, or what facial expressions might I make when someone shares an experience about sexual abuse, or even consensual sexual activity or one's own sexual identity? Am I comfortable with any of those topics? If not, what do I need to do, think about, pray about, or talk about in order to get to a place where I can receive these stories and experiences without judgment or being reactive?" We do hope this chapter makes the case for sexual

abuse and sexual assault as a vital area for increasing knowledge around best practices, but we would assert that the first step is spending time reflecting on your own experiences and internal responses to the topic of sexuality, sexual abuse, and sexual violence.

Key tenets of proper response by a social worker when presented with a client who has experienced sexual abuse, harassment, or assault, include responding in a supportive fashion and knowing that the abuse or assault is not the fault of the survivor. No matter the setting, the clothing, the food, beverages, or substances consumed, the perpetrator of the violence is the one to blame. While you may read this and have an internal response of agreement, how we respond with our nonverbal behavior and our questions can communicate something very different. The Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN) offers these practical tips for what someone can say when responding to a disclosure of sexual assault. The following phrases are emphasized as appropriate and supportive:

“I believe you./It took a lot of courage to tell me about this.”

“It’s not your fault./You didn’t do anything to deserve this.”

“You are not alone./I care about you and am here to listen or help in any way that I can.”

“I’m sorry this happened./This shouldn’t have happened to you.”

The RAINN website also emphasizes the importance of not imposing a specific recovery timetable on survivors, but rather providing continued support by avoiding judgment, checking in periodically, and staying informed about resources for both sexual assault and mental health (Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network, n.d.).

### **Case Vignette**

Considering the information provided thus far, it is important to consider what the application of these concepts can look like in the practice setting. As you read the following case vignettes, we encourage you to be mindful of your own internal reactions and initial thoughts. This will help you begin to recognize your own natural comfort level with addressing these areas with clients, and will also help you be aware of where you need to grow during your journey in the social work profession.

#### **Mary and the Mother**

Mary is a social work major in her senior year internship at a local elementary school. She has always loved working with children and is excited to have a placement with children in a social work role for her field education requirement. Mary is especially pleased to complete her placement in a school because she has always succeeded academically and enjoyed serving as a tutor and support for those who found school expectations more challenging

as she was growing up. Mary is working with a client in the fourth grade who is struggling to turn in homework, distracted in class, and getting in trouble more than teachers are used to with him. Mary planned a home visit with his mother, during which the child's mother shared that she not been as helpful with his projects and homework, and has expressed more stress and emotion around him lately. When Mary explored this further, the mother disclosed that two weeks prior, she had been sexually assaulted by an acquaintance after a night "partying with friends." The mother blames herself, fearful that her son will find out what happened, and says she is constantly tearful and "on edge." She now states that she feels guilty that her own situation is possibly impacting her son.

We encourage you as the reader to pause for a moment and ask yourself what you are experiencing right now in your mind, heart, and body as you read this scenario. What might you be experiencing if you were the intern rather than Mary? Would your face and body language reflect empathy and compassion, or would they reflect discomfort, shock, or disappointment? Would your initial thoughts point towards the injustice of what she experienced, or be filled with questions about her circumstances that could show some internal judgment or bias? These are important questions to wrestle with prior to encountering such stories with clients, so that you are ready to reflect through your work that sensitive topics are not off limits, and that any sexual experience that was not fully consented to is never the survivor's fault.

## **Bianca and Toula**

Bianca is 24 and only six months out of her MSW program and is working for the local crime victim advocacy center in Knoxville, TN, as she is beginning to clock LCSW hours. She was accepted to the University of Tennessee's MSW program after completing her undergraduate degree in Psychology at Evangel University. Bianca was raised in a suburb of St. Louis, Missouri and grew up in the Assemblies of God. She has always been active in her church ever since her family had a fairly radical transformation and started regularly attending church when she was in the third grade. Her father's change from a bar-hopping loud and angry man to a family-centered, mostly gentle, man even caught eight-year-old Bianca off guard and she remembers it well. His transformation seemed good for the family overall and her mother Evie has definitely been happier.

Ever since this change, Bianca's father Tom has been active with a men's group at church and has labeled himself a social conservative. He has never openly questioned or disagreed with the pastor or his teachings. He often talks of God's anointed when referring to their pastor, belying that he elevates and reveres him deeply. He only votes for Republicans as they are the "only true Christians," he boasts. In many ways Bianca's journey in social work has been challenging because in all honesty she has felt tension between the values she was taught in her family and social work values. It has not been easy. She finds

it difficult to share her opinions with her father and they have less in common than they used to, but this is one of the reasons she stayed in Knoxville after her MSW rather than returning home like her Dad wished.

Bianca is scheduled to see Toula who has been referred by a concerned friend. Bianca realizes that Toula is already a few minutes late for the appointment and they will have less time than she wanted for the assessment. However, when Toula arrives Bianca is pleased to meet Toula, who appears to be around 40. As they walk to the office, she notices Toula is well dressed, but has trouble making eye contact and looks quite worn down physically. Once in her office Bianca asks “Hi Toula, tell me about what is going on and how you think I can help you?” Toula is mostly silent for almost 30 seconds and looks at the floor with occasional furtive glances around the room before finally blurting out, “I don’t know what to do, I’m having an affair with my pastor.”

She continues, “It’s all my fault, I didn’t mean to, I just needed help for my marriage, I didn’t know I was tempting him. He also told me that I never should have looked at him that way, that he just couldn’t help himself. I can’t believe I’m even telling you, because he said if I ever told anyone that it would ruin his reputation and that if people in the church found out they would turn away from Christ and leave the church. What have I done?” Then through clenched teeth she strains out “I’m a horrible person.” Toula slowly bends over in her seat and begins to rock forward and back and then sobs as she puts her face into her hands. Bianca feels surprisingly angry with Toula, and her first thought is “*what on earth were you doing that tempted him, you should have respected him more than that!*”

What is your initial reaction to Toula’s disclosure? Is it similar to Bianca’s or different? What do you notice happening in your body, thoughts, or emotions? Bianca has seconds to reflect and pull together insights from her MSW training, her experience, and identify ways that her upbringing is impacting her in the moment. She will become the conduit and mediator of healing, indifference, or potential harm, complicating or relieving a significant trauma. Thankfully, Bianca attended an in-service training around spirituality and social work practice, specifically about abuse within churches. She has also been in therapy working on self-awareness for the past three months. Bianca steps back without any overwhelming self-judgment and notices her initial reaction to Toula and she recognized the instinctive reflex to oversimplify and defend, especially when pastors are discussed, something she realizes was a part of her church culture and mirrors her father’s views. She took a deep breath and tuned into the empathy she learned in her practice courses and decided the best way to validate Toula was to learn more about what has happened. She has a strong hunch that this is going to be a story of clergy perpetrated sexual abuse, but she needs a little more information to be certain. Bianca said “Toula, I can tell this is hard for you and very confusing, can you tell me more about what happened between you and your pastor? I am here to help you and in order to do that I need to better understand the details.”

### **What this Means for Social Workers**

The above vignettes ground the complexities of sexuality, power, and gender that social workers have to manage in real contexts and highlight some of the ways that a highly nuanced response is necessary and one that effectively manages personal reactions. No one chapter can exhaustively cover all dimensions of sex, sexuality, gender identity and expression, sexual abuse, and sexual assault. The literature is clear that deeply communicating about sexuality is a difficult and often a taboo area even though society is inundated with words and sexual images that would seem to contradict this. Also, statistically, some social workers themselves have been sexually abused, harassed, or assaulted. This chapter also highlighted the intersection of gender, power, and sexual abuse and assault with particular attention to the church, which cannot be overlooked. The fact is that social workers will interface with individuals, couples, and families, where all of these issues have the potential to be brought up. If a social worker does not have a basic comfort level around sex and sexuality, and understand how power is misused, they may have difficulty mediating positive outcomes for clients who might need this kind of help.

Social workers who are Christian will have to manage their own reactions, personal preferences, and wishes, as well as their own personal histories, and their own core values all in the presence of clients who may be quite different than they are or who bring painful experiences of profound abuse, betrayal, and harm through the use of sex and power. These stories of such pain can be challenging to hear and can sometimes introduce terminology, acts, or ideas that are new to the social worker receiving the information from the client. For example, social workers will need to be able to work with clients who bring up sexual abuse by family, friends, or clergy; sexual assault, same sex orientation, diverse sexual activity including oral, anal, and vaginal sex, male and female masturbation with or without objects, identification of non-binary gender, transgender, sexuality outside of marriage, and sexual activity with multiple partners at the same time (Fahs & Frank, 2014; Herbenick et al, 2017). While this list names many elements that may arise in a client's sexual history or abuse history it is not exhaustive. Sex will be a part of a client's life history beyond bearing children within a marriage. Clients may share that they have been hurt or abused by the very religious leaders they trusted with their (or their loved ones') spiritual development. A readiness to address these truths, combined with a development of meta-competencies in which the social worker is able to reflect, identify, and manage responses and reactions to difference, will be an essential focus and need in order to be most effective in your practice. We hope this chapter accomplishes this.

## References

- Berry, V. J. (2016). *Why historical phenomena instigates resistance to female clergy*. Self-published.
- Bogo, M., Katz, E., Regehr, C., Logie, C., Mylopoulos, M., & Tufford, L. (2013). Toward understanding Meta-Competence: An analysis of students' reflection on their simulated interviews. *Social Work Education, 32*(2), 259-273. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2012.738662>
- Braun, J. (Producer), & White, R. (Director). (2017). *The Keepers* [Documentary]. United States: Studio 45.
- Chaves, M., & Garland, D. (2009). The prevalence of clergy sexual advances toward adults in their congregations. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 48*(4), 817-824.
- Council on Social Work Education. (2015). *Educational policy and accreditation standards* [PDF file]. Retrieved from [https://www.cswe.org/getattachment/Accreditation/Accreditation-Process/2015-EPAS/2015EPAS\\_Web\\_FINAL.pdf.aspx](https://www.cswe.org/getattachment/Accreditation/Accreditation-Process/2015-EPAS/2015EPAS_Web_FINAL.pdf.aspx)
- De La Torre, M. A. (2007). *A lily among the thorns: Imagining a new Christian sexuality*. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA.
- Di Scipio, Giuseppe (2007). Aquinas, Thomas c. 1225–1274. In *Encyclopedia of sex and gender*. Retrieved from <https://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/aquinas-thomas-c-1225-1274>
- Fahs, B. (2010). Daddy's little girls: On the perils of chastity clubs, purity balls, and ritualized abstinence. *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies, 31*(3), 116. <https://doi.org/10.5250/fronjwomestud.31.3.0116>
- Fahs, B., & Frank, E. (2014). Notes from the back room: Gender, power, and (in)visibility in women's experiences of masturbation. *Journal of Sex Research, 51*(3), 241-252. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2012.745474>
- Gilgun, J. F., & Anderson, G. (2016). Mothers' experiences with pastoral care in cases of child sexual abuse. *Journal of Religion and Health, 55*(2), 680-694. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-015-0092-8>
- Giovannelli, T. S., & Jackson, L. (2013). Sexual violence perceptions among Christian college students. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture, 16*(3), 254-272. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13674676.2012.657618>
- Goldner, V. (2004). The sexual abuse crisis and the Catholic Church: Gender, sexuality, power and discourse. *Studies in Gender and Sexuality, 5*(1), 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15240650509349237>
- Gravelin, C. R., Biernat, M., & Baldwin, M. (2019). The impact of power and powerlessness on blaming the victim of sexual assault. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations, 22*(1), 98-115. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430217706741>
- Herbenick, D., Bowling, J., Fu, T.-C. (Jane), Dodge, B., Guerra-Reyes, L., & Sanders, S. (2017). Sexual diversity in the United States: Results from a nationally representative probability sample of adult women and men. *PLoS ONE, 12*(7), 1-23. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0181198>
- Knox, J. (2015). *The first blast of the trumpet against the monstrous regiment of women*, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.
- Kramer, S. (2015). Surfacing (im)possible victims: A critical review of the role of gender, sexuality and power in constructing the conditions of possibility for South African victims of female sex crimes. *Sexualities, 18*(3), 346-372. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460714544808>
- Mcmahon, S., & Schwartz, R. (2011). A review of rape in the social work literature. *Affilia, 26*(3), 250-263. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886109911417683>

- Moles, K. (2017). Teaching sexuality and Christianity for perspective transformation: Suggested resources and strategies. *Teaching Theology & Religion*, 20(2), 175-188. <https://doi.org/10.1111/teth.12385>
- National Association of Evangelicals. (2012). *The theology of sex* [PDF file]. Retrieved from <https://sexualityinthechurch.files.wordpress.com/2017/02/theology-of-sex.pdf>
- Pooler, D. K. (2016, October). Understanding the complex trauma of clergy sexual abuse: Facilitating competent practice. In S. H. Starks (Chair), *Annual Program Meeting of the Council on Social Work Education*, Atlanta, GA.
- Pooler, D. K., & Frey, A. (2017). Responding to survivors of clergy sexual abuse. In H. D. Gingrich, & F. C. Gingrich (Eds.), *Treating trauma in Christian counseling*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press.
- Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network. (n.d.). Tips for talking to survivors of sexual assault. Retrieved from <https://www.rainn.org/articles/tips-talking-survivors-sexual-assault>
- Renzetti, C., & Yocum, S. (2013). *Clergy sexual abuse: Social science perspectives*. Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press.
- Rossetti, S. J. (2018). The Clergy Abuse Crisis: Didn't we fix this? A look at the progress the Church has made—and where we go from here. *Priest*, 74(12), 25-31. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=133154963&site=ehost-live&scope=site>
- Rudolfsson, L., & Tidefors, I. (2014). I have cried to Him a thousand times, but it makes no difference: Sexual abuse, faith, and images of God. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 17(9), 910-922. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.baylor.edu/10.1080/13674676.2014.950953>
- Rumrill, J., Stehel, V., Durana, P., & Kolencik, J. (2018). Does sexual objectification entail institutional power imbalances in organizations? *Contemporary Readings in Law & Social Justice*, 10(2), 99-105. <https://doi.org/10.22381/CRLSJ102201810>
- Singer, J. (Producer), & McCarthy, T. (Director). (2015). *Spotlight* [Motion picture]. United States: First Look Media.
- Shulman, L. (2016). *The skills of helping individuals, families, groups, and communities* (8th ed). Boston, MA: Cengage Learning.
- Tukker, M. (2013). Where sexuality and spirituality meet: An assessment of Christian teaching on sexuality and marriage in relation to the reality of 21st century moral norms. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 69(1). Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.baylor.edu/10.4102/hts.v69i1.1343>
- Wright, L. (2016, September). The rebellion of women: Responses to the denigration and oppression of women. In K. P. Jackson (Chair). *This Matters Forum, Sexual Assault on Baylor Campus*, Baylor University, Waco, TX.

# EBP and Grand Challenges for Christian Social Workers

---

*James C. Raines and Michael S. Kelly*

## Introduction

For this chapter, we take on two seemingly conflicting ideas, at least to some social workers: Christian faith and evidence-based practice (EBP). We will argue that while important tensions exist between faith and EBP, the extent to which a social worker who identifies as Christian and who also wants to deliver their services in the most evidence-based way possible need not require an either/or choice. Rather, we see EBP by social workers who are Christian as a challenge to integrate practitioners' values, evidence, and client characteristics and values into a framework that maximizes client engagement and positive outcomes. Additionally, as the field of social work has recently moved to adopt and promote the 12 Grand Challenges for Social Work (Uehara et al., 2013), we consider those Grand Challenges from both an evidence-based lens as well as our respective Christian traditions (Protestant and Catholic, respectively), and offer recommendations for social workers (Christian and otherwise) who want to become evidence-informed in their practice going forward.

### *Definition of EBP*

For over 20 years, one of the most common understandings of evidence-based practice (EBP) has involved “the conscientious, explicit and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions about the care of individual [clients]” (Sackett, Rosenberg, Gray, Haynes & Richardson, 1996, p. 71). Over time, that definition has been expanded to include the focus on integration of client values and clinical expertise with the best available evidence (Kelly, Raines, Stone, & Frey, 2010), but the overall idea remains consistent today: finding and appraising research evidence, with a goal of making it relevant and feasible for specific client problems.

### *Rigor, Relevance, & Sensitivity*

As Christians, there are faith-based concerns about the extent to which evidence-based practice reflects positivism. Positivism has been criticized on theological grounds for its insistence that empirical or sensory knowledge is superior to other types. Christians certainly understand the temptation to reduce knowledge to what we can see or touch (e.g., doubting Thomas in John 20:24-29). Christ even acknowledged the role that the senses play in faith

(Matt. 13:16), but he praised those who did *not* rely on them, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29). Paul provides this paradox, “So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (II Cor. 4:18). Likewise, the author of Hebrews states that “faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do *not* see” (Heb. 11:1).

It is important, therefore, to recognize and respect different forms of “evidence” in evidence-based practice. Sometimes, for example, our qualitative evidence comes in the form of countertransference, emotional responses to clients that cannot be empirically known, but provide potentially useful information about the therapeutic relationship (Raines, 2003). While EBP does use a hierarchy of evidence to categorize the research, the hierarchy only applies to rigor and rigor is only one component of good clinical research (Goldenberg, 2009). Rigor refers to the degree to which the research studies control for internal threats to validity; randomized controlled trials and quasi-experimental designs do the best job. Equally valid concerns are relevance (the study participants’ similarity to our own clients) and sensitivity to client values (the respect for diverse moral principles). The “current best evidence” used in the original definition then becomes evidence that is rigorous, clinically relevant, and sensitive to client values.

### **Engaging in the EBP Process**

#### *Asking questions*

Asking answerable questions refers to asking a question that can be informed by the research literature. For Christians, not all clinical conundrums can be answered by science. If a 15-year-old girl comes in to talk about getting an abortion, then the research literature is not going to be of much help. The primary clinical concern is an ethical-moral issue, not a scientific one (Raines, 2004). If a client asks if her 18-year-old brother who just completed suicide is going to hell (as her parish priest told her), then research will not alleviate her concerns. Christian social workers frequently deal with ethical and existential issues where EBP does not apply and a different process is needed (Raines & Dibble, 2011). As O’Connor and Meakes (1998) described, “Evidence-based... care does not replace intuition or the wisdom of clinical experience or compassion. Rather, compassion, intuition, and clinical wisdom ought to be used in conjunction with the evidence from research findings” (p. 360).

#### *Investigating the evidence*

Investigating the evidence refers to exploring the research literature in an effective yet efficient manner. Franklin and Kelly (2009) describe how they triangulated their search by using five online databases, three related textbooks, and proprietary databases (e.g., PsycINFO or Social Work Abstracts). Social workers searching for Christian terms in secular databases will want to allow the database (e.g., EBSCO or OVID) to “map term to subject heading” to understand

how it categorizes certain search terms. For Christian and religious research, the American Theological Library Association (ATLA) religion database is also useful. It is the “the premier index to journal articles, book reviews, and collections of essays in all fields of religion, with coverage from 1949 and retrospective indexing for several journal issues as far back as the nineteenth century” (ATLA, 2019). It currently has over 2.7 million records. A quick review of the ATLA database, however, returned only five items related to evidence-based practice and two of these were book reviews.

### *Appraising the evidence*

Appraising the evidence means not only examining the degree of rigor, but also its relevance and sensitivity to client values. While there are some excellent online appraisal tools (e.g., [www.consort-statement.org](http://www.consort-statement.org)) for examining rigor, the questions about relevance and sensitivity depend on the clinical expertise of the practitioner (Haynes, Devereaux, & Guyatt, 2002). As Christians, we must be wise about the assumptions of secular science when it approaches spiritual interventions.

Lawrence (2002) points out four flaws about spirituality research. First, some research comes dangerously close to testing God. An example would be studies about the effectiveness of prayer (e.g., Dossey, 1993). Does prayer only “work” when God says yes? Second, much of the spirituality research assumes that all spirituality is the same and it is always good. Kershaw (2000) tells us that when Hitler heard about the death of Roosevelt, he assumed God was on the Nazi’s side! Clearly, despite the claims of new age proponents (Wilber, 2006), some spiritual beliefs are not benign. Third, much of the spirituality research seems misdirected. Again, the prayer studies have focused solely on supplication to the exclusion of other types of prayer, such as adoration, confession, or thanksgiving (Price, 1974). An interesting hypothesis might be that those who give thanks for both the good and the bad that happens to them have better mental health than those who give thanks for only the good. Finally, much of the spirituality research displays theological naiveté. Koenig (1999), for example, dismisses the age-old problem of theodicy by stating that God simply never causes illness, God only heals! Thus, one of the dangers inherent in EBP for Christians is that it can be overly reductionist when it comes to complex theological issues.

### *Adapting & applying the evidence*

Applying and adapting the evidence means modifying the intervention to make it useful for your client’s circumstances. This doesn’t mean that “anything goes,” but it does mean that one should not use a treatment manual robotically (Stewart, Chambless, & Baron, 2012). How could we adapt evidence-based interventions for religious clients? Let’s consider two different paradigms for understanding Christian spirituality. First, Thomas (2000) proposes nine “sacred pathways” to God: naturalists, sensates, traditionalists, ascetics, activists, caregivers, enthusiasts, contemplatives, and intellectuals. Thomas suggests that Christians with different journeys have different spiritual needs. Respectively,

some Christians need the grandeur of nature, some want sensual stimulation, others a liturgy, some seek simplicity, some need social action, others to serve, some want need celebration, some seek personal devotions, and others theological profundity. Understanding clients' different spiritual paths may help Christian social workers adapt therapeutic interventions to meet both their psychosocial and spiritual needs. Second, Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) proposed six different dichotomies for African-American churches. These include priestly (worship-centered) vs. prophetic (action-focused); other worldly (eternal life) vs. this-worldly (abundant life); universal (diversity welcomed) vs. particular (in-group advocacy); communal (public-minded) vs. privatistic (congregation-focused); charismatic (spirit-led) vs. bureaucratic (well-managed); accommodating (adjusting to cultural norms) vs. resistant (standing against cultural dilution). Since Protestant Christians typically "church shop" until they find a spiritual home (Mouw, 2008), a church's stance on these six dichotomies often reflect members' mindsets as well. Understanding the reasons behind clients' different church affiliations may help Christian practitioners adjust their interventions accordingly.

#### *Evaluating the results*

Evaluating the results is important for two reasons. First, the only fact that empirically-supported treatments can tell us is what works for most people. There are two corollaries to this truth: (a) even the best empirically-supported intervention will not work for some clients and (b) the best empirically-supported treatments might make a few clients worse! If we don't routinely evaluate our work, then we will not know if we are helping our clients or not. Second, if we have adapted the intervention prior to application as suggested above, then we have changed the treatment (Raines, 2008).

## **The Grand Challenges for Social Work Initiative**

### *History*

The Grand Challenges for Social Work (GCSW) (AASWSW, 2009; Uehara, et al., 2013) was sponsored by the American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare (AASWSW or "the Academy"). Starting in 2009, the Academy modeled itself on the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine. The Academy is an honorific society, inducting new members through a nomination process modeled after the National Academy of Medicine. Currently, there are more than 140 member fellows. The fellows can be nominated for either being (a) scholars or (b) policy makers, administrators, and/or practitioners. Of particular interest is that one of the examples of scholars includes: "developers of evidence-based practices that have gained national recognition and use" (AASWSW, undated). The idea that evidence-based practice can be reduced to specific interventions is at odds with the definition at the beginning of this chapter which views it as a process between the practitioner and the client. As Raines (2008) described, this is a caricature of EBP known as the cookbook approach to practice (Howard, et al., 2003; Shlonsky & Gibbs, 2006). Furthermore,

the use of social validity as the sole criterion for determining which scholars to include is problematic due to its inherent subjectivity and relationship to social marketing (Winett, Moore, & Anderson, 1991).

The GCSW was a synergistic melding of two ideas. John Brekke championed the notion that there was a science of social work (Brekke, 2012) and Edwina Uehara borrowed the grand challenges concept from the National Academy of Engineering (NAE) Grand Challenges initiative (Uehara et al., 2013). The definition of grand challenges was provided by Kalil in a speech to a science and technology policy think tank as “ambitious yet achievable goals for society that mobilize the profession, capture the public’s imagination, and require innovation and breakthroughs in science and practice to achieve” (Kalil, 2012). The goals of the GCSW were “to improve society while building new science, skills, and relationships that would also strengthen the profession of social work” (Lubben, et al., 2018, pp. 3-4).

### *Assumptions*

It is always a good idea to make the implicit explicit. The GCSW were guided by two seminal papers, one written by the leadership of the AASWSW and the other by Sherraden et al. (2014). Both, in our view, proceeded from some core assumptions. The first assumption was that the social is fundamental. The authors posited that social work currently functions as applied social science. The emphasis on application “assumes that the combination of systematic knowledge and purposeful effort can lead to improvements in social conditions” (Sherraden, et al., 2014, p. 4). The social work profession intends to change these conditions so that even the most vulnerable and oppressed can lead fulfilling and capable lives. Human beings are viewed within the social contexts in which they live—families, communities, institutions (e.g., churches), and governing authorities. At our core, we are social beings, meant to work together for the greater good. Surely, all Christians can affirm this by considering the Golden Rule or the many passages about how we should treat “one another” (e.g., John 13:34; Romans 12:10; Eph. 4:2; Col. 3:13, I Thess. 5:11).

The second assumption is that social work has already achieved grand accomplishments (AASWSW, 2013). The profession was born in the late 19th century as a response to human challenges accompanying the industrial revolution. Over-crowded tenements, urban pollution, persistent poverty, and hazardous work required social interventions. Social workers removed children from workhouses, increased foster and adoptive care, assisted mothers with Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) later renamed Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), changed working conditions in factories, championed child labor laws, reduced infant and maternal mortality, implemented social security, organized the Civilian Conservation Corps, advocated for universal human and civil rights, helped deinstitutionalize the those with mental illness, and promoted end-of-life care. With a history of grand accomplishments, the profession can courageously and confidently tackle other enduring social problems.

### *Criteria for Inclusion*

It should not come as a surprise that the committee originally entertained 80 different ideas for the GCSW. Before narrowing down the list, they came up with five criteria:

1. The challenge must be big, important, and compelling.
2. Scientific evidence indicates that the challenge can be completely or largely solved.
3. Meaningful and measurable progress to address the challenge can be made in a decade.
4. The challenge is likely to generate interdisciplinary or cross-sector collaboration.
5. Solutions to the challenge require significant innovation (Lubben, et al., 2018, p. 7).

Applying these criteria while reviewing 38 concept papers, the committee finally settled on twelve grand challenges for the next decade:

- Ensure healthy development for all youth
- Close the health gap
- Stop family violence
- Advance long and productive lives
- Eradicate social isolation
- End homelessness
- Create social responses to a changing environment
- Harness technology for social good
- Promote smart decarceration
- Reduce extreme economic inequality
- Build financial capability for all
- Achieve equal opportunity and justice

There is no doubt that this is an ambitious list and given present conditions in our polarized political context, one might rightly question whether these goals can be achieved within the next ten years.

### **EBP & the GCSW: How Much EBP Is Actually in the Grand Challenges Themselves, & What do they have to say to Social Workers and Clients who are Christians?**

Separate from preparing this chapter, one of us (Kelly) engaged in a multi-year project with another colleague and our doctoral students at Loyola University School of Social Work to critically examine the GCSW from a variety of evidence-informed lenses. We asked of the 12 Challenges and the (then) 21 papers that grew out from them:

1. How well did the papers make a case that the scientific evidence for the challenge was developed enough that progress could be made relatively quickly;

2. How well did the papers identify ways that meaningful progress could be made in the next decade;
3. How many of the papers cited rigorous research designs (systematic reviews, meta-analyses, randomized trials, rigorous qualitative studies) that would bolster the case that the science for the specific GCSW was robust and ready to implement; and
4. How many of the papers were themselves rooted in social work values, scholarship, and authorship? (Kelly, Singer, Shinn, Iverson, & Williams, 2019)

To answer these questions, our team conducted a directed content analysis of all 21 GCSW papers (details on the study methodology can be found at Kelly et al., 2019) and found some disquieting outcomes from our process. First, almost none of the papers cited extensive examples of rigorous research designs that might indicate that the science for the GCSW was poised for the next stages of implementation and innovation called for in the GCSW initiative. Second, most of the published work was itself not generated by social work scholars and/or published in social work journals, raising doubts about how much “social work” is included to start with in these Grand Challenges. Very little data from our analysis indicated that the authors of the papers had engaged in the very kind of research syntheses typical to other professions’ Grand Challenge initiatives (e.g. conducting scoping reviews or evidence gap maps to establish the parameters of the field, or assuming that enough intervention research already existed to do so, conducting a systematic review of the extant literature) (Kelly et al., 2019).

Finally, and perhaps most of concern to our team (and to the overall goal of this chapter), it appears that very little effort was made at the outset of the GCSW to establish meaningful relationships with social work practitioners and clients in the development of these challenges, making the effort itself largely dependent on a top-down researcher-led approach that continues to challenge its uptake in the larger social work practice and policy community (Kelly et al., 2019). This is compounded by the fact that the GCSW papers didn’t appear to fully reckon with the impact that the faith of the social worker (and even more importantly, the social work client) might have on the delivery of any intervention strategies generated from the GCSW.

### **Conclusion: Could Integrating Faith, EBP, and Social Work Into the GCSW qualify as its own Grand Challenge?**

We now consider some implications from our initial content analysis paper on the need for social work to build both EBP and faith-based lenses into the further development of the GCSW. We are inspired by the enormity of the 12 Grand Challenges, as well as our own concern that they not become something that fizzles, like many other well-intentioned plans or initiatives have done. It’s clear to us that one path toward bringing the GCSW into the lived realities of

so many social workers, clients, and researchers is to ask the tough questions we have in this chapter and seek some better synthesis or integration of faith, EBP, and social work in the years to come. In many ways that synthesis or integration, as elusive as it may seem to achieve now, may be the greatest challenge that social work faces within the next decade.

## References

- American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare (undated). Criteria for nomination of AASWSW fellows. Retrieved from: <https://aaswsw.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Criteria-for-nomination-of-AASWSW-Fellows.pdf>
- American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare. (2013, November). Grand accomplishments in social work. (Grand Challenges for Social Work Initiative, Working Paper No. 2). Baltimore, MD: Author. Retrieved from: <https://aaswsw.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/FINAL-Grand-Accomplishments-sb-12-9-13-Final.pdf>
- American Theological Library Association (2019). ATLA Religion Database. Retrieved April 7, 2019 from: <https://www.atla.com/products/prodinfo/Pages/ATLA-RDB.aspx>
- Brekke, J. S. (2012). Shaping a science of social work. *Research on social work practice*, 22(5), 455-464.
- Dossey, L. (1993). *Healing words: The power of prayer and the practice of medicine*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- Franklin, C., & Kelly, M. S. (2009). Becoming evidence-informed in the real world of school social work practice. *Children & Schools*, 31(1), 46–58.
- Goldenberg, M. J. (2009). Iconoclast or creed? Objectivism, pragmatism, and the hierarchy of evidence. *Perspectives in Biology & Medicine*, 52(2), 168–187.
- Haynes, R., Devereaux, P., & Guyatt, G. (2002). Editorial: Clinical expertise in the era of evidence-based medicine and patient choice. *ACP Journal Club*, 136, A11–14.
- Howard, M. O., McMillen, C. J., & Pollio, D. E. (2003). Teaching evidence-based practice: Toward a new paradigm for social work education. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 13(2), 234–259.
- Kalil, T. (2012, April). *The grand challenges of the 21st century*. Speech presented at the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation. Washington, DC.
- Kelly, M.S., Singer, J., Shinn, A., Iverson, M., & Williams, D. (2019). How much social work research is in social work's Grand Challenges? A critical review of the evidence for the 12 challenges. *Journal of Evidence-Informed Social Work*, 16 (5), 511-523.
- Kelly, M. S., Raines, J. C., Stone, S., & Frey, A. (2010). *School Social Work: An Evidence-Informed Framework for Practice*. Oxford University Press.
- Kershaw, I. (2000). *Hitler: 1936-1954, Nemesis*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton.
- Koenig, H. (1999). *The healing power of faith: Science explores medicine's last great frontier*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Lawrence, R. J. (2002). Four fatal flaws in recent spirituality research. *Journal of Health Care Chaplaincy*, 12(1/2), 125–130.
- Lincoln, C. E., & Mamiya, L. H. (1990). *The Black church in the African-American experience*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Lubben, J. E., Barth, R. P., Fong, R., Flynn, M. L., Sherraden, M., & Uehara, E. (2018). Grand challenges for social work and society. In R. Fong, J. E. Lubben, & R. P. Barth (Eds.), *Grand challenges for social work and society* (pp. 1–17). New York: Oxford University Press.

- Mouw, R. (2008). Spiritual consumerism's upside: Why church shopping may not be all bad. *Christianity Today*, 52(1), 50–52.
- O'Connor, T. S. J., & Meakes, E. (1998). Hope in the midst of challenge: Evidence-based pastoral care. *Journal of Pastoral Care*, 52(4), 359–367.
- Price, E. W., Jr. (1974). *ACTS in prayer*. Nashville, TN: Broadman Press.
- Raines, J. C. (2003). Social workers' countertransference with spiritually-similar clients. *Social Work & Christianity*, 30(3), 256–277.
- Raines, J. C. (2004). Evidence-based practice in school social work: A process in perspective. *Children & Schools*, 26(2), 71–83.
- Raines, J. C., & Raines, J. C. (2008). *Evidence based practice in school mental health*. Oxford University Press.
- Raines, J. C., & Dibble, N. T. (2011). *Ethical decision making in school mental health*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Sackett, D. L., Rosenberg, W. M. C., Gray, J. A. M., Haynes, R. B., & Richardson, W. D. (1996). Evidence-based medicine: What it is and what it isn't. *British Medical Journal*, 312, 71–72.
- Sherraden, M., Barth, R. P., Brekke, J., Fraser, M., Mandersheid, R., & Padgett, D. (2014). *Social is fundamental: Introduction and context for grand challenges for social work* (Grand Challenges for Social Work Initiative Working Paper No. 1). Baltimore, MD: American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare. Retrieved from: <https://aaswsw.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/WP1-with-cover.pdf>
- Shlonsky, A., & Gibbs, L. (2006). Will the real evidence-based practice please stand up? Teaching the process of evidence-based practice to the helping professions. In A. R. Roberts & K. R. Yeager (eds.), *Foundations of evidence-based practice* (pp. 103–122). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Stewart, R. E., Chambless, D. L., & Baron, J. (2012). Theoretical and practical barriers to practitioners' willingness to seek training in empirically-supported treatments. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 68(1), 8–23.
- Thomas, G. (2000). *Sacred pathways: Discover your soul's path to God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. An assessment tool can be found on the internet at: <http://northpoint.org/care/pathways/>.
- Uehara, E., Flynn, M., Fong, R., Brekke, J., Barth, R. P., Coulton, C., ... & Manderscheid, R. (2013). Grand challenges for social work. *Journal of the Society for Social Work and Research*, 4(3), 165–170.
- Wilber, K. (2006). *Integral spirituality: A startling new role for religion in the modern and postmodern world*. Boston, MA: Shambhala.
- Winett, R. A., Moore, J. F., & Anderson, E. S. (1991). Extending the concept of social validity: Behavior analysis for disease prevention and health promotion. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 24(2), 215–230.



# Refugee Empowerment and Faith Communities: A Qualitative Study

---

*Elizabeth Patterson Roe and Jenny Bushnell*

Although people have been coming the United States to seek asylum for centuries, the U.S. refugee resettlement program officially began in 1948 when Europeans were fleeing their home countries during World War II due to persecution and war (Administration for Children and Families, n.d.). The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) (2017) defines a refugee as:

someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group.

Since the beginning of the U.S. refugee program, faith-based organizations and congregations have had a key role, not only in providing support services for refugees, but also through acting as government contracted resettlement agents (Eby et al., 2011; McKinnon, 2009; Nawyn, 2006).

Many Christians believe in living out the gospel message by welcoming refugees in the midst of modern day world crises. Some Christians are responding to this crisis by providing services to refugees. However, in recent years, there has been much fear and concern for welcoming refugees. This paper presents a subset of results of a qualitative research study related to how Christian faith communities are both involved in refugee work and are perceived in their work with refugees. Results of this study can help both Christian social workers and faith communities better understand how to support the empowerment of refugee communities from an anti-oppressive practice perspective.

## **Oppression and Empowerment**

In the book of Mark, Jesus states that the second greatest commandment in the Bible is “to love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31, New International Version). Who one’s neighbor is and how that love manifests itself can be lived out differently. Some Christians suggest our neighbor should only be our Christian neighbor; others suggest our neighbor includes all people in need regardless of religion (Goodstein, 2017). As we love our neighbors as ourselves, it is important to recognize oppression and facilitate empowerment. Numerous scriptures speak against oppression of marginalized groups, including foreign-

ers and sojourners (examples include: Jeremiah 7:5-7, Deuteronomy 10:18, Psalm 146:7-9, Deuteronomy 24:19-21, Matthew 25:34-39). Yet the Christian church has a history of both empowerment and oppression when working cross-culturally (Case, 2012; Cronshaw, 2015; Mino, 2014).

Oppression, whether intentional or unintentional, can hinder empowerment. Mullaly (2002) describes oppression as:

“When a person is blocked from opportunities for self-development, is excluded from full participation in society, does not have certain rights that the dominant group takes for granted, or is assigned as second-class citizenship, not because of individual talent, merit, or failure, but because of his or her membership in a particular group or category of people (p. 28).”

While also addressing systemic oppression, anti-oppressive practice literature suggests that individuals must be agents of their own change so that they maintain and “gain greater control over all aspects of their lives and social environment” (Mullaly, 2002, p. 79). In this process, helpers must be careful not to repeat patterns of oppression. Lee (1996) suggests three interlocking dimensions as he defines empowerment:

- “1) the development of a more positive and potent sense of self;
- 2) the construction of knowledge and capacity for more critical comprehension of social and political realities of one’s environment;
- 3) the cultivation of resources and strategies, or more functional competence, for attainment of personal and collective social goals, or liberation (p. 224).”

Through learning from both positive examples and past mistakes, modern theories of missions suggest that when working cross-culturally, one of the goals is to empower indigenous leadership in a culturally sensitive manner (Eitel, 1998; Smith, 1998; Tennent, 2010). Yet, there has been more awareness in recent times of how Christians who have good intentions when helping the marginalized can actually do harm when intending to help those they serve. This can hurt people in the process by creating dependency rather than empowering them (Corbett & Fikkert, 2009; Lupton, 2011; Zoma, 2014).

As refugees are given the opportunity to lead, both communities of faith and our most vulnerable neighbors benefit. Groody (2015) states: “mission done from the margins of the church, particularly by migrants themselves, is key to the church’s own renewal” (p. 319). Yet, Valtonen’s (2002) research reported that “Resettling refugees feel shackled by negative stereotypes, misinformation about their emigration motives and circumstances, and absence of background information on reasons for refugeedom” (p. 116). Valtonen encourages anti-oppressive practice methods to help eliminate these feelings of oppression.

Marsiglia and Kulis (2015) suggest that when working cross-culturally across social and economic boundaries, our own values, beliefs, and perspectives influence the relationships. If left unchecked, our values and beliefs can

be a barrier creating unintentional oppression and impede empowerment. As perspectives have the potential to influence empowerment or oppression, a review of Christian perspectives on refugee resettlement will now be explored.

### **Christian Perspectives on Refugee Resettlement**

The media have expressed conflicting opinions from church leaders and communities of faith regarding refugee resettlement, particularly in light of President Donald Trump's 2017 executive orders related to immigration and refugee resettlement. Some individuals of faith and churches have responded by supporting refugees coming to America as part of their biblical calling to love their neighbor as themselves and to welcome the stranger. Others supported President Trump's order to close the borders for a period to revamp the vetting process, feeling this would help protect the U.S. from terrorist attacks (Shellnut, 2017). Many fear that America is losing its "national security" due to a perception that Muslims are entering our country as terrorists (Goodstein, 2017, para. 13).

There are variations of viewpoints from Christian leaders on this subject. For example, the head of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, Samuel Rodriguez, and Franklin Graham, an evangelical leader, have diverse perspectives on immigration issues, yet they share the view that while supporting refugee resettlement is important, so is the security of the United States (Green, 2017). Graham compares the United States to Jerusalem, where sometimes the walls and gates need to close to protect the nation (Johnson, 2017). Another varying perspective comes from Jim Daly, the President of Focus on the Family. Jim Daly believes in valuing refugees and their stories with a healthy immigration policy (Green, 2017).

Despite some negative perceptions of refugees, many Christian leaders have made the decisions to stand with refugees. In February 2017, 100 Evangelical Christian leaders signed a newspaper ad denouncing the refugee ban and supporting the Christian calling to "love our neighbor as we love ourselves," stating that "compassion and security can co-exist" (Washington Post, 2017). Some, such as the Southern Baptist Convention, believe the executive order entailed religious persecution in banning refugees from all Muslim-specific countries (Darling, 2017; Gore, 2017). Similarly, Jenny Yang, the senior Vice President of World Relief, a faith-based refugee resettlement agency, supports refugee resettlement as part of the Christian calling to love all people (Green, 2017). The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops are also opposed to the executive orders (Green, 2017).

These perspectives not only influence Christians' perspectives on refugee resettlement, they can also influence a refugee's perspective on how the Church is receiving them, having the potential to foster further oppression or empowerment (Mullaly, 2002). Regardless of opinion, as refugees are being resettled, there are faith-based organizations (FBOs) and churches responding to the needs of refugees. Next, we will review the literature to explore the involvement of FBOs and churches in the resettlement process.

## **Faith-Based Organizations' (FBOs) Involvement in Refugee Resettlement**

More than half of the organizations that contract with the U.S. government to resettle refugees are faith-based (Riera & Poirier, 2014; UNHCR, 2017). However, according to a study in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania that surveyed over 4,000 congregations to evaluate faith-based communities' work with refugees, only 5.2% reported major support towards the refugee community and 25% reported giving to programs that supported refugees (Ives, Sinh, & Cnaan, 2010).

There are a variety of perspectives on FBOs and churches involvement in refugee resettlement, suggesting that their involvement can be both an asset that empowers refugees in their process of resettlement, while also having the potential to be oppressive in some of their actions.

### **Perspectives on Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs)**

Both faith-based and secular organizations regularly partner with faith communities to provide goods and services for refugees (Eby, Iverson, Smyers and Kekic, 2011; Nawyn, 2006). Zoma (2014) suggests that FBOs' work with refugees and asylum seekers is often perceived to be no different than that of secular organizations. Furthermore, FBOs frequently have networks and resources that secular organizations cannot access. Barneche (2014) suggests that FBOs that are not constrained by government regulations and eligibility requirements are an asset to refugee resettlement in order to fill in the gaps of needed services.

However, McKinnon (2009) examined the rhetoric utilized by FBOs in their recruitment of volunteers for refugee resettlement and found that FBOs tended to utilize language and tactics that place the volunteer in a position of power as "agents of change." For example, they found FBOs use language to appeal to potential volunteers as "doers of good deeds" (McKinnon, 2009, p. 319). In addition, FBOs were helping refugees without seeking perspectives from refugees, thus potentially making refugees "immobile" in the relationship, and further perpetuating oppression.

Offering a more positive perspective, Nawyn's (2006) research reported that religious practices among faith-based nonprofits in refugee resettlement tended to act as a form of community development. For example, they discovered that religious organizations were helping to bring immigrant and refugee communities together with others from their own religious community, such as linking refugees of Muslim faith with other refugees who shared the same religious and cultural practices. Also implementing practices that align with community development principles, Eby, Iverson, Smyers and Kekic (2011) reported FBOs have values that develop a "long-term community presence" and provide resources for the refugee that may not otherwise be available, such as links to the community and opportunities for advocating for refugees. Both Nawyn (2006) and Eby et al.'s (2011) studies indicate that faith communities are offering empowering approaches to refugee resettlement.

Riera and Poirier's (2014) study on UNHCR's cooperation with FBOs also reported examples of both empowering methods offered by FBOs and behaviors that can be oppressive. Strengths noted in this study were FBOs' ability to provide hospitality, respect, and equality within their provision of services. Along with these positive attributes that faith-based communities offer, their report also noted that when problems do arise when working with FBOs these problems are typically related to negative behavior towards those of other religions. They also expressed concern that some FBOs pressure people to convert in order to receive continued support.

Zoma (2014) suggests that FBOs also can offer religious and spiritual support that can be a "source of coping, recovery and resilience" (p. 46). However, she also suggests that refugees may not feel supported by faith-based agencies of a different faith than themselves, as refugees may feel those that are of the same faith as the FBO receive preferential treatment. Furthermore, Riera and Poirer (2014) noted instances of concerns related to gender stereotyping and lack of gender equality, HIV/AIDS discrimination, and discrimination against LGBTI individuals. They also suggest that some FBOs focus too much on charity and too little on human rights issues.

The literature reveals both positive contributions by FBOs and churches in their work with refugees and potential concerns that could oppress or hinder refugee empowerment. The review of the literature helped us further understand how those involved in refugee resettlement perceive church and FBO involvement so that we can work towards maximizing the opportunities for empowerment and anti-oppressive practice.

## **Purpose**

The overall purpose of this study was to develop empowering, anti-oppressive methods for working in refugee resettlement. To ensure opportunity for the lived experiences of refugees to be shared, qualitative methodology was chosen for this research. This article focuses on the research results that relate specifically to participants' perspectives on faith communities' involvement in refugee resettlement. Through understanding how faith communities are perceived in their work with refugees, we can build awareness and help better equip faith communities to empower refugees in an anti-oppressive manner.

## **Procedures**

The methodology of this qualitative study is based on Lofland et al.'s (2006) approach to design and it follows an interpretive approach. This included a step-by-step process, consisting of a literature review, the development of a semi-structured interview guide, and systematic coding of data to draw out themes and patterns based on the subjective reality of the participants (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009; Cresswell, 2007; Lofland et al, 2006). An anti-oppressive, post-positivistic approach was utilized throughout the study in order to develop

interview questions and analyze the research from the perspective of former refugees (Lofland et al, 2006).

Initial interview questions were developed based on a literature review. Then three staff from World Relief Akron, a refugee resettlement agency in North East Ohio, gave their feedback on the methodology. Their feedback helped finalize the interview guide and determine the type of participants to seek for interviews. In order to gain multiple perspectives, participants were sought out who either had the lived experience of working with refugees and/or had been resettled as a refugee themselves (Padget, 2008). After receiving institutional IRB approval, participants were recruited through purposive sampling based on recommendations by people working in the field of refugee resettlement in North East Ohio. Later in the process, participants also recommended other participants (i.e., snowballing).

### **Interview Process**

Interviews lasted approximately an hour. Utilizing a semi-structured interview guide, former refugees were asked to describe their story of arrival to the United States and then asked to describe their process of resettlement. Those working with refugees were asked about their work and goals of working with refugees. All participants were asked to describe their perspectives on empowerment and oppression of refugees. Finally, all participants were asked to suggest ways in which professionals, faith communities, and the community in general can better serve resettled refugees in order to promote empowerment and reduce oppression.

### **Increasing the Rigor of the Study**

Steps were taken to increase the rigor of this qualitative study. Purposive sampling was utilized to select participants with a variety of experiences (Lofland, 2006). After the interviews were transcribed, the data were inputted into Atlas.ti software and coded for themes. During the analysis, bracketing was utilized through coding, memoing, and constant comparison (Creswell, 2007; Tufford & Newman, 2010). Recording and transcribing the exact words of interviews, along with providing rich and thick descriptions, increased the confirmability of the results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Liamputtong, 2009). To increase trustworthiness and credibility, two outside evaluators reviewed transcriptions and developed themes separate from the lead researcher, in order to compare and confirm results (Lapan, 2004).

### **Sample**

Twenty interviews were conducted with a total of 26 participants. All of the participants in this study either work directly with refugees or came to the U.S. as refugees. Six of the interviews were in pairs, with family members or colleagues who work together, and the rest of the interviews were completed individually. Nineteen of the people interviewed are currently working with refugees. Sixteen

participants self-identified as male and twelve as female. The ages ranged from 21-75 years old. Thirteen of the participants came to the U.S. as immigrants, nine of those with refugee status. The others who were born outside of the U.S. came under a variety of immigration visas. Those who identified as former refugees self-identified as Nepali speaking Bhutanese (5), Syrian (2), Iraqi (1) and Vietnamese (1). Those born outside of the U.S., who were not refugees, self-identified as from Hong Kong (1), Korea (1), Germany (1), and from South East Asia (1). U.S.-born participants (13) all self-identified as Caucasian or White. All participants lived in Northeast Ohio at the time of the interview except for one who was living in Germany. All but two participants were fluent in English. An interpreter was used for communication with these two participants. Pseudonyms were used in this study to protect the privacy and confidentiality of participants.

### **Defining the Term Refugee**

All participants who came to the U.S. as refugees had been resettled in the U.S. and have legal status as refugees. They are all citizens or on a pathway to citizenship if they so desire. Resettled refugees typically receive resettlement assistance for 90 days through the refugee resettlement program. Most former refugees who were interviewed had conflicting feelings between being proud of their story as a refugee and their desire to be seen as a human being without the oppressive baggage or stereotype they feel goes along with the title, “refugee.” Therefore, the language “former refugee” was chosen for this study, in order to recognize the stories of those studied, while valuing their dignity and worth as new Americans. The results of the study will now be discussed.

## **Results**

### **Motivations for working with refugees**

Many participants had motivation to work with refugees that linked directly with principles of empowerment. Daniel, a former refugee from Nepal who works with refugees, said his work was first focused on working “within the (refugee) church,” as a pastor, but now he wants to work “outside the church.” He said, “I want to reach out in the community (of refugees). But now, right now what I am encouraging our people to (do is to) sustain ourselves.”

Kris, a refugee case specialist, expressed personal faith motivation behind this desire:

To come beside or come up under refugees in order to help them be self-sustaining...work ourselves out of a job. I think that's why we are here....My hope is to be the hands and feet of Jesus to share that and to, I think, restore a little bit of the shalom or the peace and order in the world by helping them and helping not necessarily to proselytize, but to help their eyes look up a little bit. That's my goal.

Although participants expressed personal motivations to empower refugees, participants also had concerns that suggest oppressive practices within faith communities' methods. These results will now be discussed.

### **When Helping Hurts Refugees: Perceived Barriers Created by Faith Communities**

**Hostility and Fear.** A commonly discussed barrier to empowerment was hostility and fear of refugees entering into the U.S. Several participants felt that this lack of welcome inhibits refugees' ability to be fully empowered in their process of becoming new Americans. Some of the participants expressed that this fear is preventing Christians and faith communities from participating in refugee resettlement efforts. Kris, a case manager for a faith-based resettlement agency, states:

There are so many myths surrounding the community and so much fear and that causes people (to) either oppose refugees or to fear. Normally it's fear that causes opposition. Then they don't act... I think churches should act. There have been some really great churches that have been helping us out so much. There have been a lot of churches who have shut me down completely when I talk to them...I just feel this urgency of why aren't you acting?

Many participants expressed that some of this fear is based on lack of education on the facts regarding refugee resettlement. Many also expressed that people lack empathy towards refugees due to not being in relationship them. Alexa, who coordinates work with refugees at her church, desires to not only work with refugees directly, but also to change this mindset within our culture.

I want our culture to have a global mindset that we're all people of the world and you have no control over your situation in life. And it's by grace that you are not a refugee in another country... so (I) try to mobilize people's empathy and mobilize them to be good citizens of the world... really directly addressing the fear issues that are in our country...

One participant felt that the truly Bible-believing churches do not have hostility or fear towards refugees, as described by the above participants, but she still felt that churches and Christians need to be educated on how to help refugees, so that their efforts are not harmful. One particular area of concern expressed by both former refugees and those working with refugees was how proselytizing or evangelism can be perceived as harmful and manipulative.

**Proselytization.** When asked to discuss ways the community could be involved in refugee resettlement and empowerment, half of the participants noted that faith communities are a valuable asset to refugee resettlement and half of the participants noted negative perspectives on the church's direct prac-

tice in refugee resettlement. Five of these participants (19%), were overlapping, expressing both positive and negative views on faith communities' involvement in resettlement. Kim, a former refugee, stated, "Churches need to know that they need to be careful that if they're serving refugees, not having the refugees think that they're manipulating them into something." Further emphasizing this concern, Amil, a former refugee, stated:

They (refugees) don't know anything here, so some people are taking advantage of them and they are forcing them to change their religion and making them Christian, forcing them to go to church, like they are giving some housing stuff and they want them to come to church and have them in church every week... Because of that, many families (say that) they are frustrated...Some people, they broke (from) their family because...some would be wanting (this help) and others won't be wanting.... they give wrong information to involve them....and that affects their family.

Others appreciated some of the work that churches did, but also expressed concern about some churches' desires to recruit members or convert people to their religion. One former refugee, Ana expressed, "they do do a lot of good things, but at the same time, every time you're getting help from them you always have that guilt on you like (they are) really trying to get you to get into the church."

Several participants also expressed that the motivations of church members should be to aid and empower refugees, not to convert them to become members of their church. Lan, a former refugee, said that refugees "come here for freedom; they want to believe whatever they want to believe," suggesting that faith communities should help refugees, but should be intentional about helping refugees regardless of religious beliefs.

Tina, a Christian who leads refugee resettlement efforts within a faith-based organization, values partnerships with churches and Christians. However, she spoke of some of the dangers within faith communities related to dynamics of power and oppression due to types of relationships church members are used to having in their helping relationships.

The Church is used to engaging transactionally and the normal appeal to why a church would get involved is because they need to come to the rescue and that's what the Church wants to hear and that is the temptation for ministries to appeal to. (Churches) are used to an appeal that puts them in a position of power and then when they hit the reality of being taken advantage of...they don't know how to approach without being a savior so it's a constant tension...

Along with concerns regarding faith communities serving in a way that puts them in the position of being "the savior," creating feelings of oppression, concern was also expressed regarding faith communities' abilities to be culturally sensitive when working with refugees.

**Lack of Cultural Sensitivity.** Some participants expressed examples of culturally insensitive practices within church-based refugee ministries. Alexa, who serves refugees through a church ministry, referred to culturally insensitive practices by stating:

I love the great commission, so I want people to hear about Jesus and I think strategically...people being in this country is an opportunity for the church to welcome them. It's an easy gateway for talking about certain spiritual things. I think hugely in the last year I've seen that people are getting resettled here from all over the world in pretty different stages of difficulties...and so it seems logical that Americans reach out and welcome and help...people to retain their cultures, to help them adapt in a way that this can become home....but I don't think we are good at doing that.

Some participants mentioned specific, practical examples of ways that faith communities could be more sensitive to the cultures and religions of those resettling in the U.S., for example, being sensitive to refugees' dietary restrictions. Kim, a former refugee, expressed:

some, they donate meat, beef, some there donate pork, so ask them, bring a vegetable (too). Give them the choice. Tell them... they do not (always) know how to read (English)...and the next day they found out it is pork or it is beef, throw it in the garbage. (Give them) chicken or vegetables, noodles, vegetables, whatever. That they would eat. So the people who eat beef or pork, it can go to those people instead of to waste.

Andrew, an immigrant who directs an agency that works with immigrants and refugees, described the challenge of working with people of faith and church communities due to their desire to serve, but their lack of understanding of how to serve cross-culturally.

This is tricky because there's this intersection of ministry and calling and faith and there's this intersection of help but being clear that help is not enabling but it's empowering help. That needs to be wrestled with and I suspect that faith-based organizations, churches, have good intentions...sometimes (I) am not sure if they're fully aware of how to do the work...too often we've had instances where churches are like "oh, we want to help refugees, we want to help refugees" and they welcome us in and then as time goes by you hear things like "you know, they're not flushing the toilet or they're throwing garbage in the hallway"... The reality of working with refugees, I just don't think they're comprehending.... They just have to be prepared.

Relatedly, Andrew discussed that churches could be less prescriptive with their funding in order to provide funding in a more open-minded way, listening bet-

ter to the culturally relevant needs expressed by both the refugees and those working in direct practice with refugees. Although there are concerns as to how faith-based communities are helping refugees in their process of resettlement, there were also examples expressed of how Christians and faith communities are offering help in an empowering manner.

### **When Helping Helps Refugees: How the Church can be empowering**

Many participants gave examples of how faith communities are doing work that benefits refugee communities and contributes to their empowerment. Michelle, an immigrant herself, who works with an organization that serves immigrants, stated, "I think the most generous people are the churches, congregants." She gave examples of a state she noted as being successful in resettlement due to the church's support. This opinion was not given only by Christians, but by participants from a variety of faith backgrounds. Raif, a Muslim man who came to the U.S. as a refugee, credited that World Relief's success in refugee resettlement as due to their ability to equip people from churches as volunteers to support and empower refugees.

### **Filling in needed Gaps of Services**

Some participants appreciated specific ways that churches can help to fill in gaps that the larger agencies cannot, such as providing volunteers. Andrew believes that churches that feel called to refugee settlement have a "high level of commitment," and a great "ability to mobilize volunteers." Others suggested that churches have a capacity to donate needed essentials like diapers and ethnic-specific foods to help support refugees in their process of resettlement. However, participants cautioned that churches need to be careful to not create dependency in providing such direct services. For example, when describing a church ministry that serves food in a community with a high population of refugees, Betty, an American-born, volunteer mentor to refugees stated, "It's been a real blessing, but sometimes I think that people say, 'oh well I can get it, so they'll just keep getting it' and you don't want that to become a crutch."

Frank, a volunteer, who has helped empower refugees to start businesses and a cultural association, had expressed concern about churches' involvement in refugee resettlement, but gave an example of one church's work that he felt contributed significantly to refugee empowerment by providing a space for older refugees to congregate and practice English. He said, "It was a very good thing for refugees...they could go out and hang out with their friends and just practice a little bit of English."

When asked how churches and community members can be involved in refugee work, Kim, who works with a non-profit focused on immigrants, cautioned against churches proselytizing, but said that "(Resettlement agencies) cannot do everything. Their job is to bring them here...they should divide this." She gave examples of how churches and other organizations could help support

refugee resettlement by helping refugees find jobs and provide childcare for mothers who are often home with their children all day.

### **Relationship building**

The most common theme in the research related to refugee empowerment is the importance of relationships, both with the American-born community and their own community. Both former refugees and those who work with refugees suggested that when relationships are built between refugees and the American-born community, stereotypes are broken down, myths are dispelled, and culturally sensitive-empowering practices can take place. Participants suggested that churches have the capacity to facilitate mutually beneficial relationship-building between refugees and church members.

Those working with refugees spoke of specific people with whom they have built relationships, giving examples of valuable friendships that developed. Amil and Kamal spoke of how community members, some of Christian faith, have helped them become better entrepreneurs. Ana spoke of a relationship that she has built with an American-born couple she now calls her grandparents. Ana stated:

Meeting grandpa and grandma (is) the biggest thing...every time somebody meet me they are like, you are so lucky and I'm like yeah...My language is a lot better. I probably would have never been able to go to college, never have been able to navigate how everything works. I mean it's a big, long process and then he helped me apply to like lots and lots of scholarships, you know, so my parents would have never been able to pay for (college)...Every single thing, like so far, whatever I am is because of them.

Alexa, who works for a church that is invested in refugee resettlement and equips hundreds of volunteers to serve in refugee resettlement, shared their vision for work with refugees, "to foster healthy and reciprocal relationships between the church and the refugee, resulting in a multicultural community that both worships God and draws more worshipers to him." The importance of a reciprocal relationship, like this mission statement states, was a theme that came up regularly in regards to offering empowering, anti-oppressive approaches to refugee resettlement.

Alexa expressed how her church is equipping volunteers to develop relationships with the refugee community:

if (refugees) don't have native relationships, then how do they get on their feet...you need friendships that can carry you through many seasons. There will be ongoing things that are hard to learn... For us, it's our explicit goal but we want real relationships...it's a game-changer because you start to see you have way more in common with this person than differences...We have a hundred and five people that are involved in some way and some have gone in

the deep end relationally in amazing ways and it's been amazing to see how their lives have been transformed and they've become spokespeople on behalf of all of the refugee's friends, to correct and challenge American mentalities. And then we have people who drop off a bag of used goods that they got in the attic with my name on the bag....So there's a range, but we've had a lot of people be very generous with giving refugee resettlement kits and that's a very simple transaction; it's quick, but that gets people involved, but all of those people, I would like to move a portion of them towards relational...so we grow it slowly, we can slowly do a few at a time.

## **Discussion**

The results of this research indicate that faith-based organizations and churches can be a great asset to refugee resettlement if equipped with the knowledge and skills to develop relationships that empower and do not further oppress. Even though many participants expressed critique of faith communities, many also expressed how resettlement agencies benefit from faith communities' support. This support has the potential to last well beyond the 90 days that most refugees are supported by resettlement agencies. Based on the results of the research, a preliminary discussion on how faith communities can be equipped to empower refugees will now be presented.

### **Anti-Oppressive/Culturally Sensitive Training**

Education can help break down barriers and teach cultural sensitivity, but also equip the church to be an excellent resource for empowering, anti-oppressive refugee resettlement practices. Participants expressed that in order for churches to facilitate empowerment, the Church first needs to understand the truth about refugees vs. the myths that often get expressed as facts. After myths are dispelled, individuals from faith communities should be trained on power dynamics that play a role in oppression. They can then learn how to assist refugees in a culturally sensitive and humble manner that develops long-term mutually beneficial relationships. When prepared to facilitate empowering anti-oppressive relationships, faith communities can utilize their calling combined with their resources and congregants' skills to assist refugees in their process of empowerment. Social work knowledge, values and skills, combined with faith integration, provide an excellent base for this type of training and education that would facilitate the church to be better equipped to serve and empower the refugee community.

### **Tapping into the Assets of Faith Communities**

Faith communities consist of individuals with a desire to share the love of Christ to their neighbor. Congregations are also filled with people with a variety of skill sets. These skill sets range from mothers who can befriend and support other mothers, young people who have a heart for missions with international

people, but live locally, and professionals who desire to use their skills and passion of their profession to guide others with similar interests. All these people, and more, are an asset to the refugee community.

Examples of beneficial relationships that can develop through communities of faith include:

- Mentoring relationships that support cultural adjustment
- Conversational language opportunities
- Formal language classes
- Training on public transportation
- Driver's education
- Employment services
- Affordable housing
- Financial literacy training
- Entrepreneurship support
- Trade skill building
- Formal education opportunities/scholarships

### **Opportunities for Social Workers of Faith to Empower Faith Communities**

As we integrate faith with foundational social work knowledge, values and skills, Christian social workers can help faith communities think about how to integrate faith in culturally sensitive ways in order to reduce tension created from the power dynamics and seemingly manipulative proselytizing. Training in this area could help faith communities to not be perceived as controlling, manipulative and hurtful in attempts to love their neighbor as themselves, creating a better witness through their work. The North American Association of Christians in Social Work (NACSW) has a number of resources with a variety of perspectives on evangelism that could be a great resource to the church, including several related chapters in *Social Work and Christianity: Readings on the Integration of Christian Faith and Social Work Practice* (Scales & Kelly, 2016). Other books outside social work literature that are helpful resources include *Toxic Charity* (Lupton, 2011) and *When Helping Hurts* (Corbett & Fikkert, 2012). These resources could be shared as a part of training.

Furthermore, social workers are trained to understand dynamics of power, oppression and social justice in order to facilitate empowerment at the individual, family, group and community levels. Theories of social work, such as empowerment theory and anti-oppressive practice, along with our understanding of cultural competency, can help equip the church to be an asset for refugee resettlement services (Marsiglia & Kulis, 2014; Mulally, 2002; Lee, 1996). Social workers' knowledge and practice within the field of mental health can help church members understand and be equipped to support refugees in emotional healing from the trauma that led to their resettlement. At the macro level, social workers can facilitate community and organizational development by assisting communities with community-based assessments that will facilitate empower-

ment at the community level (Homan, 2015). For example, after this research was presented to the local community where the study was based, social work students from a Christian university were asked to utilize their community development assessment skills to assess assets in the communities where former refugees live in order to link assets with felt needs. The students were able to link resources in the community, such as transportation opportunities, with the refugee community, in order to assist them in their process of learning how to navigate the city and find their way to jobs and appointments. In addition, social workers can use social policy advocacy skills to advocate for the rights of refugees and build policy that welcomes, supports and empowers them to be actively engaged citizens in our society. Social workers can advocate for policies that line up with Biblical mandates. Social workers can also partner with faithful community professionals and congregants to advocate for policy that assists in the process of degree and credential recognition, so that former refugees can find work in their area of skill and training, allowing them to more quickly utilize their knowledge and skills to contribute to society in meaningful ways.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

As should be the case with qualitative studies, a strength of this study was the ability to learn and listen to the lived experiences of participants with a depth that cannot be offered in quantitative studies with a larger sample size. The thick and rich descriptions were only possible due to the in-depth interviews. Most of the people interviewed were in Northeast Ohio, which limited the interviews to the lived experiences of those in this particular region. Although results may be relevant to other regions of the U.S., this study may not be generalizable to all areas, especially countries that have different policies and practices for refugee resettlement. Even though clear themes developed as the data became saturated, interviewing more former refugees from a broader range of countries may have further confirmed the results. The results of this study provide opportunity for larger studies to test these results to confirm the transferability to other settings.

### **Conclusion**

This study adds to the literature on faith integration and refugee resettlement by furthering our understanding of how Christians and faith communities may be perceived in their work with refugees. Through providing education on refugee resettlement that combines the Biblical calling to welcome the sojourner, dispels the myths and fears related to refugees entering our community, and trains on how to facilitate culturally sensitive, anti-oppressive practices, faith communities have the potential to be a great asset to our refugee community. Social workers of Christian faith can utilize the results of this study, combined with their skills and mandate to serve vulnerable groups, in order to help educate, inform and be involved directly in helping faith communities be equipped to facilitate the empowerment of refugee communities in an anti-oppressive manner.

## References

- Administration for Children and Families (n.d.). History. In *office of refugee resettlement history*. Retrieved from <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/about/history>
- Alvesson, M. & Skoldberg, K. (2009). *Reflexive methodology: New vistas for qualitative research*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Barneche, K. (2014). How local faith communities can aid asylum seekers. *Forced Migration Review* 1(48), 45-47.
- Case, J.R. (2012). *An unpredictable gospel*. NY: Oxford University Press.
- Corbett and Fikkert (2012). *When helping hurts: How to alleviate poverty without hurting the poor...and yourself*. Chicago: Moody Publishers.
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Cronshaw, D. (2015). A commission 'great' for whom? Postcolonial contrapuntal readings of Matthew 28:18–20 and the irony of William Carey. *Transformation*. 33(2) 110–123.
- Darling, D. (2017, June 19). "Southern Baptists publicly condemned the alt-right. Here's why that matters: five takeaways from the SBC resolution." *Relevant*. Retrieved from [https://relevantmagazine.com/article/southern-baptists-publicly-condemned-the-alt-right-heres-why-that-matters/?utm\\_source=sendinblue&utm\\_campaign=06202017\\_\\_RELEVANT\\_This\\_Week&utm\\_medium=email](https://relevantmagazine.com/article/southern-baptists-publicly-condemned-the-alt-right-heres-why-that-matters/?utm_source=sendinblue&utm_campaign=06202017__RELEVANT_This_Week&utm_medium=email)
- Eby, J; Iverson, E; Smyers, J.; and Kekik, E. (2011). The faith community's role in refugee resettlement in the United States. *Journal of Refugee Studies*. 24 (3), 586-605.
- Eitel, K (1998). "To be or not to be?" The indigenous church question. In J. Terrie, E. Smith & J. Anderson (Eds.), *Missiology, An introduction to the foundations, history, and strategies of world missions* (pp. 301-317). Nashville: Broadman & Holman.
- Goodstein, L. (2017, January). "Christian leaders denounce Trump's plan to favor Christian refugees." *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/29/us/christian-leaders-denounce-trumps-plan-to-favor-christian-immigrants.html>
- Gore, L. (31 Jan 2017). "Southern Baptist leader responds to Trump's immigration order." *AL.com*. Retrieved from [http://www.al.com/news/index.ssf/2017/01/southern\\_baptist\\_leader\\_respon.html](http://www.al.com/news/index.ssf/2017/01/southern_baptist_leader_respon.html)
- Green, E. (27 Jan 2017). "Where Christian leaders stand on Trump's refugee policy" *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/01/christians-refugees-trump/514820/>
- Groody, D. (2015). Migrants and refugees: Christian faith and the globalization of solidarity. *International Review of Mission*, (2). 314.
- Homan, M.S. (2015). *Promoting Community Change: Making it Happen in the Real World*. Boston: Cengage Learning.
- Ives, N., Sinha, J., & Cnaan, R. (2010). Who is welcoming the stranger? Exploring faith-based service provision to refugees in Philadelphia. *Journal of Religion & Spirituality In Social Work*, 29(1), 71-89.
- Johnson, L. (1 Feb 2017). "Franklin Graham: Trump refugee order is right, but this still needs to happen." *CBN News*. Retrieved from <http://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/world/2017/february/franklin-graham-trump-refugee-order-is-right-but-this-still-needs-to-happen>
- Lapan, S. (2004). Evaluation Studies. In deMarrais, K.B & Lapan, S.D., (Eds.) *Foundations for research: methods of inquiry in education and the social sciences* (pp. 235-248). Laurence Earlbaum Associates: Mahwah, NJ.

- Lee, J.A.B. (1996). The empowerment approach to social work practice. In F.J. Turner (Ed.), *Social work treatment: Interlocking theoretical approaches*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. pp. 218-249. NY: The Free Press.
- Liamputtong, P. (2009). *Qualitative research methods*. NY: Oxford University Press.
- Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Lofland, J., Snow, D., Anderson, L., & Lofland, L. H. (2006). *Analyzing social settings: A guide to qualitative observation and analysis*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Lupton, R.D. (2011). *Toxic charity: How churches and charities hurt those they help (and how to reverse it)*. NY: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Marsiglia, F., & Kulis, S. (2014). *Diversity, oppression, and change: Culturally grounded social work*. Chicago, IL: Lyceum Books.
- McKinnon, S. L. (2009). "Bringing New Hope and New Life": The Rhetoric of Faith-Based Refugee Resettlement Agencies. *Howard Journal of Communications*, 20(4), 313-332. doi:10.1080/10646170903300747
- Mino, K. (2014). Campbell N. Moody's reflections on the Christian mission. *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*. 38 (3). 135-138.
- Mullaly, 2002. *Challenging oppression: A critical approach*. NY: Oxford.
- Nawyn, S. J. (2006). Faith, Ethnicity, and Culture in Refugee Resettlement. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 49(11), 1509-1527. New American Network (n.d.). *Why New Americans?* Retrieved from <http://newamericannetwork.org/>
- Padgett, D. (2008). *Qualitative methods in social work research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Riera, J., & Poirier, M. (2014). 'Welcoming the stranger' and UNHCR's cooperation with faith-based organisations. *Forced Migration Review*, 1(48), 64-67.
- Scales, T. L. & Kelly, M.S., eds. (2016). *Christianity and Social Work*. Readings on the integration of Christian faith and social work practice (5<sup>th</sup> ed). Botsford, CT: NACSW.
- Shellnut, K. (2017, January). Evangelical experts oppose trump's refugee ban. *Christianity Today*. Retrieved from <http://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2017/January/evangelical-experts-oppose-trump-plan-to-ban-refugees-syria.html>
- Smith, E. (1998). Culture: The milieu of missions. In J. Terrie, E. Smith & J. Anderson (Eds.), *Missiology, An introduction to the foundations, history, and strategies of world missions* (pp. 245-277). Nashville: Broadman & Holman.
- Tennent, T.C. (2010). *Invitation to world missions: A trinitarian missiology for the 21st century*. Grand Rapids: Kregel.
- Tufford, L., & Newman, P. (2010). Bracketing in qualitative research. *Qualitative Social Work*, 11 (1), 80-96. UNHCR Retrieved from [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1H2xLug\\_iizZ\\_IU5ut\\_McYiRx8JBhiBmBXuR9OQ7P8k/edit#](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1H2xLug_iizZ_IU5ut_McYiRx8JBhiBmBXuR9OQ7P8k/edit#)
- United Nations High Commission for Refugees. (2017). US Resettlement Agencies. Retrieved from <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/us-resettlement-agencies.htm>
- Valtonen, K. (2002). Social work with immigrants and refugees: Developing a participatory-based framework for anti-oppressive practice, part 2. *The British Journal of Social Work*. 32 (1), 113-120.
- Washington Post. (February 8, 2017). Top evangelical leaders from all 50 states call on President Trump and Vice-President Pence to Support Refugees.
- Zoma, M. (2014). Respecting faiths, avoiding harm: psychosocial assistance in Jordan and the United States. *Forced Migration Review* 1(48), 45-47.

### **End Note**

Authors would like to thank Malone University for funding this sabbatical research project, along with research assistants Emily Mattioli, Christina Stump, Paige Jennings, and Amber Friscia for their hours of support in transcription work and other assistance in research.

# Technology in Social Work Practice: Ethical Considerations for Faithful Social Workers

---

*Nick Cross and Michael S. Kelly*

*“Recall that the original intent of the Internet was to deliver weapons of mass destruction. Now, we see social workers employing it as a system to deliver social services.” (S. M. Marson, “A Selective History of Internet Technology and Social Work,” 1997, p. 48).*

## Introduction

In this chapter we will explore three main topics: 1) an overview of social work and technology to date, in both practice and social work education settings; 2) ethical considerations for social workers and technology usage; and 3) a Christian perspective on social workers' use of technology. After taking a brief look at the history of social work and technology adaptation, we will review a case study from a school social worker's perspective, with micro, mezzo, and macro level implications. We will also explore the *NASW Code of Ethics* and the *NASW, ASWB, CSWE, & CSWA Standards for Technology in Social Work Practice* and provide concrete examples of ethical considerations. We will conclude by further exploring Christian social work perspectives related to the ethical use of technology.

To be sure, technology is a very broad term. One could argue that technology has been improving since the invention of stone tablets and flint and steel. Indeed since Creation, humans have been innovating and finding better and more efficient ways to do things. The first recorded use of technology in the social service sector was in 373 BC when an abacus was used to track donations (Reti, 2014). And indeed, social workers have a mixed history when it comes to accepting and using various technologies throughout the years, but, as we'll see in this chapter, social workers have a responsibility to be at the forefront of technology, for themselves and for the benefit of the clients they serve. Technology can simultaneously improve our practice and open us to new areas of liability. Regardless of one's personal beliefs about technology, our clients will be using new technological tools and social workers of all stripes need to understand the impact it has on our clients (and on us).

## **Social Workers and Technology: Specific Applications and Challenges**

Parrott and Madoc-Jones (2008) wrote that social workers have a history of being reluctant users of new technology, citing a 1911 article by Mary Richmond calling on social workers to accept and utilize telephones! The authors share a few theories about why social workers may be slow to adopt new technologies including: 1) technology is a male-dominated field while social work is female-dominated; 2) technology uses ideas such as logic, mechanical processing, and systemization while social work holds ideas such as compassion, positive regard, empathy, and relationships as priorities; 3) technology is for those with means and traditionally social work has focused more on individuals who don't have the same access (Parrott & Madoc-Jones, 2008). The authors discuss the advancement of electronic medical records (EMR) and how that process has influenced social workers. They write that while efficiencies have been gained in EMR, one could also argue that EMR has systematized social work practice too much and, in some ways, social workers have lost their autonomy of practice in order to meet the needs of the EMR.

In addition to threats to professional autonomy, social workers may also see technology tools as a threat to their ability to do their jobs effectively. One study found that errors in child protection cases may have increased due to the electronic systems being used to collect and track data (Gillingham, 2011). The study found that front-line staff were spending too much time entering data, were having trouble capturing all the data collected into prescribed fields, were having trouble adhering to timelines and were favoring more computer-generated risk profiles instead of practitioner-informed nuances in risk. Still, EMR and other data tracking systems have a lot of potential and are being used successfully in clinical settings to track data trends, patient outcomes, and much more. Campbell (2018) urges practitioners to use the data collected to improve practice and for both micro and macro level advocacy. EMR or other types of client management systems are being used to coordinate care and integration between agencies; a hospital in Maryland is using their EMR to track basic resource needs and then refer to a partner social service agency that can meet those needs (Gottlieb, Tirozzi, Manchanda, Burns, & Sandel, 2015).

For these electronic records to be successful, social workers need to be at the decision-making table for design, development, and implementation. Social workers should not leave these decisions up to information technology professionals, management, or even sister professions (nursing, counseling, etc). This "practice-led" approach would be able to take into account the various needs of social workers, while also collecting important information to inform practice, management, and funding partners (Baker, Warburton, Hodgkin, & Pascal, 2014).

Technology has had other positive outcomes: it has allowed greater access for services in rural communities or for those with specific needs such as voice recognition and enhanced visual display boards. Parrott and Madoc-Jones (2008) cited an article by Johns Hopkins University Political Scientist Marlin Bennett indicating that individuals and groups have more power in cyberspace than

they might have in other contexts. Social workers can use the Internet to form groups of people who can advocate for their needs when their voices might have been silenced previously.

### **Social Work Education and Technology: Still Figuring Out How to Make it all Work**

Social work education is another area where technology is being used in innovative ways. One study used Second Life as a training tool for new social workers (Martin, 2017). Second Life, less commonly used than when it was first introduced in 2003, is a virtual world used to create an identity, travel to different places, and interact with various people. In the study, a virtual health clinic was created and social work students were taught to use Second Life as a way to practice doing therapy with clients. Due to a high learning curve of the technology for both professors and students, this training tool did not become popular. The study found that it did not enhance the student experience and the technological barriers were too high (Martin, 2017).

While not providing specific tools to use for education, Goldingay & Boddy (2017) write about the importance of social work students using technology in an academic setting to gain the experience of boundary setting, self-disclosures, and respectful dialogue. The use of technology in the classroom also allows professors to track student engagement and growth. Curcio, Dipace, and Norlund (2016) wrote about the valuable role of virtual reality, augmented reality, and mixed reality in the college classroom. Their research and literature review found evidence that using one of these technologies improved educational achievement while also increasing student engagement. By creating games, 3D simulations, and virtual environments specifically for educational attainment, teachers challenge their students to explore, manipulate concepts, and represent their ideas differently (Curcio, Dipace, & Norlund, 2016).

Virtual Reality can take learning opportunities such as role-playing to the next level. A few examples from the literature show new virtual reality programs being used to train students to reflect on barriers to clients' experiences in their community (American Association of Universities, 2018), post disaster response (Getz, 2018), and group management skills (Beal, 2017). Initial research has shown some success with using virtual reality in addiction treatment, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (Getz, 2018), and pro-social skill development in youth (Smokowski & Hartung, 2003). Virtual reality is definitely an area for social work education and practice to continue growing (Getz, 2018).

### **Clinical Social Work and the Internet**

Huguet, et al. (2016) studied the use of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and mobile phone applications in Canada and found some interesting results. Through their screening process, they identified 117 unique apps that met their criteria for helping treat people with depression. While their exclusion

criteria were fairly strict, they originally identified 326 apps in the marketplace by searching for depression and 253 that had been identified in published manuscripts. These searches were completed in 2015. They found that there is plenty of room for improvement as the apps with the most fidelity to treatment protocols weren't necessarily the most user-friendly. Two major concerns that they identified were how users might feel if they found treatment to be ineffective, speculating that a failed technological intervention might worsen a mental illness and be a barrier to getting face-to-face treatment. A second concern would be that the more user-friendly apps (with adherence to theoretical protocols) would receive higher user ratings in the marketplace and thus more downloads, but not necessarily better treatment outcomes.

Other researchers have built off this research and have found similar results (Ameringen, Turna, Khalesi, Pullia, & Patterson, 2017; Stawarz, Preist, Tallon, Wiles, & Coyle, 2018). Grist, Porter, & Stallard (2017) looked specifically at the adolescent population and use of mental health mobile apps. They conclude:

...that currently there is no evidence to support the effectiveness of apps designed for adolescents with mental health problems. Because we did not identify any study participants younger than nine years, there is no evidence to support the effectiveness of apps designed for children with mental health problems either. Our conclusion is consistent with previous reviews and highlights that the evidence base has barely increased over the past four years.... Given the significant increase in the availability of mobile apps, the lack of evidence to support their safety or effectiveness with vulnerable populations is concerning (Grist et al., 2017, p. 9).

Ameringen, et al. (2017) raise similar concerns about the lack of research supporting current applications. They cite the potential for positive impacts, but are concerned about the lack of studies and the poor quality of those studies as well. They also noted that any change in an established treatment protocol needs to be validated against a current protocol before its effectiveness can be truly determined.

Stawarz, et al. (2018) confirmed the above information but also talked about who should be responsible for ensuring that apps do what they claim to do and are being used responsibly. Is it the app developer, the app store that approves it, or the therapist who recommends it? They do not provide a definitive answer, but instead make a case for each of these stakeholders to be accountable for the apps. They conclude that it is important for a team of medical providers and app developers to work together to create an engaging, evidence-based application that could supplement or supplant treatment-as-usual.

## **Youth and the Internet**

Research conducted by the Pew Center in 2018 found that 95% of teenagers (13-17 year olds) have access to smartphones, 88% have access to computers at home, and 84% have access to game consoles at home (Anderson & Jiang,

2018). Additionally, 89% of the surveyed teenagers were either almost constantly online (45%) or online multiple times daily (44%). This means that almost every teenager is deeply connected to their cell phones and to the online communities they have created. The survey found that Snapchat was the most frequently used platform (35%) while YouTube was a close second at (32%). Instagram was a distant third with 15% and only 10% used Facebook. Other sites such as Reddit, Twitter, and Tumblr are used even less frequently.

An area that is often brought up in mental health circles is cyberbullying and mental illness such as depression and anxiety due to social media usage. Teens in the survey present a very mixed opinion about social media usage with 45% saying it is neither positive nor negative, 31% saying it is positive and 24% as negative (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). Ways that teens reported that social media are negative cite the following reasons: more bullying and spreading rumors (27% of those with negative views), harm relationships and causes less meaningful interactions (17%), distorts reality (15%), teens use it too much (14%), causes teens to give in to peer pressure (12%), concerns that it could lead to psychological issues or drama. Almost half of the teens surveyed say they feel compelled to either post content that makes them look good (45%) or get lots of likes or comments (37%; Anderson & Jiang, 2019).

On the positive side, 81% of teens say that social media use makes them feel connected to what is happening in their friends' lives. About 70% of teens feel that social media allow them to connect with friend's feelings, that they have a group of people who will support them, and that they have a place to show their creative side. The main positive effect of social media is that they allow teens to stay connected to each other (40% of the 31% who say it is positive), greater access to news (16%), connect with those with similar interests (15%), entertainment (9%), self-expression (7%), support from others (5%), and learning new things (4%)(Anderson & Jiang, 2018).

Looking specifically from a mental health perspective, research shows that youth who are victims of cyberbullying are more likely to have mental health issues (Bottino, et.al., 2015; Dehue, Bolman, & Völlink, 2008;;Elgar et al., 2014; Fahy et al., 2016; Kim, Colwell, Kata, Boyle, & Georgiades, 2018; Landstedt, & Persson, 2014; Quintana-Orts & Rey 2018; ). Definitions of cyberbullying and mental health differ across the literature and, therefore, prevalence rates also vary. Prevalence also depends on age, as younger kids have experienced less bullying, but as they get older the prevalence of being bullied increases (Bottino, et.al., 2015; Elgar, et.al 2014). Landstedt and Persson (2014) report that up to 72% of adolescents have experienced cyberbullying.

Roles in cyberbullying vary between being a victim, bully, or the bully-victim (who has been in both roles). Fahy, et al. (2016) found that almost half of participants in cyberbullying were bully-victims. They also found that the victim and bully-victim were more likely to be depressed or have social anxiety, while the bully was more likely to have aggressive tendencies or conduct disorder later in life.

Cyberbullying is found to be more toxic than traditional bullying (Bottino, et.al., 2015; Elgar, et.al 2014; Kim, Colwell, Kata, Boyle, & Georgiades, 2018)

and there are a variety of possible reasons. Cyberbullying tends to be more permanent, is visible to more people, is easily repeated (a bullying message can be forwarded, copied, or saved into a screenshot, etc.). Cyberbullying can be hard to escape since we may use our phones and other electronics day or night. Spaces that are typically safe spaces could be tainted (for example, hiding in the bedroom, one can still pick up the phone and be bullied), and parents often do not know it is happening or do not know how to use the technology (Bottino, et.al., 2015; Dehue, Bolman, & Völlink, 2008; Kim, Colwell, Kata, Boyle, & Georgiades, 2018; Elgar, et.al 2014;;).

Parents might not be aware of the issues of cyberbullying. One study found that parents underreported by almost half that their child was a victim of bullying or was the bully (Dehue, Bolman, & Völlink, 2008). The same study found that the majority of parents set rules for youth Internet usage (60% set time limits and 80% set rules about content viewed). Interestingly, Bottino, et.al (2015) reported that about half of adolescents do not report cyberbullying to an adult. The two main reasons given were that the adolescents wanted to resolve it on their own and that they were afraid of losing access to their technology which would increase social isolation. Two resilience factors that were found are family dinner time (Elgar, et.al., 2014) and forgiveness (Quintana-Orts & Rey, 2018). Elgar, et.al. (2014) found that eating dinner together at least three times a week had a moderating impact of cyberbullying. They presented research that found family dinners represented an increased level of parent involvement in a child's life and could also be a specific tool for families to support their child. Quintana-Orts and Rey (2018) presented research that found forgiveness predicted better psychological adjustment and could serve as a moderating effect for the victims of bullying. The idea of forgiveness resonates within our Christian context and, not surprisingly, has a positive impact on a variety of mental illnesses (Quintana-Orts & Rey, 2018).

### **Case example: Youth, School Social Work and Screen Time**

As a school social worker in an elementary school, I (Nick) deal with a surprising number of issues related to social media, especially considering that none of my students are 13 yet. My school also has students who spend large portions of their days playing video games or otherwise engaged by a screen. What follows are three approaches of dealing with technology in a school setting from macro, mezzo, and micro social work levels.

*Macro* - A lot of research is available about the impact of technology, specifically screen time, on developing children. Providing information across the school to both parents and students about the impacts (positive and negative) of screen time can be helpful. However, parents can benefit from both support and ideas about how to address this "addiction." Including alternative ideas to fill free time as well as suggestions about ways to limit screen time can be effective. This can be done via handouts and conversations at open houses, conferences, and family nights; in newsletters sent home; on social media, websites and other outlets that parents frequent. Parents who received this information

all appreciated it and predicted that it would be helpful. Macro practice in this setting could also include advocacy with school administration about policies related to cyberbullying, both during and outside of the school day.

*Mezzo* - At this level of practice a social worker could meet with a group of parents or students impacted by a situation on social media. Examples could include a group of students who have been texting (chatting or commenting on a social media channel) when the conversation turns negative and becomes an issue of bullying. When a group of students using Music.ly started making fun of one student's video, it became an issue that had to be dealt with in the school setting. Families were brought in to help mediate the conflict and to be made aware of how their children were using the social media channel. This incident also resulted in conversations with the entire 5th grade about what bullying is and about the seriousness of that cyberbullying.

*Micro* - This level of work is in one-to-one situations or with two or three students making poor decisions with social media. This could be the result of a larger group issue that was started by one student. Another example involves two students in a Snapchat getting into a cyberbullying situation with sexual undertones. Social workers met with the entire group, but spent additional time with the two students to understand the dynamics between them. In addition to meeting with the students, the team met with the families to ensure that everyone understood the seriousness of the incidents. These conversations resulted in two outcomes: school social workers recommended outside therapy for both students and created a safety plan so that the students could feel safe at school. This safety plan included moving a student to a different classroom, turning in personal technology every morning, and limiting access to iPads, computers, and other technology during the school day. In this instance the school was only able to enforce a safety plan at the school, though the plan also included the students not friending or following each other on social media.

## **Religion and the Internet**

Heidi Campbell, a researcher in the field of Internet Studies, has highlighted research on multiple areas of religious usages of the Internet. These included the exploration of religious rituals and practices online, how the Internet influences definitions and understandings of religion, the relationship between online and offline forms of religion, and the study of religious community, identity and authority in relation to the Internet (Campbell, 2013). Her research indicates that some internet users are creating a more individualized form of religion, compiling rituals and ideas from a variety of sources and using the Internet to find other people who share their ideas. This is different from traditional access to religion, which typically starts in a local community. Some people are using the Internet to expand their "offline" religious practices into the online world. Campbell argues: "Identity online becomes an act of performance, in which individuals select, assemble, and present their senses of self through a variety of different resources available to them" (2013 p. 686).

Christian perspectives on the internet seem mixed, with many religious leaders viewing the Internet as a new place to do ministry while others think that face-to-face ministry should be the main method, with some online communication used as a supplement to offline work (; Tudor & Herteliu, 2016). Some religious persons avoid social media and the Internet due to concerns about personal piety, inappropriate images, innuendo, or other internet abuses (White, Tella, & Ampofo, 2016). White, Tella, and Ampofo (2016) have reported on “cyber churches” that are just like a regular church except that they are found completely online; for example, the website Global Media Outreach (2012) claims that they’ve had 1.77 million “likes” on their page and that they’ve been able to leverage that data to connect people with “online missionaries” (Global Media Outreach, 2019, White et al., 2016).

In his book *Illusions of Freedom: Thomas Merton and Jacques Ellul on Technology and the Human Condition*, Jeffrey Shaw (2014) lays out a case that technology has negatively impacted the work of the church, self-transcendence, and the individual’s search for true freedom. Lewis (2018) argues that social media has both benefits and drawbacks for Christians, highlighting the opinion that social media are part of a sinful world and therefore have limitations. However, social media are also being viewed as the newest places to live out a missional life as a “digital disciple,” sharing the story of Jesus through our online lives (Lewis, 2018). Schuurman (2013) writes in *Shaping a Digital World: Faith, Culture, and Computer Technology*: “If technology is, in fact, a distinct cultural activity in which human beings exercise freedom and responsibility in response to God, then we need to use and develop computer technology in ways that honor God” (p. 26). He uses the themes of Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration to understand how the Bible could inform one’s approach to using technology. Schuurman posits that this is a framework through which Christians can take a reasonable approach to technology. Indeed, Pope Benedict XVI is quoted as saying that “there exists a Christian way of being present in the digital world: this takes the form of a communication which is honest and open, responsible and peaceful to others” (Danaan, 2016, p. 65). Byers, (2013) reflects on the discipleship calling of Christians in relation to technology, arguing that if Christians are the way that God is revealed on earth, then the way Christians present themselves online can be a reflection of that same witness and communication.

### **Ethics of the Use of Technology: Recent Social Work Scholarship and Policy Developments**

An increasing number of articles have been written about social work and the ethical use of technology. In fact, the *Australian Social Work Journal* published a special issue on technology in 2017. In the lead editorial, “e-Professionalism and the Ethical Use of Technology in Social Work,” McAuliffe & Nipperess (2017) argued that the social work profession must evolve in relationship to technology use and challenged the Australian Association of Social Work to

be a leader in these efforts, including big data, and the ethical use of data to support the social welfare sector (Gillingham & Graham, 2017). This includes careful consideration of ethics (Reamer, 2017). Boddy and Dominelli (2017) continue on the theme of ethics: “The challenge for social work is to use the benefits and opportunities that social media enables, without causing harm and reflect critically on their incorporation into everyday practice” (p. 174). Social workers have the critical skills needed to navigate the tricky issues related to social media and new technologies and should warn clients about the possible dangers of social media use and the for-profit motives behind social media as part of their practice (Boddy & Dominelli, 2017).

Shevellar (2017) focuses more on technology that fosters community participation instead of assessment- or treatment-based technologies and their ethical implications for social workers. Social workers need to have an online presence to be taken seriously, but also must ensure that posts do not contain private information about themselves or clients. We must realize the permanence of postings and their potential long-term impacts.

Reflected in this emerging scholarship is a growing sense that the field of social work needed to more fully reckon with the seismic changes in technology use for social work practice and the ethical implications for social workers. Fortunately, we now see some significant movement in social work to better understand how to use technology ethically with our clients. In June 2017, the NASW, ASWB, CSWE, and CSWA *Standards for Technology in Social Work Practice* (Standards) were released after much feedback and review. The working group created an ethical framework that can guide social work practice and be useful in the years to come, even as technology changes. The Standards are a supplement to the *NASW Code of Ethics* and provide specific examples of ethical uses of technology across 55 standards in four areas: provision of information to the public, designing and delivering services, gathering, managing, and storing information, and social work education and supervision (NASW, 2017a). Some of the standards may seem commonplace or simply add the word “technology,” but some are more challenging and thought-provoking.

While the written standards are organized into the four areas mentioned above, it can be helpful to also think about them from the following perspectives: Clinical, Administrative/Macro, Education, and a fourth category that pertains to all social workers. All social workers must know and understand the entirety of the standards, regardless of their practice focus. Authors such as Reamer (2017) and Boddy & Dominelli (2017) posit that many ethical challenges social workers face could be eased by clearer professional expectations at the level of the agency, state licensing boards, federal policies, and national associations. While the *Standards* may not state explicitly that social workers should not friend or follow a client on social media, an agency could create such a policy to clear up any ambiguity for the client or social worker. It is in this space of ambiguity that many social workers operate, so let’s look more carefully at the *Standards*.

## The NASW Code of Ethics and Technology

The NASW Code of Ethics provides a foundation for **all** social workers. For example, Standard 1.01 states that “when social workers use technology to provide information to the public, they shall take reasonable steps to ensure that the information is accurate, respectful, and consistent with the *NASW Code of Ethics*” (NASW, 2017b). It is not clear whether this applies to professional or personal communications on social media, addressed later in the Standards 2.09, 2.10, 2.19, 2.24, 2.27, 3.02. The line is blurred when a social worker has connections from a professional network on Twitter, Facebook, or LinkedIn.

It is also important to remember that once information is posted online, the original poster loses control of the message and any context related to it (Standard 2.24). Many lives have been ruined by a message that lost context and was exploited by others, but also people have shown poor judgement in their online activity and paid dearly for it. Ronson (2015) interviewed subjects who had been on the receiving end of Twitter shaming who lost jobs, had their lives threatened, and had their reputations ruined for something they meant as a joke or for information taken out of context. Both as Christians and social workers, we are called to be peacemakers (Matthew 5:9), encouragers (John 17:23), and bridge builders (Ephesians 4:11-13). This can be done in part by being careful about what information we share and by ensuring it is accurate (Standard 3.06).

Standard 1.02 “Representation of Self and Accuracy of Information: When social workers use technology to provide information to the public, they shall take reasonable steps to ensure the accuracy and validity of the information they disseminate” (NASW, 2017b). Social workers should ensure that credentials are used accurately, speak only within their scope of practice, and disseminate accurate information about themselves and others. Social workers should use disclaimers to state that their views are their own and not the agency’s, or that this is a personal, not a professional position. Also, keeping personal pages/accounts set to a higher privacy setting could help with some of the blurring of identities and limit a client’s ability to find out private information. This standard includes making sure to only promote services that are certified and that fall within your area of competence. At some level, this includes reviewing your previous postings to ensure their ongoing accuracy, providing updates if a company goes out of business.

Using a search engine for finding information about a client or a professional colleague should be done with caution. In fact, the NASW Code of Ethics 1.03.i (2017a) says, “Social workers should obtain client consent before conducting an electronic search on the client. Exceptions may arise when the search is for purposes of protecting the client or other people from serious, foreseeable, and imminent harm, or for other compelling professional reasons.” Searching for a client without consent or a compelling emergency strips the client of their right to self-determination and expectations of privacy. If a social worker wants to search for information about a client as part of the intake or ongoing work, this

should be clearly spelled out in the informed consent process, including why it is a valuable part of the treatment process. Searching for colleagues (3.10) should be done only to verify information for a client such as credentials, and areas of practice or expertise.

### **Ethics for Clinical Social Workers**

Clinicians and social workers, along with their clients, must be aware of the impact of using a specific technology in practice and the clinician is responsible for understanding and implementing technology correctly. The notion of informed consent is one of the bedrocks of social work practice. Informed Consent (2.04) could include a wide range of items related to technology such as making sure the client has access to the correct technology required for services (2.05, 2.21) including ability to pay any costs that might be associated with data plan usage, where the client might access services (at a public library, on their phone, an understanding of what electronic data may be stored (3.01), how to access their records (3.08), how to communicate with the clinician (2.19, 2.27, 2.07, and 2.09), what would happen if there was a disruption in technology access (2.12), and what plans are in place for an emergency situation (2.13). Informed consent should also include some time spent explaining the risks and rewards of a specific technological platform or intervention and the possibility that not all situations are appropriate for technological intervention. Social workers should be clear about how they can be reached for administrative tasks (rescheduling appointments), clarifying questions (homework), and crisis support. Clients need to be presented with clear information about how to interact with their social worker.

It is becoming more common for the intake/assessment process to include information about technology usage (2.05). This could be as specific as time spent on certain sites or games or gathering a general understanding of how much screen time a client spends in any given day. During the intake process, it might also be helpful to explain why you are asking these types of questions and to ensure you are not judging their responses.

Individual social workers are also required to follow the laws (licensure, mandated reporting) for the jurisdiction in which they practice and the jurisdiction in which the client lives or even might temporarily be (2.03). This includes following any applicable laws regarding data privacy such as the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPPA) and making sure any client information is stored securely (verifying the data is HIPPA-compliant. If a social worker is using a specific technology that requires certification, the social worker must maintain that certification (2.02). This also includes being competent in the technology being used for practice (2.06). For example, if using Second Life as a location for therapy, the social worker must understand and explain to the client all the risks and benefits and be able to use the platform competently.

## **Ethics for Administrators and Agencies**

From an administrative perspective, an agency should have policies that support and promote appropriate technology usage for both employees and clients. Technology can be beneficial in increasing therapist efficiency (Parrott & Madoc-Jones, 2008).

It is the agency's responsibility to have clear guidelines for their employees that follow the *NASW Code of Ethics* and state requirements. It helps the social worker to have a clear policy when working with a client who wants to push boundaries. These policies should be shared with all clients as part of the intake and informed consent process and include information related to electronic payments (2.08), access to online records, including how confidential information will be stored and handled (3.04), breaches of confidentiality due to hacking or lost equipment (3.05), and possible disruptions of services due to outdated technology or technical errors (2.12, 3.14).

Policies may also reflect expectations related to technology use in supervision of employees (4.12) as well as field supervision of social work students (4.11). Agencies should ensure they have the proper releases for testimonials (2.14) and ensure that any information posted on a website or social media is accurate and reflects current best practices in the field (1.02). Agencies should employ technology professionals who are up to date on the latest information including risk management and security while also making sure that all employees are competent in the technology they are required to use (2.23).

## **Ethics for Higher Education and Supervision**

The entire fourth section of the standards is focused on higher education and supervision of social workers. Educators have the important role of training the next generation of social workers to make sure they are ready to face any professional challenges that may arise, including new technology and ideas that could disrupt the profession. Educators should use technology within their competence and related to the particular context of their curriculum. Social work education should also include education about technology and its ethical use within the profession (including risks and benefits). Like all professionals, educators need to stay current on technology, both related to practice and within the educational domain.

Faculty in many disciplines are using social media to enhance their coursework whether for research, class discussions, or experiments. Students should be provided with social media policies to help them consider ethical issues that might arise such as implications of friending a professor or classmate, using professional language, permanency of the medium, and sharing information with others. In addition to social media policies, students need guidance for technology disruptions such as a power outage, or computer crash, and how these might impact their work or grades. Faculty should also clarify for students how they will be evaluated on technology use such as posting in forums or tweeting, and how these activities that relate to the overall course work.

Technology-enabled cheating should be a concern for faculty. All student submissions, such as tests and papers, should include some step to help validate authenticity, originality, and authorship. It is important to ensure that one student does not try to submit a paper or take a test for another student, and technology tools are available for faculty and students.

As in other online practice situations, it is important to understand the cultural, social, and legal context of students, especially with distance learning classes. All students may not be able to afford the latest technologies or have a specific device, so faculty must be sensitive to this when setting requirements. The standards indicate that educators must ensure students have access to technological supports they need, for example providing detailed instructions for technology use or helping with a computer malfunction.

Field supervisors must teach students about the organization's use of technology, including aspects such as the social media policy, interacting with clients, and online boundaries. Supervision gets only one stand-alone standard. In addition to following other standards and laws for supervision, online supervisors need to ensure that they are able to adequately assess learning and competence using the chosen medium. Otherwise, supervision falls into the same standards mentioned previously with the supervisee as the client.

### **Implications for SW Research and Practice**

This is an exciting time for social workers using technology. There is a growing body of research showing the impacts of technology and its use in clinical work and technology is making non-clinical aspects of social work easier too. The evidence base for technology-based therapeutic interventions continues to expand and, as new technologies come, more changes can be made. One challenge for this is that research will always lag behind innovation. New platforms will be developed and adopted in common usage before researchers have a solid evidence base to support it. In this regard, social workers and other researchers need to adapt and to test new developments quickly. Can we develop a robust enough evidence base and research framework that could be applied to new technologies?

Of course, ethical issues will certainly be a part of the landscape and social workers will need to find a balance between ethics and innovation. The current NASW Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice have created an open-ended framework which can help guide innovation and development of new technology. Social workers who use the research base and ethical frameworks as their foundation will have a solid starting point for any innovative ideas they develop. Getz (2018) shares that Patrick Bordnick, a leader in using virtual reality in social work says, "The future requires more collaboration between those that have the technology skills and those that have the clinical skills. You need to have the right virtual environment in order for the therapy to be effective" (p. 6).

As noted earlier, Schuurman (2013) believes that Christians should be developing and using technology in a way that honors God. Indeed, Scriptures

such as 1 Corinthians 10:31 implore us to honor God in everything that we do. And other verses like Jeremiah 29:7 could be interpreted to say that Christians are called to innovate and to change their communities via technology. The research shows that some Christians are using technology to build Christian community and intentional discipleship, as well as using it as a tool for ministry in a “technological mission field.”

If social workers are to truly empower service-users, then engagement with technology at all levels—political, organizational—is vital (Parrott & Madoc-Jones, 2008, p. 193). Technology will continue to be a part of our daily lives, new technologies will be developed, and new ways of doing social work will come into being. With technology’s ubiquitous nature, social work will be left behind if the profession does not continue to adapt and grow with innovation. Research about the impact of new technologies will continue to guide social work best practices. Using existing frameworks and knowledge, social workers can make informed decisions about how to serve their clients - no matter the setting or client. Social workers have an ethical responsibility to understand the risks and rewards of any technology they use and must have an informed consent process for its use.

## References

- American Association of Universities. (2018, October 10). Virtual reality training for social workers. Retrieved from <https://www.aau.edu/research-scholarship/featured-research-topics/virtual-reality-training-social-workers>
- Ameringen, M., Turna, J., Khalesi, Z., Pullia, K., & Patterson, B. (2017). There is an app for that! The current state of mobile applications (apps) for DSM-5 obsessive-compulsive disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder, anxiety and mood disorders. *Depression & Anxiety (1091-4269)*, 34(6), 526–539.
- Anderson, M., & Jiang, J. (2018, November 30). Teens, Social Media & Technology 2018. Retrieved from <http://www.pewinternet.org/2018/05/31/teens-social-media-technology-2018/>
- Anderson, M., & Jiang, J. (2019, January 07). Teens’ social media habits and experiences. Retrieved from <http://www.pewinternet.org/2018/11/28/teens-social-media-habits-and-experiences/>
- Baker, S., Warburton, J., Hodgkin, S., & Pascal, J. (2014). Reimagining the relationship between social work and information communication technology in the network society. *Australian Social Work*, 67(4), 467–478.
- Beal, B. (2017, January 02). Teaching group dynamics using virtual reality. Retrieved from <https://www.socialworker.com/feature-articles/technology-articles/teaching-group-dynamics-using-virtual-reality/>
- Boddy, J., & Dominelli, L. (2017). Social media and social work: The challenges of a new ethical space. *Australian Social Work*, 70(2), 172–184.
- Bottino, S. M. B., Bottino, C. M. C., Regina, C. G., Correia, A., V. L., & Ribeiro, W. S.. (2015). Cyberbullying and adolescent mental health: Systematic review. *Cadernos de Saúde Pública*, 31(3), 463-475.
- Byers, A. (2013). *Theomedia: The media of God and the digital age*. Wipf and Stock Publishers.

- Campbell, H. A. (2013). Religion and the internet: A microcosm for studying internet trends and implications. *New Media & Society, 15*(5), 680–694.
- Campbell, M. (2018). An engaged electronic medical record for social good. *Health & Social Work, 43*(2), 131–133.
- Curcio, I.D., Dipace, A., & Norlund, A. (2016). Virtual realities and education, *Research on Education and Media, 8*(2), 60-68
- Danaan, G. (2016). Mass media and Christian evangelisation in the digital age: Towards sustaining 'mission' in the Catholic Archdiocese of Jos. *Journal of Arts and Humanities, 5*(7), 61-73.
- Dehue, F., Bolman, C., & Völlink, T. (2008). Cyberbullying: Youngsters' experiences and parental perception. *CyberPsychology & Behavior, 11*(2), 217–223.
- Elgar, F. J., Napolitano, A., Saul, G., Dirks, M. A., Craig, W., Poteat, V. P., ... & Koenig, B. W. (2014). Cyberbullying victimization and mental health in adolescents and the moderating role of family dinners. *JAMA Pediatrics, 168*(11), 1015
- Fahy, A. E., Stansfeld, S. A., Smuk, M., Smith, N. R., Cummins, S., & Clark, C. (2016). Longitudinal associations between cyberbullying involvement and adolescent mental health. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 59*(5), 502-509.
- Getz, L. (2018, March/April). Social services innovations: A whole new world — Virtual reality in social work. *Social Work Today, 18*(2), 6. Retrieved from: <https://www.socialworktoday.com/archive/MA18p6.shtml>
- Gillingham, P. (2011). Computer-based information systems and human service organisations: Emerging problems and future possibilities. *Australian Social Work, 64*(3), 299–312.
- Gillingham, P., & Graham, T. (2017). Big data in social welfare: The development of a critical perspective on social work's latest "Electronic Turn." *Australian Social Work, 70*(2), 135-147.
- Global Media Outreach. (2019). How it works. Retrieved June, 2019, from <https://www.globalmediaoutreach.com/about/how-it-works>
- Global media outreach, GodLife online mission community reaches 1 million facebook fans: Millions visit christian community to join, pray and receive encouragement. (2012, Aug 02). *PR Newswire*
- Goldingay, S., & Boddy, J. (2017). Preparing social work graduates for digital practice: ethical pedagogies for effective learning. *Australian Social Work, 70*(2), 209-220.
- Gottlieb, L. M., Tirozzi, K. J., Manchanda, R., Burns, A. R., & Sandel, M. T. (2015). Moving electronic medical records upstream. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 48*(2), 215-218.
- Grist, R., Porter, J., & Stallard, P. (2017). Mental health mobile apps for preadolescents and adolescents: A systematic review. *Journal of Medical Internet Research, 19*(5).
- Huguet, A., Rao, S., Mcgrath, P. J., Wozney, L., Wheaton, M., Conrod, J., & Rozario, S. (2016). A systematic review of cognitive behavioral therapy and behavioral activation apps for depression. *Plos One, 11*(5).
- Kim, S., Colwell, S. R., Kata, A., Boyle, M. H., & Georgiades, K. (2018). Cyberbullying victimization and adolescent mental health: Evidence of differential effects by sex and mental health problem type. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 47*(3), 661-672.
- Landstedt, E., & Persson, S. (2014). Bullying, cyberbullying, and mental health in young people. *Scandinavian Journal of Public Health, 42*(4), 393–399.
- Lewis, B. (2018). Social media, peer surveillance, spiritual formation, and mission: Practising Christian Faith in a Surveilled Public Space. *Surveillance & Society, 16*(4), 517-532.

- Marson, S. M. (1997). A selective history of internet technology and social work. *Computers in Human Services*, 14(2), 35-49. doi:10.1300/j407v14n02\_03.
- Martin, J. (2017). Virtual worlds and social work education. *Australian Social Work*, 70(2), 197-208.
- McAuliffe, D., & Nipperess, S. (2017). e-Professionalism and the ethical use of technology in social work. *Australian Social Work*, 70(2), 131-134.
- National Association of Social Workers. (2017a). *Code of ethics of the National Association of Social Workers*. Washington, DC: NASW Press.
- National Association of Social Workers. (2017b). *NASW, ASWB, CSWE, & CSWA Standards for Technology in Social Work Practice*. National Association of Social Workers.
- Parrott, L., & Madoc-Jones, I. (2008). Reclaiming information and communication technologies for empowering social work practice. *Journal of Social Work*, 8(2), 181-197.
- Quintana-Orts, C., & Rey, L. (2018). Traditional bullying, cyberbullying and mental health in early adolescents: Forgiveness as a protective factor of peer victimisation. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 15(11), 2389.
- Reamer, F. G. (2017). Evolving ethical standards in the digital age. *Australian Social Work*, 70(2), 148-159.
- Reti, D. O. (2014, October 30). Social work and technology: Past, present and future. Retrieved from <https://www.socialworkhelper.com/2014/04/10/technology-and-social-work-past-present-and-future/>
- Ronson, J. (2015, February 12). How one stupid tweet blew up justine sacco's life. *New York Times Magazine*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/15/magazine/how-one-stupid-tweet-ruined-justine-saccos-life.html>
- Schuurman, D. C. (2013). *Shaping a digital world: Faith, culture and computer technology*. Westmont, IL:InterVarsity Press.
- Shaw, J. M. (2014). *Illusions of freedom: Thomas Merton and Jacques Ellul on technology and the human condition*. Cambridge: United Kingdom: The Lutterworth Press.
- Shevellar, L. (2017). E-technology and community participation: Exploring the ethical implications for community-based social workers. *Australian Social Work*, 70(2), 160-171.
- Smokowski, P. R., & Hartung, K. (2003). Computer simulation and virtual reality: Enhancing the practice of school social work. *Journal of Technology in Human Services*, 21(1-2), 5-30.
- Stawarz, K., Preist, C., Tallon, D., Wiles, N., & Coyle, D. (2018). User experience of cognitive behavioral therapy apps for depression: An analysis of app functionality and user reviews. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 20(6).
- Tudor, M., & Herteliu, A. (2016). The usages of internet and new media by the Romanian Seventh-Day Adventist clergy. *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, 15(45), 207-233.
- White, P., Tella, F. & Ampofo, M.D., (2016). A missional study of the use of social media (Facebook) by some Ghanaian pentecostal pastors. *KOERS - Bulletin for Christian Scholarship*, 81(2).

# SECTION 5

## Descision Cases

---



# DECISION CASE 1

## Gabriela's Pregnancy Test<sup>i</sup>

---

*Joseph Kuilema*

In February 2019, social worker Gabriela García looked at the unopened pregnancy test in her hand. She could hear the girls at the Emmaus Mission's Creekside group home—where she had worked with unaccompanied children from Central America for 20 months—chatting in Spanish in the background. Gabriela's colleague, Keisha Jones, had confiscated the pregnancy test from Araceli Rivera, while on a group excursion to Target. Now Araceli was sitting across from Gabriela. *This girl is going to end up like Esperanza, she thought to herself, she's going to age out and end up pregnant and there's nothing I can do about it.* The girls at Creekside were not supposed to be having sex. *Shall I file the required incident report? Or ignore agency policy and my supervisor's instructions, and have a conversation about contraception and safe sex?*

### **Unaccompanied Alien Children**

After the passage of the Homeland Security Act in 2002, the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) managed the Unaccompanied Alien Children (UAC) Program as part of the Administration for Children and Families in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008 made several changes to the ways unaccompanied youth from non-contiguous nations were processed upon entry to the United States in order to safeguard against child-trafficking. It mandated that unaccompanied children “be promptly placed in the least restrictive setting that is in the best interest of the child” (William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act, 2008, p. 5078).

For most of the first decade of the UAC program under ORR, fewer than 8,000 unaccompanied children were served each year. That number began to creep upwards in fiscal year 2012, when 13,625 UACs were referred to ORR, almost doubled again in 2013 to 24,668, and then again to 57,496 in 2014. The numbers remained high in the years that followed, with 33,726 referrals in 2015, 59,170 in 2016, and 40,810 in 2017.

The vast majority of UACs entering the United States at the time were from Central America. Among all UACs in 2017: 45% were from Guatemala, 27% from El Salvador, and 23% from Honduras, the three nations of the so-called “Northern Triangle.” In 2017, about half of all the unaccompanied children referred to ORR were over 14, and about two thirds were boys. ORR reported that in 2018 the average stay for a UAC in their programs was 57 days, and that “the overwhelming majority of UAC are released to suitable sponsors who are family members within the United States to await immigration hearings” (ORR, 2018, para. 7).

For UACs who could not be connected with suitable sponsors or family members, ORR contracted with voluntary agencies (VOLAGs) for resettlement services and support. Many of these agencies were faith-based, and two of them work closely with the UAC program: Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). After the passage of the Homeland Security Act in 2002, ORR reached out to USCCB to assist in resettling UACs, and USCCB in turn subcontracted with a number of agencies, including Emmaus Mission.

### **Emmaus Mission**

One of the organizations the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) subcontracted with was Emmaus Mission in Naperville, IL, a western suburb of Chicago. Emmaus began as a small Christian non-profit adoption agency in 1957, when the founders, Jacob and Ethel Wilson, adopted a child from South Korea. In 1976, in response to the federal government's need to resettle refugees from the Vietnam War, Emmaus began offering services to refugees and immigrants. It grew into an agency that in 2019 was operating in 12 states and several foreign countries, facilitating adoptions, both domestic and international, foster care, and services for refugees and immigrants.

Throughout its growth, Emmaus remained a distinctly Christian organization. The mission statement of Emmaus Mission was to "Help children, both domestic and international, find loving Christian families and live full and abundant lives." It described its work as "Walking the road with our clients, as Jesus walked the road to Emmaus, so they may know 'It is true! The Lord has risen' (Luke 24:34)." Emmaus' employees signed on to the mission statement, as well as a supplementary statement of faith meant to ensure that staff were active Christians who had a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. As an organization, conservative evangelical Christian values guided many of its policies, including an emphasis on abstinence in its programming with teens, a strong pro-life stance on abortion, and a refusal to place children for adoption with same-sex couples. Nevertheless, Emmaus had a diverse staff with regard to Christian beliefs, ranging from those whose personal beliefs aligned closely with agency policies and the statement of faith, to others who disagreed with agency policies or aspects of the statement of faith, or who had no active personal faith.

For some of the more progressive Christian staff at Emmaus, the agency's stance on certain issues made for an awkward fit. Emmaus was a large employer of social workers in a metropolitan area where there were multiple Christian colleges and universities with accredited social work programs. Many of these graduates went on to long careers at Emmaus, but others were alienated by the mix of conservative Christian values and the bureaucracy of a large social service agency. As with many agencies engaged in child welfare work, turnover among case managers and other frontline staff was high, but at Emmaus, at least a portion of that turnover was related to issues around the integration of faith and social work practice.

Emmaus ran a variety of group homes, including boys and girls homes for UACs, and separate homes for unaccompanied refugee minors (URM). The case managers and frontline staff at these homes, called youth specialists, were supervised by a group home case manager supervisor. Supervisor Lisa Meyer worked at the main offices of Emmaus Mission, but visited the case manager at each of the group homes two or three times a month for supervision. Lisa was in her early 30s and had been working at Emmaus for almost a decade. She had obtained undergraduate degrees in social work and biblical studies at a Bible college in Indiana before completing an MSW at a public university. Before moving into a supervisory role with the group home case managers, Lisa had been a case manager for one of the group homes, and she was very familiar with the policies and programs UACs were navigating. She was known as a competent and hands-on supervisor who cared about both her employees and the clients they served.

Emmaus also employed a full-time nurse for clients at the group homes. Nurse Laura Kowalski worked with immigrant and refugee clients, including those at the UAC and URM group homes. Nurse Laura had worked as an RN for more than three decades, mostly at a rehabilitation hospital, but had been at Emmaus for a little more than three years. She was thrilled to be a part of Emmaus' team, having adopted her own children through the agency. While Nurse Laura worked with many of the agency's adult refugee clients, she visited the group homes about once a week.

During these visits, Nurse Laura would meet one-on-one with each of the girls to discuss their medical concerns. She would offer medical advice, and if necessary, communicate to staff about setting up further appointments. One of the bilingual staff always sat in on these meetings because Nurse Laura did not speak Spanish. The youth seemed to respond well to Nurse Laura, who was an older, grandmotherly figure. The staff trusted Nurses Laura to know what was medically best for the youth, although generational gaps in communication style had occasionally led to misunderstandings and frustration on both sides.

### **Creekside Group Home**

Creekside was one of two group homes Emmaus ran for unaccompanied minors, or "UCs" (unaccompanied children) as everyone at the home called them<sup>1</sup>. Six UCs lived at Creekside, all young women between the ages of 14 and 17, and all from Central America. The girls would age out of the home at 18, and out of Emmaus' care, unless they were able to obtain a Special Immigrant Juvenile Status visa as a victim of abuse, abandonment, or neglect, or T Nonimmigrant status, which covered victims of human trafficking.

Creekside was a typical Midwest suburban split-level ranch house, in a quiet residential neighborhood in Naperville, that had been converted into a group home. The six girls shared four bedrooms, so two girls had their own rooms. Three

---

<sup>1</sup>The staff shortened the acronym to UCs because they were uncomfortable with the term "alien" in "Unaccompanied Alien Children," which they felt echoed the language of "illegal aliens," when many of them instead preferred terms like "undocumented immigrants."

of them shared each of the two full bathrooms. Creekside was always staffed by at least two youth specialists who were there for eight-hour shifts, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. The youth specialists helped the girls prepare meals, supervised chores and homework, and transported them to appointments.

In addition to the youth specialists, each of the girls was assigned a case manager. The case manager's job was to make sure that the girls complied with the rigid timelines set by ORR. As part of the agency's implementation of ORR guidelines, each girl was required to participate in individual therapy at least once a week and group work twice a week. The staff at Creekside led skills groups informed by Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) two days each week, as well as a weekly house meeting to discuss concerns from either staff or the girls themselves.

The girls were also required to have a complete physical and dental assessment within the first 90 days, and then another physical six months later. Ongoing medical services and consultation were provided onsite by Nurse Laura about once a week. Case managers also accompanied the girls through the court system, which meant spending time at the courthouse in front of judges, working to classify the girls as wards of the court, and then keeping them on a path to permanent residency in the United States. If the girls were not in court, at school, or out on the occasional group excursion, they were at Creekside.

### **The Girls**

The staff at Creekside, both the frontline youth specialists and the case managers, spent a lot of time with the girls and knew their difficult stories. The girls who ended up at Creekside were almost all escaping violence of one kind or another in their home country. Sometimes that violence was in their community, in the form of narco-trafficking gangs, extortion, and cycles of retaliatory killings. Other times that violence was more interpersonal, and more intimate. It was mom or dad. Often, it was both. Many of the girls had been kept out of education, either deliberately based on gender norms or because their families were simply too poor to afford their school fees. Many of them had been physically assaulted, sometimes brutally. Many had witnessed domestic violence. Some had seen someone murdered. Almost all of them had been sexually assaulted or raped, whether at home, on their journey to the United States, or both. One of the girls at Creekside had been raped by a group of uniformed Mexican police officers.

There were, of course, exceptions. Sometimes parents had actually encouraged the girls to leave home because they believed that the girls would have a better life in United States. Sometimes the girls had met "boyfriends" online, on platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, or Instagram. These men would profess their love, or tell the girls that if they came to the United States they would be able to find them a job. Often these men were human traffickers, but it was hard to know for sure.

For either reason—whether fleeing a violent life or seeking a better one—they went North. Often their mother or another relative helped raise money for their attempt, paying \$2,000 or more to a smuggler, often referred to as a "coyote," to try to ensure they would actually make it to the border and across it. Some of the girls turned themselves in at official ports of entry, others waded

across the Rio Grande or walked through the desert. No matter how they arrived, they were initially screened at the border, and then put into temporary shelters. If efforts to reunify them with family members or family friends failed, they were shipped off to agencies contracting with ORR to resettle unaccompanied children.

### **SIJ Visa**

The Creekside case managers spent a lot of time with Form I-360, particularly the Petition for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJ). All of the girls at Creekside were hoping to get an SIJ visa. The SIJ visa existed for those who “are in the United States and need the protection of a juvenile court because [they] have been abused, abandoned, or neglected by a parent” (United States Citizenship and Immigration Services [USCIS], 2019). To qualify for an SIJ, youth must be under 21, currently living in the United States, unmarried, and able to prove both that they “cannot be reunified with one or both of [their] parents because of... abuse, abandonment, or neglect” and that it’s not in their “best interests to return to the country of nationality or last habitual residence of [them] or [their] parents” (USCIS, 2019). If the girls could obtain an SIJ visa, they would eventually be eligible to apply for a Green Card, and become lawful permanent residents of the United States.

After the start of the Trump administration in 2017, processing times began increasing. Previously, an application for an SIJ visa might take from two to six months. But by February of 2019, it was not uncommon for a girl to wait more than a year to receive a decision regarding her SIJ visa application. Indeed, one Creekside client had applied for her SIJ visa about six months before she turned 18, aged out of Creekside, and still had not heard anything nearly two years later. As a result, Emmaus opted to continue walking alongside former clients, pro-bono, for months or years, even though it no longer received government assistance.

Emmaus staff attributed this slow down to the Trump administration’s overall attitude towards immigration policies and, more specifically, to the decision to close many of the offices that had previously existed around the country to process SIJ visas, and the decision in January of 2018 to adopt a policy of “last in, first out,” meaning that the newest applicants would be handled first instead of working through applications chronologically. This was done to “deter those who might try to use the existing backlog as a means to obtain employment authorization,” or as then USCIS Director L. Francis Cissna said, “Lingering backlogs can be exploited and used to undermine national security and the integrity of the asylum system” (USCIS, 2018). At the beginning of 2018, the backlog in the asylum system as a whole (not just unaccompanied children) was 311,000 pending cases, an increase of 1750% over the past five years (USCIS, 2018).

### **Gabriela García**

Gabriela García graduated from Trinity Christian College with her BSW in May of 2017, and took a job the same month with Emmaus Mission, working as a case manager at Creekside. It was her first official social work job, and it seemed like a perfect fit for Gabriela. She had done her BSW internship at an agency in

Chicago, the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (ICIRR), that provided legal assistance to undocumented individuals and engaged in educational and advocacy work on immigrant rights. During her time at ICIRR, she had often worked closely with staff members at Emmaus. She had a close friend who worked in the other UAC group home at Emmaus. It certainly hadn't hurt that she was a Christian, bilingual, and Latina.

Her job as a case manager at Creekside was exciting work for Gabriela, both as a Latina and as someone who was passionate about working with undocumented immigrants. She cared about justice for immigrants. She had taken this job because she wanted to make a difference. All through her BSW program, she had studied what she considered a broken immigration system, and she had taken the job at Creekside because she wanted to do something about it.

Gabriela felt a close connection to the girls with whom she was working. As a case manager, she spent a lot of time listening to their stories, whether occasionally listening in during bi-weekly CBT group sessions or in one-on-one meetings setting goals to show progress toward the ORR timelines. Part of her job was to take these stories and present them to the judges who presided over the girls' cases. The girls' stories reminded her of the stories of many of her own family members and friends, people who struggled every day with their immigration status and lived in fear of deportation and separation from those they loved. She identified closely with her clients' struggle to navigate life as young Latinas.

Part of her identification with her clients came from her family's immigration story. Both her parents had immigrated to the United States from Mexico, and her extended family included individuals who were U.S. citizens and those who lived in the U.S. but remained undocumented. Growing up, she had seen how those differences in immigration status shaped life experiences and outcomes for her parents, aunts, uncles, and cousins.

Her parents wanted her story to be different, but they also wanted her to understand the struggles of people with stories like hers, to not forget the people she came from. When she was eleven, her father made her work an entire summer at a blueberry farm in southwest Michigan, picking berries in the fields. "If you want an allowance," he told her, "you should learn what it means to work hard." She thought about that summer a lot, working alongside young men fresh from Guatemala and older women from Honduras with wide brimmed hats hunched over from years of picking fruit. The old, the young, no one making much money, everyone using the same rickety outhouse on breaks. She thought about that summer any time she heard people talk about immigrants "stealing jobs," a comment that always made her angry. The experience gave her tremendous empathy for migrant farm workers.

She also thought a lot about her clients as young women. When Gabriela first had the "sex talk" with her mom, her mother had presented sex as negative. Growing up, her parents would turn off the TV when there was kissing on a show. The messages Gabriela and her sister received at home were about being submissive to their future husbands, about having kids and keeping a good Christian home. For Gabriela, these messages had always clashed with the

ways she saw her mother being treated, the ways her uncles treated her aunts and cousins. It seemed to Gabriela that many of the women in her own life were submissive more because they feared physical or emotional abuse than because of their faith, or because that's how God had made them.

Gabriela grew up attending church with her family, a Pentecostal church that preached a hellfire and brimstone version of abstinence and sexual purity. The church had a strict dress code for girls, and women were not allowed to serve in leadership roles. As a teenager, her mother bought her a couple of Christian books on dating, and she went on to purchase several more herself. She read *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* by Joshua Harris. Harris started writing the book while he was a teenager himself, and published it when he was 21. The book discouraged Christians from dating, and described sexual "impurity" as a "grimy film that coats the soul, a shadow that blocks light and darkens our countenance," warning that while "God's love for the impure does not cease... their ability to enjoy this love does" (p. 100). Gabriela committed to a conservative "courtship" model of relationships between men and women. She was given a purity ring by her parents when she was in middle school, a ring worn on the same finger a wedding band would be that reflected her commitment to abstain from any sexual activity before marriage. She wore it until her first year at college.

During her time at Trinity, Gabriela's beliefs began to change. Her courses in the social work program introduced her to ideas about women's rights and self-determination, and her religion courses introduced her to different ways of interpreting scripture passages about gender roles. For the first time, she had close friends who were in active sexual relationships. Gabriela began to question some of what she had learned about sex. Her friends didn't seem to be coated with a grimy film. They seemed happy. During her final year at Trinity and her internship at ICIRR, she had the opportunity to work on several cases where undocumented women were attempting to flee sexually and physically abusive relationships. In discussions with her supervisor, and with her immigrant clients, she was beginning to believe that a gospel of male domination and female submission was less a solution and more a part of the problems she was seeing. She began to identify as a feminist.

After taking the job at Creekside, she had been struck by how the girls had internalized so many of the same messages she had about sex and about themselves as women. Her clients would ask her why she didn't have any kids yet. They would tell her she needed to get married, that it was crazy she wasn't already married. *Those aren't the only possibilities*, she would think to herself, *I wish you could see that as clearly as I do*.

Gabriela also wrestled with differences between her and her supervisor, Lisa Meyer. While both women identified as Christians, Lisa was a conservative evangelical, who had attended a small bible college, worked internationally with Youth With a Mission (YWAM), and interned at a faith based pregnancy resource center. In conversations with Lisa, and in conversations with colleagues about Lisa, it became clear to Gabriela that she deeply disagreed with Lisa about a variety of issues, including abortion and same-sex marriage.

Politically, Gabriela and Lisa were also worlds apart. After conversations with Lisa about politics, Gabriela puzzled, *How do you work with migrant kids every day and then vote for someone who in his presidential announcement speech called migrants from Mexico criminals, drug mules, and rapists?* As a Mexican-American, Gabriela had been particularly incensed by then candidate Donald Trump's statement on June 16, 2015: "When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best.... They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people."

### **A conversation in supervision**

Gabriela had been on the job for several months when she began to have concerns about how her agency talked about sex, and about what she could and could not say about sex because of Emmaus' contract with USCCB and ORR. One week in October 2017, she was meeting with Lisa for their regularly scheduled supervision when Lisa asked, "What have you heard about the Jane Doe case out of Texas?"

"You mean the girl that wants an abortion?" Gabriela was familiar with the case from the attention it had received in the media (Chappell, 2017; Marimow, Hsu, & Sacchetti, 2018), but she was not sure how to respond.

"Yes," Lisa said, "she's a UC, different agency, but they're also under USCCB."

"Are they going to let her get the abortion?" Gabriela asked.

"I don't know, that's in the courts right now, but I just wanted to check in with you on those issues. What are you hearing at Creekside? Have any of your girls approached you about being sexually active?"

"No," Gabriela said, "I mean, they talk to me about guys they're 'talking to' on Facebook, or the guys they see at school, the guys they think are cute, but I haven't heard anything about them being sexually active."

"Okay," Lisa said, "That's good. Just to be clear, under our contract with USCCB, your girls cannot be in sexual relationships. They can't even technically consent to sexual activity."

"What does that mean?" Gabriela asked. "If a girl were to tell me ..."

"If one of the girls discloses that she's engaged in a sexual relationship, you'll need to fill out a Sexual Abuse Critical Incident Report, a SACIR. That would come to me, and we'd forward it to our federal field specialist at USCCB, and then to ORR."

"Okay," Gabriela hesitated, "what should I tell the girl? Do I tell her that we're filing the report?"

"They should know about the report," Lisa replied, "it's part of their orientation on the first day. But, yes, if they disclose sexual activity, let them know you're going to have to file a SACIR, and reiterate that they can have a boyfriend, but they are not allowed to have sexual relationships."

"But if they're already in a sexual relationship, do I talk to them about, like, getting on birth control, or ...?" Gabriela trailed off.

"No," Lisa said, "no birth control. We're actually not even supposed to talk

about that. The guidance I'm getting is that we're not allowed to talk about, teach, or encourage the use of contraception with the clients."

"Is that because it's USCCB?" Gabriela asked.

"I don't know," Lisa replied, "it could be part of ORR, but that's the guidance."

"If I have to file an SACIR, what does that do to their chances at an SIJ?" Gabriela asked.

"That's somewhat unclear," Lisa said. "I mean we want to definitely try to avoid that if at all possible, especially at the home. If the girls are having sex at Creekside, we could lose our contract, they're under our care, but even if it's happening off site, like at school or something, we need to report it. We need to make sure that we're following policy if we want to continue to help these girls."

"Okay . . .," Gabriela said. *Is it really necessary to have a policy about something so intimate and personal?* Gabriela wondered. *That seems a little weird.* Not sure how much she wanted to have this conversation with Lisa, she didn't say more.

### **Let's talk about sex**

Several weeks later, Gabriela's first client hinted that she was in a sexual relationship. Then she heard rumors about another. Then she received a report of sexual activity from the girls' school. As far as Gabriela knew, none of the girls were having sex at Creekside, but they were meeting boys at the school, or meeting up with boys they had met online while on outings in the community. When sexual behavior was reported to her directly, or from the school, Gabriela submitted the required Critical Incident Reports. She was less sure how to handle the gossip that swirled around the house about who was having sex and where they were having it. Gabriela also hesitated to mention this activity to Lisa. *I don't want to do anything that might jeopardize my girls' ability to get legal status. It's not happening at the house, and how seriously can you really take the word of one girl who says another is having sex in a bathroom at school? Even if it might be true, is it worth being sent back to Honduras for? To potentially get killed by the neighborhood gang?*

At the same time, Gabriela was worried. *I don't want to jeopardize my cases, but I also don't want to lose my job, or jeopardize Emmaus' contract with USCCB and ORR.* She was also worried about her clients. *I can't prevent them from contracting a sexually transmitted infection or getting pregnant when they're supposed to be abstinent.*

Even if the girls asked their doctors for contraception at their initial physical or 6-month follow-up appointments, it was not clear to Gabriela that they would get it. It was also not clear whether Nurse Laura would give them guidance. The girls at Creekside all had insurance, from an Indiana company called Point Comfort Underwriter's Insurance, but it did not cover much. Gabriela learned, for example, that it would not cover even basic orthodontal maintenance care. Point Comfort would not pay to have one of her girl's braces tightened, and so the braces loosened until they fell off her teeth. Even if a girl were courageous enough to ask her doctor for contraception, it seemed unlikely it would be covered. Gabriela certainly knew she could not encourage them to ask.

### **A conversation with a co-worker**

In summer 2018, Gabriela began talking more openly with her colleagues about her discomfort with the agency's policies around contraception. One day, she was at Creekside with fellow case manager Olivia Harris. Olivia and Gabriela had been a part of the same BSW cohort at Trinity, and both had taken jobs with the UAC program at Emmaus after graduation. Gabriela had just met with another client she suspected was sexually active because the client had been asking questions about what happened to girls who got pregnant in the program.

"Well, what do you do when they ask you?" Gabriela asked Olivia.

"I mean," Olivia had rolled her eyes and sighed, "the only thing you can do is, like, tell them that, you know, some girls in the past have had really heavy periods, or are on those really toxic acne meds, or have had Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome, and they've gotten approved..."

"So you just coach them to lie about it?" Gabriela asked.

"You're just telling them that it worked for someone else," Olivia offered, "you're not like telling them to do it themselves, right?"

"So then what, you just put in a request to Nurse Laura?" Gabriela asked.

"Yeah, and she'll refer it forward," Olivia explained, "or I think she can actually talk to them about it. She's not on our contract, she's general Emmaus staff."

"So she could get them birth control?" Gabriela asked.

"I mean, maybe technically, but she'd probably still tell them that abstinence is the answer," Olivia replied. "She may not be on the USCCB contract but she still works for Emmaus."

"They could get a referral though?" Gabriela asked.

"Again, maybe," Olivia said, "but ORR sits on that stuff for months. They're just slow-walking everything. I submitted a request for a girl two months ago, and then we just got back a request for some kind of proof that her periods are heavy, that she's in a lot of pain. Like, how am I supposed to prove that to you?!?"

"That's so ridiculous," Gabriela agreed.

"I know, right?" Olivia said. "It makes me want to just drive down to Walgreens and buy a bunch of condoms and give them to them."

Gabriela was annoyed by the entire situation, but also relieved that there was some possibility that clients might be able to obtain contraception, and that girls in the home seemed to be circulating that information. *I don't know whether they're actually having heavy periods, or just repeating what some other resident told them to say, but if they're having sex they need protection.*

### **Esperanza Gomez**

Gabriela remained uncomfortable with the entire situation, but she followed the policies as they had been described to her. She filled out Critical Incident Reports when the girls self-disclosed sexual activity or she got a report of such from the school. She avoided explicitly coaching girls on how they might obtain contraception, but was honest when asked questions about girls who had been able to obtain contraception, and did not try to prevent them from telling one another about ways to circumvent the policies. Then her first client got pregnant.

Esperanza Gomez had been at Creekside for 18 months. She was there when Gabriela started the job, and she was one of the first clients Gabriela got to know. Her father had been physically abusive towards her whole family, and especially towards her. He made her drop out of school because he did not want to pay school fees. He violently beat Esperanza's mother in front of her, and one night tried to kill Esperanza's mother.

Shortly after that, Esperanza decided to escape to the United States. Her mother gave her blessing, and Esperanza headed north. It was not an easy journey. While she had few problems leaving Honduras and making her way through Guatemala, she was raped during her travel through Mexico by a group of three men she did not know.

Esperanza wanted to join her 17-year-old brother who was living in Texas at the time. After surrendering herself to Border Patrol, she gave them his information, but because he was a minor, she could not be reunified with him. Instead, Border Patrol sent Esperanza to Creekside in Illinois.

During her 18 months at Creekside, Esperanza told her therapist that she had been sexually active in Honduras. Gabriela knew this because they had discussed it during a case conference. Esperanza had also made it clear that she was "not ready to be a mother." In a couple different meetings with Gabriela, Esperanza had asked questions like, "Que pasaría si una chica quiere tener relaciones y quiere usar protección ... Sería un problema? Se metería en problemas?" ("If a girl wanted to have sex, and if a girl wanted to get birth control ... would that be a problem? Would she get in trouble?")

"Ok. Si una chica quiere usar protección entonces necesita hablar con la enfermera Laura" ("Ok. If a girl wants to use protection then she needs to talk to Nurse Laura") was all Gabriela felt like she could say in reply. She wanted to say: *Yeah, that's a great idea. If you're ready to take that step in a relationship we should absolutely make sure that you can do that safely. And who are these Catholic bishops to tell you what you can and can't do with your own body.* Gabriela felt angry. Her girls did not understand the systems they were caught in, they did not even speak the language. They were coming from Catholic backgrounds where birth control wasn't discussed, and now they were under the authority of a Catholic agency that wasn't going to discuss it either. More than anything else, she felt trapped in that system. *My hands are tied.*

Esperanza aged out of Creekside in July 2018, although because she had not gotten her SIJ she was able to continue to access services through Emmaus. Gabriela heard that she was pregnant in August.

## **Pregnancy Test**

Esperanza was Gabriela's first former client to become pregnant, but would not be in the last. Six months later, in February 2019, Gabriela was holding an unopened pregnancy test confiscated from another of her clients, Araceli Rivera. Araceli had purchased the pregnancy test at Target during a group outing. The youth specialist accompanying the girls, Keisha Jones, had seen Araceli wander away from the rest of the group, and when she returned, she was holding

a plastic bag. Keisha asked Araceli to show her what was in the bag, and there was the pregnancy test.

Keisha called Gabriela, who was on-call for the shift, and because of the timelines for potentially submitting a Critical Incident Report, Gabriela drove in to Creekside. When she arrived, Keisha handed her the unopened pregnancy test.

"She says it's not hers," Keisha said, "she says she bought it for someone else."

"Did she say who?" Gabriela asked.

"She says it's for this girl over at the URM home." Keisha replied.

"Do you believe her?" Gabriela asked.

"I don't know," Keisha replied, "it's hard to say. See what she says to you."

"How's she doing?" Gabriela asked.

"She's scared." Keisha stated.

Gabriela wanted to believe Araceli. She had only known her for a few months, but she trusted her. Gabriela could see her being the kind of friend who would do something like this for someone else. *But what if I'm wrong? Gabriela thought. What if she's lying to me, and it's for herself? Is just having a pregnancy test enough evidence to fill out a report? This is all so sad. I wish our girls felt more comfortable reporting pregnancy scares, but instead they worry about me turning it into a report. They're afraid of being pregnant, but they're also afraid of me.* So she had stood there, turning the pregnancy kit over in her hand. *Is this really worth filing a Critical Incident Report over? Is this really what I signed up to do? Do I fill out the required paperwork and potentially endanger Araceli's immigration status, or ignore agency policies and Lisa's instructions, and have a conversation about contraception with Araceli.*

## References

- Chappell, B. (2017, October 25). 'Jane Doe' immigrant has abortion in Texas, after battle with Trump administration. *National Public Radio*. Retrieved from: <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/10/25/560013894/jane-doe-has-abortion-in-texas-after-battle-with-trump-administration>
- Harris, J. (1997). *I kissed dating goodbye*. Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Publishers Inc.
- Marimow, A.E., Hsu, S.S., & Sacchetti, M. (2018, March 30). U.S. government ordered to allow abortion access to detained immigrant teens. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/>
- Office of Refugee Resettlement. (2018, June 15). *Fact sheet: Unaccompanied Alien Children Program*. Retrieved from: [https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/orr/orr\\_fact\\_sheet\\_on\\_unaccompanied\\_alien\\_childrens\\_services\\_0.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/orr/orr_fact_sheet_on_unaccompanied_alien_childrens_services_0.pdf)
- United States Citizenship and Immigration Services. (2018, January 31). *USCIS to take action to address asylum backlog*. Retrieved from: <https://www.uscis.gov/news/news-releases/uscis-take-action-address-asylum-backlog>
- William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008, Pub. L. 110-457, 122 Stat. 5044 - 5091 (2008).

# DECISION CASE 2

## The Walk (Part A)<sup>1</sup>

---

*Kendra Wright*

“Try to steer clear of resident Stan Davis,” supervisor Sharon Miller warned field student Becca Powell as they parked near the housing complex. It was day one of Becca field placement, and she was riding with Sharon to visit Vibrant Village’s housing units. “He’s been inappropriate with staff and is being dismissed from the program.”

Becca wondered, wide-eyed, what Stan had done to deserve dismissal. She was already nervous about one-on-one meetings with clients and hoped that she wouldn’t find herself alone with him.

### **Vibrant Village**

Vibrant Village had served thousands of low-income seniors in Grand Rapids, Michigan for more than 30 years. Their premier programs included the Bright Life residences which offered independent, affordable housing space and living assistance to low-income seniors. Individuals living in these residences were at least 55 years old and receiving disability income (SSDI) or at least 64 and receiving supplemental security income (SSI). Located in two different buildings, known as the Carol Wold House (CWH) and the Perry Stratton House (PSH), the Bright Life residences deliberately included families and individuals with a variety of socioeconomic statuses to create an intergenerational community setting. Housing units were independent and did not offer medical or nursing support. Both buildings were in residential neighborhoods with several business storefronts within walking distance.

Each building included a Building Manager who supported all building residents and maintained the property, and a Coordinator who focused on assisting Bright Life residents’ day-to-day needs. In addition, Resident Assistants (RAs) lived on each floor; these RAs assisted Bright Life seniors with housekeeping and laundry, and helped facilitate social life on each floor, in return for subsidized housing. RAs were required to be 18 or older and pass extensive background checks. Both Bright Life seniors and RAs received two home-cooked meals, served family-style, each day, in addition to self-serve breakfast options.

CWH was a three-story, ADA-compliant building that served 9 Bright Life seniors. The building accommodated seniors who needed assistance with daily living tasks, 4 resident assistants (RAs), and 1 family with school age children. Common areas included living rooms, dining rooms, kitchens, and bathrooms.

PSH was a larger housing complex with five floors. The first floor included a kitchen, community room, computer room, fitness area, garden room with

library, one single-family apartment, and the property manager office. The second, third, and fourth floors offered 28 private apartments for unassisted seniors, 2 apartments for RAs, and 4 apartments for families with school age children. The fifth floor included apartments for 14 Bright Life seniors and 4 RAs, and the Bright Life program offices.

Vibrant Village's headquarters were located five miles away from the housing sites on a different side of Grand Rapids. Headquarter staff included the Executive Director, Development Director, Volunteer Coordinator, Program Managers, and other administrative personnel.

### **Becca Powell**

Becca Powell was a senior social work major at Calvin College, a Christian university in Grand Rapids. She grew up in a small town outside of Grand Rapids with her parents and two siblings. During high school, Becca spent a lot of time helping her mother take care of her grandmother who lived in a local nursing home. She particularly enjoyed talking to nursing home residents about their faith journeys and believed her faith grew significantly because of this experience. When Becca wasn't visiting her grandmother or in school, she was throwing shotput on her high school's track team—a skill and passion she would take with her into college.

From an early age Becca knew she wanted to work with the elderly and believed that pursuing a degree in nursing could set her on this path. Two years into her college experience, however, Becca struggled with science courses but remained eager to work with the elderly. She took an Introduction to Social Work course where a guest speaker talked passionately about the field of gerontology. That day, Becca decided to pursue social work. She perceived a great opportunity to continue living out her faith and serving older adults with this profession.

As a rising senior, several weeks before the fall semester began, Becca interviewed by phone for a field placement at Vibrant Village. Going into the interview, Becca knew that Vibrant Village had partnered with Calvin's Social Work Department for a few years and that this supervisor had hosted at least one other student intern from Calvin, a good friend of Becca's. Becca was eager to learn more about the opportunity, particularly because her friend had had such a good learning experience.

The day of the phone call Becca talked with Sharon Miller, the Program Manager and an MSW. Becca was impressed by her enthusiasm and knowledge about the services they provided. She liked Sharon because they had similar backgrounds, both being from small towns and having worked in nursing homes, and they seemed to hit it off during the phone call.

Becca noted the organization was privately funded but not faith-based, and she appreciated its focus on intergenerational living and advocacy for senior rights. She was most excited about the opportunities to engage in group work, but honest with Sharon about her anxiety and lack of experience in one-on-one

meetings with clients. Becca was grateful for Sharon's understanding and for opportunities to practice this skill during the internship experience. She could not wait to get started.

### **Monday**

Becca arrived ten minutes early on her first day at Vibrant Village's headquarters, feeling sharp and prepared. She had a notebook, pen, and her Code of Ethics in her new work bag and had awoken early with plenty of time for a good breakfast and coffee.

Sharon was at the front desk when Becca was buzzed into the building. "Welcome, you must be Becca! Nice to meet you. Why don't you hang up your coat and we'll get started in my office."

Becca followed Sharon's cues to hang up her coat and followed her around the office.

"Hi, Amanda and Dale, say 'hi' to Becca. Becca is our new social work intern from Calvin College. She'll be serving with us through December."

"Hi, Dale and Amanda, so nice to meet you," Becca said. Becca met three more of Sharon's administrative colleagues before they finally got to Sharon's office.

"Well, welcome!" Sharon repeated. "We're so glad to have you here. I hope you don't mind, we're going to have you just jump into the work."

"I don't mind at all!" Becca responded. "I'm really excited to get started. Thank you for your warm introductions!"

"Great. We'll spend just an hour or so here today, and then I'll bring you to each of the housing sites where you'll be spending the majority of your time this semester. I have a meeting in a few minutes, so before we head out to the residences I'm going to give you some important paperwork to complete. Please review and sign each of these forms, and spend some time reviewing the agency policy manual, particularly the Mandated Reporter section. We'll need you to complete a quick training on that this week. Do you have any questions before I go?"

"No, I think this is a good start. Thanks," Becca responded. "When will you be back?"

"In just 45 minutes. When I get back we'll pack up to go to each housing unit," Sharon explained, "and we can talk about what to expect on the way. Thanks for your flexibility, Becca, see you in a little bit!"

"Thanks, Sharon! See you later." Becca got her things settled and began reviewing materials and signing forms.

When Sharon returned, they both packed up their things and got in Sharon's car. During the ride, Sharon explained that Becca would split her time between the two Bright Life residences. On Mondays and Tuesdays she would be at CWH, and on Wednesdays and Thursdays she would work at PSH.

Their first visit was to CWH, where they spent the majority of the first day. This building appeared to be many decades, maybe even over 100 years old. While the building smelled somewhat old and musty, Becca also picked up the scent of fresh plants and cleaning supplies. Each common room hosted at least a dozen living plants. This place felt like a home to Becca. Much of the antique

furniture was well-loved, and she noticed unfinished puzzles, open books, and many other signs of life in the space. Several Bright Life seniors were out and about in the common spaces, greeting each other or sharing an activity. Sharon and Becca spent several hours getting to know the Bright Life seniors, RAs, the Building Manager, and the Bright Life Coordinator, Cara Thomas. Sharon and Cara introduced Becca to the schedule and rhythms of life and pointed out several areas of opportunity for work. Becca noted how disorganized the office spaces were but felt eager to get started on one of her first projects there: clearing, reading and reorganizing files. She wouldn't be lacking work here.

After saying goodbye to some of her new colleagues, Sharon and Becca got back in the car to drive to PSH. On the drive, Sharon told stories about some of the seniors who lived in these buildings. "There is a Bright Life senior at PSH who has been really inappropriate with staff. His name is Stan. He's being dismissed from the program. Try to steer clear of him."

Becca wondered, wide-eyed, what Stan had done to deserve dismissal. She was already nervous about one-on-one meetings with clients and hoped that she would never find herself alone with him.

Thankfully, once they were inside Sharon stayed with her, giving Becca a tour. On the first floor they met Roger Williams, the Building Manager, and on the fifth floor, Melissa Wilson, the Bright Life Coordinator. Becca's office was a small but cozy room on the fifth floor, not far from Melissa's, with a desk along the wall and a chair for visitors beside the desk. Because both Roger and Melissa were busy that day, Becca didn't spend much time with them, and only got to meet a couple of Bright Life seniors on their way to or from the kitchen.

The PSH building, while offering complete accessibility and many state-of-the-art amenities, showed fewer signs of community than at CWH. Becca heard televisions blaring from behind closed doors of senior's rooms, but noticed little use of the common spaces, except for the kitchen where everyone kept their favorite snacks and shared several meals. The walls were white and stark with just a few pieces of artwork and a handful of outdated flyers sharing invitations to community events. It seemed more like a private apartment complex than a home.

Every time Becca introduced herself at CWH and PSH, she noticed how people—both staff and residents—reacted when she told them she was from Calvin College. "Oh, isn't that a Christian college?" some would say.

"Yes!" she would say proudly, but then Becca would notice a subtle look of concern, or even indignation. *I know that Vibrant Village prides itself in its inclusivity of residents who identify as LGBTQ+. Are people concerned about my openness to or acceptance of these individuals?*

"Are you one of those Christians, judgmental and closed-minded?" one RA even asked her. "Those people frustrate me so much."

"Oh, um," Becca stumbled over her words, "I'm sorry you've had that experience with some Christians. I try to be a very open-minded person."

Becca made a mental note to reflect on this further with her faculty instructor, Gwen Murphy, back at Calvin. *How might this dynamic impact how I build relationships with my clients and colleagues?*

Becca also learned that while she was working at these buildings, Sharon would be stationed at the headquarters building, only visiting Becca once a week for an hour of supervision. But she would also receive task supervision from the Bright Life Coordinators at each house, Cara at CWH and Melissa at PSH. Becca wasn't sure how she felt about this but hoped that she could build a positive relationship with and learn from Melissa at PSH, who was pursuing her MSW at Grand Valley State University.

### Wednesday

On day three of her internship, Becca walked confidently from her parking spot at PSH, the larger housing complex. She had had a great first full-day at CWH on Tuesday getting to know the small building's 9 Bright Life seniors, and Becca was excited to continue this momentum at PSH. She wondered what Melissa had in store for her. Buzzed in by the person at the front desk, Becca took the elevator to the fifth floor and her office. Becca was early so she took her time getting settled into the room that Sharon had identified as her office. It was small, nothing fancy, but she was excited about having her own space and the opportunities she would have to practice her interviewing skills.

Becca looked around but hadn't seen any other staff yet that morning, so she decided to continue working on her learning contract, using some of the information, organizational needs, and opportunities she had learned at CWH.

About an hour later, Becca noticed that Melissa had arrived. Becca waited 20 minutes before she knocked on Melissa's door.

"Hi Melissa!" Becca ventured.

"Oh, hi," Melissa turned, apparently surprised to see Becca. She turned back to continue sorting the papers she was holding.

"It's my first full day here," Becca offered. "Sharon might have told you but I'll be here on Wednesdays and Thursdays. Is there anything I can help with today?"

"Oh, um, not really . . .," Melissa continued to look at her papers as she replied, "well, actually, there are a couple of things. Let's meet in 20 minutes. I can tell you about some Bright Life seniors and we can take it from there."

"Okay, I'll come back then!" Becca tried to sound enthusiastic. But she thought, *That was a little disappointing.*

The Bright Life coordinator at CWH, Cara Thomas, had been warmer and had prepared a lot of projects for Becca. Becca smiled when she remembered what Cara had said: "It's so great to have you here! It's such a relief, actually. This place is a hot mess and we need all the hands we can get. Here are a couple things you can started on..."

Returning to the moment, Becca had hoped and expected Melissa would be just as relieved and excited to see her and that she, too, would have some clear projects for her. But Becca was grateful for the time, regardless.

Half an hour later, Becca knocked on Melissa's office door. "Is this still a good time?"

"Yes, thanks. I want to talk over the Bright Life seniors on our floor. It won't take too much time." Melissa pulled out some notes she had written.

“Great! I’m really looking forward to working with them.” Becca listened and took notes while Melissa talked about the female Bright Life seniors living on the floor. The women had a variety of unique needs and it was interesting to hear about their preferences and personalities. Becca took notes on next steps to take with these women while Melissa paused for a few minutes, pulling out some of her paperwork on the male Bright Life seniors living on the floor.

“So, let’s talk about Stan first,” Melissa continued.

Becca stiffened a bit remembering his name from her conversation with Sharon.

“He needs to find housing which can offer more assistance, maybe a nursing home. We need to meet with him and talk about his goals.” Melissa stated.

*We’ll do the meeting together, right?* Becca was relieved to hear Melissa say that last part.

“Okay, can you tell me more about the kind of assistance he needs?” Becca asked. “Like what would require him to need a nursing home?”

“Sharon might have told you already,” Melissa responded quickly, “but he’s being dismissed from the program for inappropriate behavior. He’s also dealing with some pretty involved health issues including diabetes, and his family has not been super helpful or involved. We can’t really care for his needs in a program like ours. Can you begin researching local options for him?”

“Absolutely. I’ll let you know what I find. Do you have any files on him that I can review?” Becca hoped she can get more of Stan’s backstory before she began her research.

“Oh, I’m not sure where we are holding onto his,” Melissa looked around at her desk, “they might have ended up in someone else’s office. I’ll try to get those for you soon. In the meantime, let’s move on to the next resident.” It only took a few more minutes for them to wrap up the introductions.

Becca went back to her office and tried to start researching local nursing homes. But without Stan’s case files, she wasn’t sure where to start.

About an hour later, Melissa appeared in her office doorway. “Hey, we all eat lunch together with the Bright Life seniors on the fifth floor in the shared kitchen. You should join us.” Becca felt surprised but pleased by this invitation and quickly put her things away to follow Melissa.

Melissa wasted no time introducing Becca to everyone in the room, and Becca tried to keep track of all the names and faces as she shook their hands. Becca was talking with a resident when Melissa tapped her on the shoulder. Becca turned around to find a short white man with greasy dark hair facing her. He was shorter than her, maybe 5 foot 1, but Becca guessed he must have weighed over 350 pounds. He seemed to put all of his weight into his cane.

“Stan, this is Becca. You need to meet with her later today to talk about finding a new place to live.”

“Uhh, hi,” it took Becca a few seconds to register how to respond. “Hi! Nice to meet you.” Her throat got tight, and her heart started racing as she shook his hand. Stan’s hand was significantly clammy than everyone else’s.

“Nice to meet you, too!” Stan smiled. “I’ll drop by your office after lunch sometime.”

*I thought we were going to talk to him together!* Becca stressed. *Am I going to have to meet with him by myself?*

Becca didn't know what time Stan meant when he said he'd drop by after lunch, but she hoped to have a few minutes to prepare before he arrived. Her mind was racing. *I don't want to say, 'no,' so should I ask Melissa to join us? She seems so busy. It would be so embarrassing to ask her right here. I guess I'll have to do this.* She spent most of her lunch thinking about how the meeting would go and what she could do to prepare herself.

After lunch, Stan appeared in her office doorway almost immediately. Becca was surprised he came so quickly but he was cheerful and friendly.

"Hello, Becca. Nice office you have here," Stan said. He reached across the tiny room with his cane to pull the door closed.

"Oh, no," Becca responded quickly, "we'll keep this open."

Stan sat down in the chair beside Becca's desk where she was sitting. They were only a couple of feet away from each other in the small space, and his odor was overwhelming.

*How many days has it been since he showered?* Becca slid her chair back, closer to the wall. *You're too close. This is so uncomfortable.* She felt guilty for being repulsed by his presence. *Stan deserves to be treated with dignity and respect, too. Try to be patient, Becca, he is your elder after all.*

"Thanks for stopping by," Becca straightened her back stiffly as she began to speak, trying to sound more confident than she felt. "I'd like to learn a little more about you so that we can find you your next housing option."

*Can he tell how nervous I am? I haven't even had a chance to review his files. What did he do to get dismissed from the program? Do I need to be worried about him coming on to me physically?*

"Sure," Stan leaned in and said, "Has anyone told you yet today that you look very nice? Your hair's really pretty." He squinted when he looked at her. Even when she turned to the computer, she could feel his eyes on her.

*What if he tries to touch me? Okay. Deep breath.* Becca tried not to look scared. *He's big, but if he tries anything, I'm strong enough to push him away. Let's get this meeting over with.*

"Let's stay focused on what we need to discuss for your next housing option," Becca redirected the conversation. "I have a note here that says you would like to have more assistance in your next residence. Tell me more about that."

"Okay, since I have to leave I was hoping to go somewhere where I could get more help with things, like cooking meals, my diabetes' medication," Stan replied. "That stuff has become really hard for me to remember lately and my family is too busy to help."

From her own experience Becca thought that assisted living could be a good next option for Stan. "It sounds like an assisted living facility, where some medical support and nurses are available, could be a good next step for you. Can you tell me more about the kind of things you're having a hard time remembering?" Becca asked while taking notes.

"What about a nursing home?" Stan asked. "I have all these doctors' appointments that are hard for me to remember by myself—I can never keep

them straight. Maybe a nursing home could help with that, you know, bring the doctor to me?"

"Maybe," Becca nodded. "But assisted living might be an easier next step for you if you still want some independence." Becca spent some time articulating the pros and cons of nursing homes and assisted living facilities, advising Stan to give assisted living more consideration.

"No," Stan insisted, "I definitely want to try a nursing home. Let's start there." After a few more minutes of conversation and questions about his situation, Becca agreed to research nursing home options for him. She stood up, shook Stan's hand, and extended her arm towards the door, gesturing for him to leave.

"Well, thanks for stopping by today, Stan," Becca stated. "I'll take your thoughts and research a few options for you. One of the nursing homes down the street might be good for you. I'll try to set up an appointment for you next week. Someone will be in touch shortly about next steps."

"That sounds good. If it's down the street I can probably go by myself for a visit. Thanks, Becca. Hope to see you around soon." Stan lingered and looked at her for an uncomfortable few seconds before he left her office. Becca closed the door behind him for a few minutes of solitude.

Becca took a deep breath, relieved that the meeting was over. She was starting to understand what Sharon meant by "inappropriate" earlier but wondered, *What would lead to his dismissal? What else happened during Stan's stay here at Vibrant Village?* She was nervous and confused. *Sharon told me to "steer clear of Stan." Should I tell Sharon what Melissa asked me to do today? I don't want to tattle, but I'm really uncomfortable in this situation. I don't have all the information I want or need to engage with Stan, but I also don't want to be perceived as unwilling or uncooperative.* Becca shook off some of these thoughts as she continued her work.

After some more research, she was able to find eight different local nursing homes, per Stan's request, and set up a meeting for Stan at the nursing home down the street the following week. She documented the information in a file, wrote a note about the appointment for Stan, and worked up the courage to take the note to Stan's apartment. *I'm not sure if I should knock or not. Would I be invading his privacy?* She was still learning how independent these Bright Life seniors were. She taped the note to his door, took a picture for documentation, and walked away, hoping that she wouldn't have to interact with Stan again.

The next day she continued her work with other clients, caught Melissa up on the progress she had made, and was relieved not to see Stan at all. At the end of the day, Becca looked forward to a few days away from PSH because of the weekend, her classes, and two days at CWH.

### **The Next Wednesday**

During her Friday seminar with other BSW students, Becca told her faculty liaison, Gwen Murphy, about the situation. She explained how conflicted she felt about both her commitment to Stan as a client, wanting to respect his dignity, worth, and status as her elder, but also wanting to protect herself in an

uncomfortable situation for which she felt unprepared. Becca also shared how uncomfortable some clients and staff became when Becca identified that she went to a Christian college, and that perhaps some individuals didn't trust her because of this. She didn't mind this discomfort, but it undermined her confidence about speaking up. She wasn't sure how much people trusted her and didn't want to do anything to risk establishing a positive relationship.

Gwen was concerned, too, and called Sharon to set some parameters and discuss what was happening with the instructions from Melissa. Sharon seemed surprised by what had happened as well, and assured Becca and Gwen that Becca would not have to be alone with Stan again. It seemed clear that communication had broken down between Sharon and Melissa.

When Becca arrived at PSH, Melissa called her into her office for a meeting. She debriefed a few things going on in the building and then said, "One last thing, I've seen your case notes on the meeting with Stan, and also your research on alternative residences. I'd like you to walk with Stan to the appointment tomorrow morning at the nursing home because otherwise he'll never go. Let me know how it goes." With that, Melissa resumed some paperwork.

*I thought Sharon took care of the situation. Did she not communicate her promise that I wouldn't need to be alone with Stan to Melissa?* Becca thought, stunned. After a brief pause, Becca said, "I understand this is a priority for him and I'm happy to do this, but I'm wondering if someone could maybe join us? Stan makes me uncomfortable and I'd rather not be alone with him."

"Oh, are you a scaredy cat?" Melissa snickered, still looking at her paperwork. "Stan creeps me out, too. It will be fine, though, it's just a short walk." Without catching Becca's eye, Melissa turned to her computer and began typing.

Becca didn't want to come across as unwilling or incapable just a week into her internship, but she also felt the situation was unfair. *Stan even told me he could go by himself.*

Silent and embarrassed, Becca stood there until Melissa spoke again, "You can figure it out. Maybe you should just go meet with Stan, talk with him, and tell him how you're feeling."

*That's the last thing I want to do,* Becca thought, but said, "Uh, maybe ..." Confused and nervous, she walked away. Back in her office, she wrote a reminder note about the appointment for Stan, tacked it to his door, and took a picture for documentation. Trying to distract herself, she worked on other projects and prepared for next week's group session.

In her one-on-one with Sharon later that day, Becca brought up the walk. Not wanting to sound inflexible, she approached it from a fresh angle. "Melissa asked me to walk Stan to his appointment at the nursing home. I want to help, but it makes me feel uncomfortable. I don't really know Stan and I still don't have access to all of his files. He seems fairly independent, though... he even told me he could walk himself over to the appointment himself."

"Someone really needs to hold his hand," Sharon responded quickly, "and help him get this done. It's just a couple of blocks on an open road. It'll be okay."

*I thought you told Gwen that I wouldn't have to have more time one-on-one with*

Stan, Becca felt so confused, *but now you're telling me to walk him to the nursing home, alone. Did you change your mind, or forget?*

"I'd really prefer not to do that," Becca worked up the courage to say. "He makes me so uncomfortable."

"I'm sorry," Sharon replied, "but this will never get done if you don't go with him. I think this will be a really good stretching experience for you, considering your desire to get more experience in one-on-ones with clients."

*Should I continue to push back against Sharon?* Becca tried to control her facial expression but felt stuck. *Should I contact Gwen again?* But out loud she replied, "Okay, I'll let you know how it goes."

*I really don't want to cause any conflict on the team or draw any attention to myself this early in the internship, especially since so many people are still trying to figure out if they can trust me as a Christian. Maybe I just need to be more flexible. I guess it's only a short walk down the street. If there was anything serious in his actual file, they wouldn't make an intern be alone with him, right?*

## Endnotes

1 This decision case was prepared solely to provide material for class discussion and not to suggest either effective or ineffective handling of the situation depicted. While based on field research regarding an actual situation, names and certain facts may have been disguised to protect confidentiality. The author wishes to thank the anonymous case reporter for cooperation in making this account available for the benefit of social work students and instructors

# DECISION CASE 2

## The Walk (Part B)<sup>1</sup>

---

*Kendra Wright*

The next day, Stan arrived at Becca's office right on time. They headed out of the residence while it was still early in the morning. They were on a busy street out in the open, and Becca appreciated the public space and traffic of both cars and people. The two-block walk to the nursing home was uneventful, and Becca hoped the rest of the morning would be that way. Becca walked slowly so Stan could keep up with his cane.

"Welcome!" Martha Jackson, the nursing home manager, greeted them warmly at the front of the office. "You must be Becca. Thanks for setting up the meeting. And you must be Stan," she said, turning to greet him. "We're so glad to meet you. Follow me to my office."

Back in her office, Martha began the appointment by talking to Stan about the services the home provided and the requirements for residents, such as a roommate, scheduled meal times, and family visiting hours.

The more Martha talked, the more Stan appeared upset. He breathed heavier, he tapped his foot faster, and furrowed his brow.

"Stan, what are your thoughts?" Martha paused. "Do you have any questions about our program?"

Stan was quiet for a moment before he asked, "Can I cook in the kitchen?"

"No," Martha said, "all the meals are prepared for the residents and we do not allow residents in the kitchen."

Instead of responding to Martha, Stan turned to Becca and said loudly, "Did you know about this? Why didn't you tell me I wouldn't be able to do all this stuff? That I would have to follow all these rules?"

Becca paused for breath before she said calmly, "We did talk about this in our meeting, Stan. You were the one who asked me to find nursing homes. You weren't interested in assisted living."

"Well, you still should have told me," Stan insisted with raised voice. "I won't have any freedom here! They have all these rules and I won't be able to do anything myself. No, I can't be here. I'm not interested."

"This is what we talked about, Stan," Becca tried to stay calm. "These are the services you requested when we sat down and talked. We talked about the limitations of a nursing home but you wanted to visit."

She had barely finished when Stan stood and declared, "No, we're done here. I want to go back to my apartment now."

Becca shot Martha an apologetic look and said, "We'll let you know if we have any questions. Thank you so much for your time."

*Wasn't this exactly what he wanted? Becca felt so frustrated. He got himself kicked out of Vibrant Village and into this situation in the first place. Why is he blowing this?*

On the walk back, Stan spoke first, “You should have told me I would have no freedom there.”

“Stan, I just want to remind you,” Becca said, trying hard to stay calm, “it was your request to find a nursing home, which I did.” She tried to be kind, and not pass judgment. “Even though I advised that you would be better suited for an assisted living facility.”

Stan didn’t reply but continued walking. A few minutes later, Stan smiled and said, “Your dress looks really good on you today. Your legs look sexy like that.”

Becca stopped, looked at Stan, and said, “No, stop, that’s really inappropriate. I really wish you would stop.”

Stan still smiled but they walked the last block in silence.

*I can’t do this anymore, Becca fumed. I need to tell Melissa and Sharon that this was my last meeting with Stan, and that I can’t meet with him again. I don’t care if I look unwilling or inflexible, or if they limit my other responsibilities. This isn’t fair to me.*

### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup>This decision case was prepared solely to provide material for class discussion and not to suggest either effective or ineffective handling of the situation depicted. While based on field research regarding an actual situation, names and certain facts may have been disguised to protect confidentiality. The author wishes to thank the anonymous case reporter for cooperation in making this account available for the benefit of social work students and instructors

# DECISION CASE 3

## The Best Interests of the Child?<sup>1</sup>

---

*Joseph Kuilema*

In August 2013, new social worker Laura Jensen moved from just outside of Chicago, Illinois to San Fernando, Honduras to work at the St. Paul Bilingual School. One week after arriving, Laura met 12-year-old Gabriela Sandoval and, a short time later, began formally mentoring her. Gabriela and her siblings were sponsored by a small NGO to attend St. Paul.

One afternoon in March, 2014, Laura noticed square bruises on Gabriela's forearms.

"What happened to you?" Laura asked, "How did you get those marks on your arms?"

Gabriela said nothing, then she burst into tears.

Laura put her hand on Gabriela's shoulder and tried to make eye contact, but Gabriela looked away. They sat together in silence.

"It was a belt," Gabriela said finally. "She hit me with a belt."

"Who did?" Laura asked gently.

"My mom."

### **Honduras**

In 2013, Honduras was a country of approximately 8.5 million people. One of Spain's former colonies in Central America, it was overwhelmingly Catholic (97%), and quite young, with more than 55% of the population under the age of 24 (Central Intelligence Agency, 2013). It was the second poorest nation in the region, but also had extremely high levels of income inequality. Economically, it was still recovering from Hurricane Mitch, which devastated the nation in 1998 (Central Intelligence Agency, 2013).

More recently, Honduras had earned the dubious distinction of having the highest murder rate in the world, largely a result of America's appetite for illegal drugs (Bumpus, Meyers, & Sanchez, 2014). The drugs were manufactured in South America and routed through Honduras on their way to the United States. The violence surrounding narco-trafficking had fueled an increase in emigration

---

1 Development of this decision case was supported in part by the North American Association of Christians in Social Work. It was prepared solely to provide material for class discussion and not to suggest either effective or ineffective handling of the situation depicted. While based on field research regarding an actual situation, names and certain facts may have been disguised to protect confidentiality. The authors wish to thank the anonymous case reporter for cooperation in making this account available for the benefit of social work students and instructors.

northwards, especially among the youth, and efforts to stem the violence had been hampered by widespread corruption (Bumpus et al., 2014). In 2013, Transparency International (2013) ranked Honduras 140th out of 177 nations for corruption.

### **A school in San Fernando**

San Fernando, a small town of about 10,000, was several hours from the two epicenters of the drug-fueled violence, the major cities of San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa, the capital. San Fernando was a small town of narrow cobblestone streets. Nestled at the base of a large mountain, San Fernando's rich colonial history, waterfalls, and nearby cloud forest drew some adventurous tourists, but it remained firmly off the beaten path.

At the time, San Fernando had two bilingual schools, St. Paul, which catered to students from Honduras' middle and upper class, and La Escuela Agua Viva (i.e., The School of Living Water), another bilingual school with a scholarship program which made it more accessible for lower-income Hondurans. St. Paul was founded by a Honduran doctor in 2002 as a way to give back to her community. In the 2013-2014 school year, it enrolled about 400 students in preschool to eleventh grade, the final year of high school in Honduras. The school was structured around bilingual education with a focus on citizenship and Protestant Christian ideas about vocation. It was located in a mostly middle class neighborhood, and had a number of international staff, all of them North Americans and most from the United States.

### **Gabriela Sandoval and the Sandoval Foundation**

In 2011, two of St. Paul's American teachers, Stephanie De Luca and Brittany James, met a girl, Gabriela Sandoval, who lived near St. Paul. Stephanie and Brittany had wanted to live intentionally in their community, and to get to know the people who lived around them. Many of the families in the mostly middle-class community had children who attended St. Paul, but one family stood out. Gabriela's family was one of the poorest in the neighborhood. They survived on about \$5 a day. Gabriela had three younger siblings who, along with their mother and father, lived in a tiny home on a vacant lot someone allowed the family to squat on. The house had a dirt floor, rough wood walls, and a tin roof. Gabriela's father, Carlos, sold hot dogs on the street to support the family. Gabriela's mother, Rocio, occasionally sold pupusas. Like Stephanie and Brittany, the Sandoval family was religious, Protestant, and attended church. Stephanie and Brittany were particularly drawn to Gabriela. She had a big personality. She was tall for her age, loved wearing dresses, and described herself as "guapa" (i.e., beautiful). Like Stephanie, she loved animals, particularly horses.

Gabriela's family was far too poor for her to attend St. Paul, and even struggled to pay for the uniforms and supplies required for the local public school. Education in Honduras was only compulsory through elementary school (i.e., sixth grade), and Gabriela's parents were clear that she would not be headed

to high school. This broke Stephanie and Brittany's hearts. They wanted this beautiful, intelligent young lady to be able to further her education. As Christians, they wanted to help, to show God's love in practical ways. So Stephanie approached the family and asked, "What if I send her to my school?" Carlos and Rocio were thrilled at the opportunity to send their daughter to a school they could not otherwise afford.

Stephanie and Brittany started the Sandoval Foundation as a 501(c)3 non-profit in the United States, and raised funds from their family and friends back in Alabama to pay the tuition for Gabriela. In the fall of 2012 they enrolled Gabriela at the school. Later that semester, they paid for her younger sister and brother to join her. The Sandoval children were the only children at St. Paul on scholarships, and the only recipients of the Sandoval Foundation. When Laura Jensen met her in 2013, Gabriela was 12 years old, and heading into the seventh grade at St. Paul.

### **Laura Jensen**

Laura Jensen had first fallen in love with Honduras in the fall of 2011, during her junior year at a Christian liberal arts school. She had participated in a semester program there focused on justice and development. The program fit in well with her social work major, as well as her minors in journalism and global development. In 2013, during the spring semester of her senior year, she completed her field placement in Kenya working with HIV/AIDS patients, and she was excited to pursue further international opportunities after graduation.

Laura graduated with her BSW in May of 2013. She was interested in practicing social work internationally, and began to search for jobs on idealist.org, a website with job postings from international NGOs that sought to "connect idealists with opportunities for action." It was there that she found a posting for a position at St. Paul in San Fernando to start a school counseling program. It seemed perfect to her. Laura had been backpacking in the mountains around San Fernando during her semester abroad, and felt excited to return to the area.

Laura was especially attracted to the job at St. Paul because it was a native Honduran organization, as opposed to an organization started by someone from the U.S. This made it different from many of the organizations she had interacted with during her first time in Honduras. While in Kenya, she had come to appreciate working with and for Kenyans, and seeing unique roles for both expats and local workers. It would also give her an opportunity to use her Spanish. She interviewed over the phone for the job while in Kenya, and got it.

### **Laura and Gabriela**

By the time Laura got to St. Paul in August of 2013, the person who had interviewed her for the job had returned to the United States. The new supervisor for foreign staff was in her second year at the school, and two years older than Laura. Laura lived with her and two other teachers in the Koinonia House, a brightly colored home rented by the school. It was very nice by Honduran stan-

dards, comparable to the homes of many of the school's more affluent students who lived in the surrounding neighborhood. There were bars on the windows for security, and it (usually) had running water and electricity.

Laura came expecting to set up the school counseling program, but found the situation on the ground considerably more complicated and chaotic. Within one week of arrival she found herself leading a workshop, on leadership, with the entire school staff of about 40. The next week she had to give a speech in front of all the students' parents, several hundred people, in Spanish. Also that week, Laura was asked by Stacey Kim, a teacher at St. Paul and also the in-country director of The Sandoval Foundation, if she wanted to be a mentor for one of the students. Stacey had taken over operations on the ground in Honduras after Brittany and Stephanie had returned to the United States. To Laura, mentoring seemed like a great way to dive a little deeper. She would be interacting with lots of kids, but was excited by the possibility to get to know one well. Gabriela was given a list of staff willing to be mentors and she chose Laura.

Beginning that August, Laura met with Gabriela twice a week for about two hours, usually after school. They met at the Koinonia House, at Gabriela's house, or somewhere in the community. Laura appreciated being able to walk around San Fernando with Gabriela as her guide, seeing the city from her perspective. They did a lot of homework. Gabriela had come from the Honduran public schools, and spoke limited English. The year before, she had been through a 6-month language immersion program at St. Paul, but her language skills still lagged behind her peers. As a seventh grader, while she took some classes like Religion and Philosophy in Spanish, she was expected to take many of her core classes—Math, Science, Social Studies, and English—in English.

Laura enjoyed her time with Gabriela, but as the semester progressed she became increasingly concerned about the girl's situation. Seemingly, everyone knew that Gabriela and her siblings were receiving full scholarships to St. Paul, the only students sponsored to attend. Gabriela's home on the vacant lot had no plumbing. There was no place indoors to toilet, shower or bathe. Consequently, Gabriela and her siblings often smelled badly. To make matters worse, the house sat on the road to St. Paul. Every day, many kids went past her house.

Shortly after Laura began tutoring Gabriela, her father moved to a town about 40 miles away. Laura asked Gabriela what had happened and Gabriela said, "He thinks he can make more money there I guess." The family saw him only once or twice a month. As the fall progressed, it became clear that Gabriela did not fit in well at St. Paul. "I can't make any friends," she told Laura, "the other girls, they think they are better than me." Gabriela struggled with her English language proficiency, but also with the difference in her family's background. While all students wore the same uniforms, Gabriela's family could not afford the accessories that the other girls took so much pride in. A fellow staff person told Laura that Gabriela had stolen a hair clip from another girl.

### **“I am too good for you”**

In January 2014, Brittany came to Honduras to visit. Brittany or Stephanie took turns visiting once every six months or so. As Brittany was preparing to return to the United States, she gave Gabriela a silver ring. “This ring was given to me by my grandmother, I want you to have it,” she told Gabriela. Gabriela was extremely proud of the ring, which she showed to Laura, telling her what Brittany had said. She wore it almost every day.

A few weeks later, Gabriela showed up to a tutoring session looking flustered and told Laura she had lost the ring.

“I’m so sorry, do you have any idea when you last had it?” Laura asked her.

“No, I had it yesterday and now it’s gone,” she replied. “I know exactly where I put it, it just isn’t there anymore.”

“Are you sure?” Laura asked.

Then, a few days later, Gabriela found her ring again.

“Where was it?” Laura asked.

“I found it tucked away inside a sock,” Gabriela replied.

“What was it doing inside a sock?” Laura had asked.

“Well I didn’t put it there,” Gabriela replied angrily, “I think my mom was hiding it from me, she’s jealous. She’s stealing my things just because she doesn’t have anything nice of her own.”

One afternoon, in March, Laura met Gabriela for their usual tutoring session. Laura could sense that something was wrong. She had known Gabriela for almost eight months, and she thought they had developed a pretty good rapport. While she had always known Gabriela to be “somewhat moody,” she sensed her “shutting down.” Laura noticed square bruises on Gabriela’s forearms, and was immediately suspicious. *It looks like she was trying to shield her face*, Laura said to herself. *I was afraid something like this would happen.*

“Gabriela, what happened to you?” Laura asked softly, “How did you get these marks on your arms?”

Gabriela avoided eye contact. She turned and looked towards the ground. Then, she burst into tears. Laura put her hand on Gabriela’s arm and tried to make eye contact, but Gabriela looked away.

“You can tell me what happened,” Laura said again.

“It was a belt,” Gabriela said finally. “She hit me with a belt.”

“Who did?” Laura asked gently.

“My mom.”

“What happened? Can you tell me?”

“We were fighting and I told her I was tired of her stealing my stuff and being all jealous of me, and she started yelling at me and being like, ‘You think you’re too smart for me now? You think you’re too good for me because you go to a fancy school?’”

Laura knew that Gabriela and her mother had gotten into similar arguments before. Gabriela was now in seventh grade and Rocio, her mother, had a third grade education. This had been a source of tension on more than one occasion.

“And then she hit you?” Laura asked.

“No... not then, she was yelling like that and then I said, ‘I *am* too smart for you, I *am* too good for you...’ That’s when she took off her belt and started hitting me. She said I should be grateful it was just her belt, she said my grandmother used to chase her with an axe.”

“I’m so sorry,” Laura said. She didn’t know what else to say. They sat together in silence. Gabriela was still crying, but not as hard.

“It’s okay,” Gabriela replied, “It’s not as bad as when my father used to hit me with the electrical cord. I know I shouldn’t have said that to her, but I honestly feel that way sometimes.”

“Can I pray for you?” Laura said. Gabriela nodded. Laura took Gabriela’s hands and bowed her head. “God, I don’t know quite what to say right now, but I pray that you protect Gabriela, I pray that she can feel your love, all the time, even when it feels like nobody else loves her. I pray that you surround her, that she knows she is not alone. I pray that you would give her strength, and wisdom. God give me wisdom too. Help me to be there for Gabriela however I can. God be with us. Amen.”

Laura hugged Gabriela, and sat with her in silence.

“Violence is easy,” Gabriela said, switching from Spanish to English, “but change is hard.”

Laura knew that there was not a lot that the Honduran system, already notoriously corrupt, could offer Gabriela. Laura knew of no equivalent to Child Protective Services, no family preservation agencies, no foster care system. Earlier in the year she had spoken with an administrator at St. Paul to try to understand the systems in place and the proper procedures if a student disclosed abuse. She was told that, “Unless the abuse is seen in a public place by a police officer, there’s nothing that can be done.”

Later, Laura spoke with Stacey Kim. She told her everything, concluding with, “This is verbatim what I just listened to.” Stacey was surprised and upset by the events.

“Maybe we should meet with the parents,” Stacey said, “and see if we can work with them.” After a brief pause, she added, “We need to talk with Stephanie and Brittany. Let’s schedule a call.”

## **A confrontation**

Laura scheduled a Skype call with Stephanie and Brittany for later that week. Sitting in front of her laptop, she told them what had happened. “It’s getting really bad between Gabriela and Rocio since Carlos moved out of town. I feel like Rocio’s mental health is getting worse, and she’s taking it out on Gabriela, and Gabriela isn’t necessarily making the situation any better either. I think it’s been really hard on Gabriela to make the transition to this new school, learning English, being around all these kids from wealthier families, and, I mean, this is middle school, so it’s already crazy.”

“I think we both kind of knew that there was some abuse in the home,”

Stephanie replied, “but we never had any evidence of it.”

“You knew this was happening?”

“Well I don’t know if we knew, exactly,” Brittany chimed in. “I mean, I guess we could sense that things between Gabriela and Rocio weren’t always the greatest.”

“Yeah,” Stephanie said, “I think it’s been hard since Carlos started working out of town more ...”

“Well I feel like we have to do something,” Laura interrupted.

“Oh, definitely,” Brittany replied. “It’s just hard because we’re not there right now.”

“I’ll be visiting again in a couple of months,” Stephanie said, “so I can certainly have a conversation with Rocio then.”

“But what about now?” Laura asked.

“Let’s see what we can do to maybe lower Rocio’s stress levels?” Brittany said. “We could have the kids change into their school uniforms at St. Paul instead of at home ...”

“Can you and Stacey sit down with her and just try to check in?” Stephanie added.

*You’re missing the point*, Laura thought to herself. “I really think that some of the gifts and attention that Gabriela gets from you guys is creating some of this tension,” she said.

“Well,” Brittany replied, “we can certainly try to be more conscious about gifts, and, I don’t know, balance our time better.”

Stephanie and Brittany continued to talk about what they might be able to do to help lower Rocio’s stress levels, which Laura felt was missing the larger picture. *Rocio isn’t the problem here*, she wanted to say, *you are. You created this situation. Are you trying to replace this girl’s parents?*

“What are we trying to do for Gabriela?” she asked.

“We just want to love on the Sandoval kids,” Stephanie said, “have them be contributing members to society. Help them figure out how to live out their vocation.”

“It’s not about straight As,” Brittany added, “it’s about building people of good character.”

“I know,” Laura said, “but I just wonder whether all of this attention isn’t contributing to this situation. Gabriela is being abused.”

“Well we can’t abandon the Sandovals,” Stephanie said, “We’re going to have to figure out how to work through this. Let’s start with you and Stacey meeting with Rocio and Gabriela. We can go from there.”

“I’ve got to get going,” Brittany said, “but let’s talk again after you meet with her, and just keep us in the loop.”

“Definitely keep us in the loop,” Stephanie said. “We’ll be praying for you.”

The Skype call ended. Laura felt overwhelmed. She was still trying to develop her counseling program. In many ways she was still just trying to adjust to living in another country. She didn’t know what she’d say to Rocio and Gabriela.

## References

- Bumpus, J. P., Meyers, J. S., & Sanchez, P. A. (2014). Reducing homicide in Honduras: How the US government can help. *Journal of Public and International Affairs*, 25, 44-57. Retrieved from <https://www.princeton.edu/jpia/past-issues-1/JPIA2014.pdf#page=45>
- Central Intelligence Agency. (2013). *World factbook 2013: Honduras*. Retrieved from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/download/download-2013/index.html>
- Transparency International. (2013). *Corruption perceptions index 2013*. Retrieved from <http://www.transparency.org/cpi2013/results/>

## Endnote

<sup>1</sup> This decision case was prepared solely to provide material for class discussion and not to suggest either effective or ineffective handling of the situation depicted. While based on field research regarding an actual situation, names and certain facts may have been disguised to protect confidentiality. The author wishes to thank the anonymous case reporter for cooperation in making this account available for the benefit of social work students and instructors

# DECISION CASE 4

## Client or Congregant?<sup>1</sup>

---

*Carla MacDonald*

On a beautiful Sunday in June 2014 Caylan Bruns looked forward to worship at her beloved church, the South Metro Community Church located in greater Minneapolis. It had been her church home for two years. She found spiritual renewal each Sunday, following stressful weeks as a social worker in the field of domestic violence at the Family Justice Center.

Caylan had already entered the church and was preparing to find a place to sit when she saw her, client Samantha DeLucia. *What's she doing here?* Caylan wondered, startled. *She hasn't shown up for appointments in several weeks! What am I going to say to her if she sees me?*

### **Minneapolis and The Family Justice Center**

The Family Justice Center was located in the heart of Minneapolis, part of a metropolitan area with 3.8 million people. Caylan loved Minneapolis because so many neighborhoods were diverse. Members of minority groups could be found almost everywhere in the city. Loring Park was a diverse community with immigrant and refugee residents. The community experienced a fair share of violence that negatively impacted its residents. It also had a relatively high unemployment rate, poor schools, and was medically underserved.

The Family Justice Center was founded in 1967 as a way to address many of the community needs. Its broad mission was to empower individuals and families in Loring Park and surrounding neighborhoods. The Center offered early childhood education, youth services, adult education and employment, and general health and human services.

The Center also served approximately 120 survivors of domestic violence per year through case management and clinical services. Five staff members worked in the domestic violence program. Two staff members were licensed social workers—Caylan Bruns and Amy Womack—and the remaining three were trained bilingual translators who served as court advocates and educators on the

---

1 Development of this decision case was supported in part by the North American Association of Christians in Social Work. It was prepared solely to provide material for class discussion and not to suggest either effective or ineffective handling of the situation depicted. While based on field research regarding an actual situation, names and certain facts may have been disguised to protect confidentiality. The authors wish to thank the anonymous case reporter for cooperation in making this account available for the benefit of social work students and instructors.

law. The two social workers provided psychoeducation groups for survivors who were just entering the program as well as support groups for survivors. They each also provided counseling and case management services to 35-40 clients.

### **Social Worker, Caylan Bruns**

Caylan Bruns was a native of Minneapolis. In 2003 she received her BSW from a small Christian liberal arts college. After graduating, she worked as an AmeriCorps worker at The Family Justice Center. Her primary clients were adults who wanted to work on their English. She served as an English as a Second Language (ESL) instructor. Following a year of service she returned to graduate school for her MSW. Subsequently, she returned to The Family Justice Center as a Domestic Violence Counselor and Advocate. In this role she received additional training in domestic violence and also earned a certificate in HIV/AIDS education.

Co-workers and colleagues often referred to Caylan as “cheerful Caylan” because she was so often smiling. She was outgoing and easily engaged clients. She typically had a cup of coffee in her hand, regardless of the time of day and was an avid runner.

Caylan lived in Burnsville, a suburb on the south side of Minneapolis that offered a diverse community with easy access to her job downtown at the Center. Partly to avoid dual relationships with clients, Caylan chose to attend the South Metro Community Church also in Burnsville. Due to the typical hour drive from Burnsville to downtown Minneapolis, she felt confident that she wouldn't run into clients from The Family Justice Center.

### **South Metro Community Church**

The South Metro Community Church congregation was housed in a former retail space. The church held two services on Sundays with an average of 30-40 people in each service. The two Sunday worship services were similar in format and simply were small in attendance because of the size of the worship space.

As a social worker, Caylan was attracted to the church because it was well known for serving a diverse membership. There were Republicans and Democrats, seekers and skeptics. The church was also racially diverse- 50% Caucasian, 25% African American, and 25% Native American. Most attendees were in their 20s and 30s although there were some elderly members as well.

The church strongly promoted an inclusive environment for anyone who wanted a place at the table, regardless of where they were in their spiritual journeys. They had a particular focus on welcoming individuals who identified as LGBTQ. Because of the church's aim to reach diverse people, it prioritized participating in community events as a means of outreach to the local community.

**February 4, 2014**

Caylan rushed past the packed waiting room and headed straight to her office. Due to the intense cold and wintery mix of sleet and snow, Caylan had worn a heavy coat and insulated boots. She promptly removed her coat and switched to more comfortable shoes before reviewing the intake forms for her first client.

Her name was Samantha DeLucia. Ms. DeLucia had moved to Minneapolis from Milwaukee in an attempt to get away from her abuser, the father of her two young children, five-year-old Joey and three-year-old Kelly. Upon arrival in the area they moved in with a family friend. The forms also indicated desired services of employment, housing, childcare, transportation assistance, and a cell phone.

Caylan returned to the waiting room visually noting the only female with two small children as described in the intake forms. Caylan approaching her hesitantly, "Ms. DeLucia?"

The woman looked up and nodded.

Caylan shared, "Hello, my name is Caylan Bruns. I am an intake worker here at The Family Justice Center."

Caylan invited Samantha and the two children to her office. None of the private offices at the Center were very large, but Caylan had tried to make her office inviting with a few plants and wall hangings. On this particularly cold day, the freezing sleet outside left a cloudy haze over her outdoor window, blocking the limited daylight. Caylan invited Samantha and her children to sit down.

"I heard that Verizon offers free cell phones with 3,000 minutes for victims of domestic violence," Samantha stated. "Since I'm a victim, can I get one of those phones? Can I get one right away ... like today?"

Given the harsh coldness of the wintery months, along with the possibility that this woman was running from an abuser who could appear at any time, Caylan realized the immediate need appeared even more intense.

"Yes, I'll connect you with my colleague who handles that service before you leave today." Caylan responded.

She immediately noticed a sense of relief on Samantha's face.

Caylan looked over at the children. Thin with pale white skin, they were dressed in clean clothes and each had blond wispy hair. They were working intently with coloring books and crayons that Samantha had given them when the meeting started. Caylan knew that children who had witnessed domestic violence were prone to suffer symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, such as bed-wetting, nightmares, and were at a great risk of having allergies and asthma. Caylan made a deliberate decision to not explore those symptoms today until she got to know Samantha better.

"Can you share a bit more about what's brought you here today?" Caylan began.

Samantha shifted awkwardly in her chair and avoided Caylan's gaze.

Caylan had hoped to hear more about the husband and the father of these three vulnerable people sitting in her office.

"These details are just too hard for me to talk about. Do we have to discuss this right now?" Samantha asked.

“No, we can talk through this another time.” Caylan replied.

Caylan continued, “On your intake forms you also noted you’d like services in the areas of employment, housing, child care, and transportation assistance.”

“Yes, I need to find a place of my own because I can’t stay with my friend too much longer.” Samantha replied.

“Okay,” Caylan responded. “We offer an eight-week training program for survivors of abuse along with case management services. The focus will be on your legal rights in regards to your abuser, a safety plan for you and your children, and a focus upon your desire for employment, housing and childcare. We can also access some resources for you to assist with your transportation needs. How does that sound to you?” Caylan asked.

Samantha gave a gentle nod of her head.

“Okay, let’s just make sure that you have a safety plan started, Samantha,” Caylan began. It’s important that you have phone numbers readily available in the event you need help or another place to go. Such numbers include the police, hotlines, friends and the local shelter.”

Again, Samantha nodded agreement. And then, to Caylan’s surprise, Samantha pulled out a folded up piece of paper she had in the back pocket of her blue jeans. Because it was discolored and creased, it appeared that Samantha had been carrying this piece of paper for quite a while.

“The only number I don’t have from the ones you listed is one for a local shelter,” Samantha responded.

“Let’s find one,” Caylan replied. She pulled out her resource directory and found the number of a shelter close to the family residence where Samantha and her children were staying. Caylan read the number aloud and Samantha added it to her list.

“Samantha,” Caylan asked, “do your children know how to dial 911?”

“My children have had to call 911 on numerous occasions.” Tears welled up in Samantha’s eyes. “So, yes, they know how to make a call,” and then hesitantly she asked, “Can we stop for today? I’m exhausted and my kids have colored about every page in their coloring books.”

“Yes, Samantha, we can finish for today. Here’s my business card with your next appointment date on the back,” Caylan said as she handed the card to Samantha. “Let’s plan to complete your application for Medicaid and Food Stamps at the next visit.”

Samantha nodded her head.

“I’ll take you to my colleague who handles the Verizon Hopeline program and she will get you set up with a phone.” Caylan stated.

As they walked together, Caylan thought, *Next time I’ll focus on the Food Stamp program and Medicaid documents. I’ll have her sign up using our agency address to assure that she can obtain mail without interruption in the event she needs to make a move.* Caylan knew that having clients use the agency address for receiving email had a double benefit as it ensured that clients continued to come to the address in regular intervals to pick up mail. She sensed that Samantha was in a vulnerable place and wanted to support her at this time.

## The Following Week

Samantha returned to the Center the following week to apply for Medicaid and Food Stamps. Joey and Kelly were not with her. She opened the meeting by stating, “My abuser is the father of my children. I am concerned with how I can keep him away from Joey and Kelly. I didn’t bring them today, they stayed home with my friend. I was concerned with how much we may talk about their father today and I have tried to protect them from hearing about the abuse.”

Caylan said, “Is it okay for me to ask some specific questions?”

Samantha nodded.

“When did he become abusive?” Caylan asked.

“From the start,” Samantha replied. “Why I stayed, I’ll never know, but when the abuse started to shift towards my children that is when I knew we had to leave.”

“So, let’s go back to the safety plan we began working on last week, Samantha. Do you feel okay working on that some more?” Caylan asked.

Samantha continued to look down at her folded hands in her lap but gently nodded ‘yes.’

“Okay, let’s discuss how to get out of your home safely in the event your husband finds where you and the children are residing. Tell me how you would get out of your home if you had to,” Caylan asked.

Samantha told Caylan the layout of the home where she was residing, indicating that the front door would be the easiest if she were in her bedroom. Once Samantha had described the layout, Caylan led her to identify a primary route for escaping and a secondary one. She suggested that Samantha and her children practice ways to get out.

Samantha replied, “We will practice and next time I see you I’ll tell you how it went.” Caylan noted a sense of hope in Samantha’s voice.

“Sounds good, Samantha. Okay, now let’s address the applications for Medicaid and Food Stamps.” Caylan pulled out several folders from her desk.

“Can I just take the forms with me and complete them at home?” asked Samantha. “I really need to go. I’ll bring them back with me next week.”

Caylan indicated this was fine and scheduled their next weekly meeting.

## Mid-Late March

Over the period of the next three weeks Caylan and Samantha only met once due to her children being sick.

At their next meeting Samantha arrived alone but late, apologetically stating, “Public transportation was running behind because of the recent snow storm. So sorry I’m late.”

“We will have enough time,” Caylan assured her. “Last time we met we talked through your safety plan and how you and your children would escape the home where you are staying should you be in immediate danger. Did you have an opportunity to practice this together?”

Samantha responded with frustration, “Do we have to spend much more time on this safety plan? I worked with CPS in Wisconsin and they already helped me develop a safety plan.”

Caylan was a bit taken back by Samantha’s question and frustrated response. She remembered that Samantha shared the abuse had also been targeted toward her kids but wasn’t specifically aware of CPS involvement in Samantha’s case. “Can you give me details of what your plan included while you were living in Wisconsin?”

No sooner was her question raised, Samantha shut down and shared no further information.

*Is she hesitant to share the details because she has an open case in Wisconsin?*

“Samantha, safety plans typically involve children residing where they can be checked upon. If visitations are allowed with the domestic violence abuser, they are followed in the safety plan. Does this apply to your safety plan?” Caylan asked.

*Did your safety plan have restrictions against leaving the state?,* Caylan wondered, while awaiting Samantha’s response, *Maybe that’s why you’re withholding information.* Caylan wanted to explore these questions but hesitated because of Samantha’s apparent reticence.

“I need to go now,” Samantha broke the brief silence. “I have another appointment I need to get to.”

“Okay, but did you want to talk through your Medicaid and Food Stamp applications?” Caylan asked.

Samantha pulled the forms out of her purse. They were wrinkled but thoroughly completed.

“Thank you, Samantha,” Caylan replied. “I’ll send these in right away.”

Despite the abrupt ending to the appointment, Caylan and Samantha did schedule an appointment for the following week.

## April

It had been two weeks since Caylan had seen Samantha because she cancelled another weekly appointment when Kelly was sick. As Caylan prepared herself for seeing Samantha, she specifically wanted to focus on relationship building. She feared that Samantha was drifting away and she wanted to devote her attention to building trust.

Caylan was relieved when Samantha began their appointment by bringing up the CPS services she received in Wisconsin.

“Last time you asked me about the CPS services I received in Wisconsin,” Samantha stated to open the appointment. “I think I’m able to discuss it more today.”

“Yes, Samantha, I would like to hear more about that,” Caylan responded. “In order for me to fully support you and understand where you’ve been, whatever you share with me about your services in Wisconsin will help.”

Samantha nodded. “Do you think I’ll get into trouble with CPS because I moved out of state?”

“I don’t know the answer to this question without further information,”

Caylan responded.

Samantha shifted in her seat.

Caylan asked, "What's the name of your CPS worker in Wisconsin? If I have the name of the CPS worker we can proceed with having you sign a mutual consent form so I can gain information on your case and thus answer the questions you raised earlier."

But as she looked up, Caylan noticed Samantha's expression. She did not look willing to share information. Caylan thought, *I simply want a worker's name so I can facilitate the transfer of her case to Minnesota...*

"I know that I need to open up to you and share more about my life in Wisconsin," Samantha acknowledged, "but I'm just not ready. Can we cover this at our next meeting?"

"Yes, Samantha," Caylan paused, "we can wait until you're ready to share more. What else can we cover in today's appointment?"

"Hey, I'd better go," Samantha suddenly appeared disengaged, "I'm supposed to take care of my friend's daughter when she gets home from school today."

Whether that was a valid reason to end the brief appointment, Caylan didn't know. But she also knew there was no use trying to prolong the appointment if Samantha was done.

"Let's schedule you to come back next week." Caylan replied.

After the hasty appointment with Samantha, Caylan found herself again in deep thought about the case and questioning, *Was her case in Wisconsin separate from the domestic violence incidents or was it connected?*

## **Late April**

Although it was two weeks later when Samantha returned for another appointment, she exuded excitement that Caylan had not observed before.

"I just picked up my mail and received notification that I'll get Food Stamps and I also got my Medicaid card," she announced. "I've moved though so I'll need to report my new address."

"You can continue to use the agency address if you want. Just in case you move again." Caylan replied. "However, it will be good for us to have your current address in your file. What is the address of the place where you now live?" Caylan asked.

No sooner was the question raised when Samantha shut down. She had picked up some brochures in the lobby and appeared intent on reading them.

Caylan asked again, "So what's your new address?"

Samantha looked up and gave a quick response, "I'm still in the same apartment complex but the number has changed. I'm now in apartment 4A23." She returned to her reading.

Caylan attempted to discuss Samantha's legal rights in regards to her estranged husband. These attempts, however, were in vain and Samantha again ended the appointment abruptly.

Caylan looked forward to their next appointment two weeks later but again

Samantha did not show for her appointment. Over the course of the next three weeks, Caylan left weekly messages for Samantha but did not hear back.

## May/June

It had been over a month since Caylan had seen or heard from Samantha. On a warm but rainy spring day, Samantha appeared in the office without an appointment. Caylan was with another client so Amy met with her and assisted her in reviewing some options for summer programs for Joey and Kelly.

Caylan had hoped that she would get to meet with Samantha but by the time she finished with her scheduled client, Samantha had left. Amy noted in the file that Samantha reported that she felt safer. She also reported that she now had a boyfriend and was staying with him and his family.

Caylan tried to reach Samantha by phone several times the following week. Her calls and messages, however, went unanswered. She wondered if Samantha's case should be closed. New clients were waiting to be seen and no-show appointments kept new clients from receiving needed services.

## Sunday, June 29

Caylan had entered the church and was preparing to find a place to sit when she saw Samantha. *What's she doing here?* Caylan wondered, startled. *She hasn't shown up for appointments in several weeks! What am I going to say to her if she sees me?*

Samantha and her kids were welcomed by the usher and led toward the front of the small sanctuary. *She's a client! I can't go to the same church as my client!* Caylan felt flustered. *What about boundaries that we talked so much about in graduate school? What about dual relationships?* When Samantha took a seat near the front of the sanctuary, Caylan decided to sit in the back. Not sure how to respond if they came face-to-face, Caylan decided to leave early.

After the service Caylan met up with her friends from church at a local restaurant for brunch.

"Did you see the new lady with the two adorable children?" one asked.

*Normally, I would be excited to see my friends reaching out to a visitor at our church, but this feels different,* Caylan thought.

As they ate together Caylan's friends relayed a few stories Samantha had shared with them as they greeted her after church. This was not uncommon for them as they all shared in the same excitement when a visitor attended their church, especially one with children.

But the stories did not match what Samantha had told Caylan.

In order to protect Samantha's confidentiality, Caylan pretended that she didn't know her. But the church was such a small place. What if Samantha said hello to Caylan and Caylan's boyfriend, who typically attended church with her, and he questioned how she knew Samantha? She and Adam, whom she had been seeing for over a year, held no secrets from each other but now what

would she do. *What would I say? How would I explain how I knew Samantha while protecting her confidentiality?*

Caylan felt so much confusion as she pondered additional questions. *How do we interact with clients that I go to church with and yet protect their confidentiality? How can I be true to these two roles of social worker and church member and not have one negatively affect the other? Can I have any type of relationship with Samantha at church?*

Caylan decided to leave church early to avoid the issues. *I love this church and don't want to leave, she thought, but I also would not want to discourage Samantha from attending. This church could provide a great source of support to Samantha and her children.*

## **Sunday, July 6**

The following Sunday, Caylan was making coffee and setting up supplies for the second service when she spotted Samantha enter the church. Caylan was fairly confident that Samantha didn't see her but Caylan grew more disturbed. Samantha had an adult male with her.

Following the service, Caylan once again met up with her friends for brunch and they shared more information about the children. They now referred to her as Samantha DeLucia and mentioned the children's names, Joey and Kelly. She had obviously freely given out her full name as well as the children's. Caylan wondered, *Did she also reveal information about the guy who was with her?* Her friends' comments interrupted her thoughts.

"Did you notice that the new lady had her husband with her this time?" a friend asked.

"He must be the father of her children," another explained. "She called him 'Dad,' when talking to her children."

*Oh no!* Caylan thought. *I assumed that was her boyfriend! Who is this guy? Has she reunited with the children's father, her abuser, and thus put herself and the children in harm's way again? But Caylan's mind quickly moved to another scenario, Perhaps this is the boyfriend she's living with and she simply introduced him as their father to avoid questions. Either way, Caylan felt conflicted. If he's the husband, she's reunited with her abuser. If this is her new boyfriend, is she safe or involved with another potentially abusive person?*

On her way home from church that day, Caylan wondered how to respond. *I'm a volunteer at church, what if she becomes a volunteer at church as well? Our paths will certainly cross. I'm not the type of person who hovers over my clients, but what is my role as her social worker? Could I interfere with her growth and role in the church? What do I say when my friends make comments about the 'new lady with the really adorable kids'? We don't often have new people, especially with kids, so it will be impossible to avoid her. What should I do?*



# About the Editors

---

**Dr. T. Laine Scales**, PhD, MSW is Professor and Master Teacher at the Garland School of Social Work, Baylor University, where she has served since 1999. She has published over 40 articles and chapters in the areas of teaching in social work, rural social work, and history of religious settlement houses. Her ten books include “*Doing the Word: Southern Baptists’ Carver School of Church Social Work and its Predecessors, 1907-1997*. (University of Tennessee, 2019) *Christian Faith and University Life: Stewards of the Academy* (Palgrave, 2018), and *Social Environments & Human Behavior: Contexts for Practice with Groups, Organizations, Communities, & Social Movements*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford 2016).

**Michael S. Kelly** PhD, MSW is Professor at Loyola University Chicago’s School of Social Work. Prior to coming to Loyola in Fall 2006, he was a school social worker, family therapist, and youth minister in the Chicago area for 14 years. He has written over 80 articles, book chapters, & books on school social work and evidence-based practice (EBP). He is a fellow of the Oxford Symposium for School-Based Family Counseling, and the Associate Editor of *School Mental Health Journal*, and the Editor-in-Chief of the open-access journal *International Journal of School Social Work*.

# About the Decision Case Editors

---

**Mackenzi Huyser** received her BA in Sociology from Trinity Christian College (IL), her MSW from Grand Valley State University (MI) and her Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction from Andrews University (MI). She is Executive Director of Chicago Semester, an urban experiential education program founded over 45 years ago by six Christian universities that now serves students from over 30 institutions. She previously served as Professor of Social Work and Dean for Faculty Development and Academic Programs at Trinity Christian College (IL). She is co-editor of *Grappling with Faith: Decision Cases for Christians in Social Work*. Her most recent work includes a second collection of decision cases for social work practitioners and research on experiential education.

**Terry A. Wolfer** earned a BA in sociology from Concordia University (Nebraska), an MSW from The Ohio State University, and a PhD from the University of Chicago. He is Professor and Interim Associate Dean for Curriculum at the University of South Carolina College of Social Work. He has authored or edited eight collections of decision cases published by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), Thomson Brooks/Cole, Columbia University Press, Sage, and NACSW. Dr. Wolfer leads faculty workshops on case method teaching and case writing. For his work on case method, he received the Distinguished Recent Contribution to Social Work Education Award by CSWE. His research and publications have focused on social work education, volunteerism, congregational social work, and integration of faith and practice. Dr. Wolfer has served on the Board of NACSW and on the editorial board of *Social Work & Christianity*.

# About the Contributors

---

**Bree Alexander** received a BA in Psychology from Furman University, a MSW from the University of South Carolina, and recently completed requirements for a PhD in Social Work from Baylor University. She is a licensed clinical social worker in the state of South Carolina and serves as adjunct faculty for Baylor University's School of Social Work. In her capacity as an adjunct faculty member, she teaches a variety of courses in the online MSW program related to mental health, introduction to social work, social work theory and research, and evidence-informed practice. Her professional experience includes serving the child and adolescent population through school-based mental health therapy, therapeutic foster care, and, most recently, mental health/social work consulting in pediatric primary care settings. Her research interests include, school-shooting trauma and focuses on broader interests like youth and family mental health and public-school mental health services.

**Tanya Smith Brice** is Dean of the College of Professional Studies at Bowie State University in Bowie, Maryland. Prior to joining Bowie State University's administration, she was Dean of the School of Health and Human Services at Benedict College in Columbia, SC. She earned a BS in Social Work from South Carolina State University, an MSW from the College of Social Work at the University of South Carolina, and a PhD in Social Work from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She has served on the faculties of Baylor University's School of Social Work, Abilene Christian University's School of Social Work and at the University of South Carolina's College of Social Work. Her research interests include social welfare history, with a particular focus on the contribution of African American women in the development of the social work profession. Her research also includes the impact of race relations on Christianity and the examination of structural oppression and its impact on vulnerable populations. She has published extensively and presented at national conferences on these topics.

**Jennifer Bushnell** received her BSW and a secondary degree in global and international studies from Malone University. Currently, Jennifer is completing her MSW at The Ohio State University while working at a community mental health agency as a therapist. During her ungraduated studies, Jennifer took interest in macro social work among communities and across the globe. As part of her secondary global and international studies major, Jennifer was required to study abroad and chose to complete her BSW field placement abroad, as well, in Chennai, India. In Chennai, Jennifer worked with students at Madras Christian College to complete needs assessments among the Irular tribal people and began planning programs to decrease exploitation. Jennifer is completing her MSW field placement at a traumatic-stress center and learning micro practice. While her interests are still macro, she has taken an interest in trauma therapies and has goals for continuing in trauma-work in the future.

**Rick Chamiec-Case** earned a BA in Philosophy from Wheaton College, a MAR in Religion from Yale Divinity School, a MSW from the School of Social Work at the University of Connecticut, and a PhD in Social Work from Fordham University. He has been the Executive Director of the North American Association of Christians in Social Work since 1997. He worked for a number of years as Senior Vice President at ARI of Connecticut which provide homes and jobs for people with disabilities. Dr. Chamiec-Case has written and presented at conferences on various topics addressing the ethical integration of faith and social work and has research and scholarship interests in the areas of spirituality in the workplace and faith-based social services. He has been the managing editor of *Social Work and Christianity* since 1997.

**Nick Cross** earned his BSW from Taylor University and a MSW from Monmouth University. He is currently a School Social Worker in an elementary in the Minneapolis Public Schools in Minneapolis, MN. Before that he served as an Americorps VISTA and Program Coordinator in a middle school in the same school district. Nick has a regular column about technology and social work in NACSW's *eNews* formerly the *Catalyst*. Nick first started thinking about the intersection of technology and social work during an internship in rural Ghana partnering with the Asante Akim Multipurpose Community Telecentre (AAMCT).

**Helen Wilson Harris** earned a BA from the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor in Belton, Texas, MSW from Our Lady of the Lake University in San Antonio, Texas and Ed.D. from the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor. Presently she is an Associate Professor at the Diana R. Garland School of Social Work at Baylor University where she teaches undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral students. Previously Helen served as Director of Graduate Field Education and Director of Field Education for ten years. Prior to coming to Baylor, Helen was the founding director of the first hospice in central Texas and served for eight years as foster care and independent living director at The South Texas Children's Home. Helen's research and practice interests are the impact of loss and grief/grief theory applied, trauma treatments, the ethical integration of faith and social work practice and teaching, and the interface of LGBTQ+ persons and Christian institutions including congregational discernment and civil conversation.

**Beryl Huguen** received a BA from Calvin University, an MSW from Western Michigan University, and a PhD from the University of Kansas. He is Professor (emeritus) of Social Work at Calvin University in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He has served as a board member and publications editor for the North American Association of Christians in Social Work. He has published papers on mental health, the integration of Christian faith and social work practice, and social work history. He is co-editor of *Spirituality within Religious Traditions in Social Work Practice* (Brooks Cole, 2001) and editor of *Christianity and Social Work*:

Readings on the Integration of Christian Faith and Social Work Practice, 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> Editions, (NACSW, 1998, 2002, 2008). In retirement he has been involved in international social work consultation and program evaluation in Russia, Liberia, and New Zealand.

**Joseph Kuilema** earned a BSW from Calvin College, a MSW from the University of Michigan, and a PhD from Michigan State University, where his dissertation focused on understanding motivations for international collaborations in social work education. He is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology and Social Work at Calvin University, where he has taught since 2008. His research and teaching interests include global social work, community development, anti-racism, and the integration of faith and social work. He has published articles on international social work, the role of faith as a virtue in social work practice, and social work advocacy.

**Mary Lawinger** earned her BA from Marquette University and is currently enrolled in the MSW program at Loyola University-Chicago. She has spent much of her undergraduate and graduate career serving persons in jail and prison systems in the Midwest and hopes to continue to incorporate her faith and spiritual life into her future social work career. Mary recently got married and is enjoying being a newlywed with her husband in downtown Chicago.

**Carla J. MacDonald** is the Program and Field Education Director for the BSW program at Huntington University (IN). She is also Associate Professor of Social Work. She received her BSW degree from Manchester University (IN) and her MSW from Indiana University- Indianapolis. She also holds a MBA from the University of St. Francis (IN). From 1978 to 2005 she worked at Pathfinder Services, overseeing adult and children's services to individuals with disabilities as well as those facing barriers to employment, independent living and socialization within their communities. She was the founding director of Kids Kampus, an early childhood education center where the focus was on the integration of typical children and children with developmental delays in order to foster a focus upon *children first*. She also served as an outpatient therapist for the Bowen Mental Health Center working primarily with children in the foster care system. In 2012 she received her Ed.D. in Organizational Leadership from Indiana Wesleyan University. She has been recognized with the Vanderspool Volunteer Award presented annually to a United Way supporter, 2016 recipient of the LaMont Award through Pathfinder Services, and 2018 recipient of the Steve Bailey award through the Youth Services Bureau.

**Melanie Minuche** earned a BSW from Loyola University Chicago. As a first generation, low-income student, she has spent much of her undergraduate career serving communities of color, particularly immigrant and refugee populations while analyzing the intersections of race, class, and immigration status.

She hopes to continue empowering youth of color through her involvement in mentorship programs and advocacy for self-reflective practices. Melanie hopes to pursue a dual-degree, JD/MSW, to continue working with underrepresented communities of color in the fight for freedom and liberation.

**Dennis Myers**, Ph.D., M.S.S.W, L.C.S.W. Professor and Danny and Lenn Prince Chair. University Outstanding Teacher and Distinguished Teacher. Principal or co-principle investigator for over \$1,500,000 grant funding. Gerontology Initiative chair and principle investigator for the Prince Initiative providing research, evidence-based practice models, educational programs, and practical resources to strengthen the care environments and enrich the personal and family life of older persons. Serves on the Texas Nursing Facility Administrator's Advisory Board. Authored or co-authored 70 journal articles and chapters in social work practice, military family life, at-risk older persons, persons living with dementia, educational gerontology, administration and social work practice in senior living environments, adult caregiving, productive aging, and faith-based community services.

**Holly K. Oxhandler** received her BS, MSW, and PhD from the University of Houston in Houston, Texas. She currently serves as the Associate Dean for Research and Faculty Development at Baylor University's Diana R. Garland School of Social Work. Her research focuses on the ethical and effective integration of clients' religion/spirituality in mental health treatment across helping professions, client preferences for such integration, and helping professionals' training around integrating clients' religion/spirituality into treatment. She developed the *Religious/Spiritually Integrated Practice Assessment Scale* and similar instruments, cohosts *CXMH: A Podcast on Faith & Mental Health* and maintains a blog about her research at [www.hollyoxhandler.com](http://www.hollyoxhandler.com).

**Mary Anne Poe** earned a BA from Vanderbilt University, a MDiv from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, and a MSSW from the University of Louisville. Presently she is Dean of the School of Social Work and Director of the Center for Just and Caring Communities at Union University in Jackson, Tennessee where she has taught since 1996. She served previously as a congregational social worker in churches in Minnesota and Kentucky. Her research and practice interests are how to engage congregations in effective and culturally sensitive ministry in the community, social and economic justice, and relationships among faith-based organizations, congregations, and other social service providers. She has published case studies, *Instructors Resources for Christianity and Social Work* in previous editions, and *Instructor Resources for Congregational Social Work*.

**Edward C. Polson** is an Associate Professor in the Diana R. Garland School of Social Work at Baylor University where he teaches courses in social policy,

social work research, and theory. He received a BA in Christian Studies and Philosophy from Mississippi College, an MSW from Baylor University, an MDiv from George W. Truett Theological Seminary at Baylor University, and a PhD in sociology from Baylor University. His research interests include the intersection of religion and civic life; the community involvement of religious organizations; civil society; and the work of non-profits and voluntary associations.

**David Pooler** earned the BA from Lee University and the MSSW and Ph.D. from the University of Louisville. He is Associate Professor of Social Work at Baylor University in Waco Texas. He teaches across the social work curriculum with interest in clinical practice and policy work and served for five years in social work administration. His research and teaching interests include joy, trauma resolution, addiction, EMDR, and social policy. His research centers around human flourishing, with particular focus on professionals including social workers and clergy. Currently he focuses on researching survivor's experiences of sexual abuse by clergy and is known in the survivor community as an advocate for policy change.

**Julia Pryce** earned at BA in Psychology from Kenyon College, an MSW from the School of Social Work at the University of Michigan, and a PhD in Social Work from the University of Chicago. She is committed to integrating her values of faith and justice into her teaching and writing. Her research areas span two content foci, including the nature of adult-youth partnerships among youth at risk, including system-involved youth (domestically and internationally), and social work education, particularly as it relates to incorporating social justice into social work pedagogy. Dr. Pryce's work has been funded by the Department of Health & Human Services, the Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention, and the Hemera Foundation.

**James C. Raines** earned his B.A. and MA in Christian Education from Wheaton College (IL), a M.Div. from Fuller Theological Seminary (CA), a MSSW from Columbia University in New York City, and his Ph.D. in Social Work from Loyola University of Chicago. He has been an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church of the USA since 1981. He is currently professor and department chair of Health, Human Services, & Public Policy at California State University Monterey Bay. He has authored three books published by Oxford University Press on evidence-based practice, school social work, and ethical decision-making. He has served as President of the Illinois Association of School Social Workers, the Midwest School Social Work Council, and is President-Elect of the School Social Work Association of America.

**Elizabeth Patterson Roe** received her BA in social work from Mount Vernon Nazarene College and her MSW from Roberts Wesleyan College, and PhD from Memorial University of Newfoundland, Canada. Presently, she is associate profes-

sor at Malone University in Canton, Ohio. Her dissertation focused on the impact that international practicums have had on participants' social work practice. Her current research and practice areas include anti-oppressive practice as it relates to international practicums and study abroad, international social work, and international and domestic community development. Previously, Elizabeth practiced international social work in a faith-based setting through serving as the coordinator of social services for Veritas in Sighisoara, Romania and as a faculty member for the Romanian Studies Program. Elizabeth has published and presented on various topics related to international social work and study abroad.

**David A. Sherwood** earned his BA from Lipscomb University; his MSW from Bryn Mawr; and his PhD in Social Work from the University of Texas, Austin. Now retired, he has helped develop BSW and MSW programs at Christian colleges and universities, including Baylor University, Roberts Wesleyan College, Gordon College, and Oral Roberts University. He has written extensively on ethics and topics related to the integration of Christian faith and social work practice. Dr. Sherwood is a co-editor of *Spirituality and Religion in Social Work Practice: Decision Cases with Teaching Notes*. He has served two terms on the Commission on Accreditation of the Council on Social Work Education and consults with social work programs in Christian colleges and universities. Dr. Sherwood has served on the Board and as President of the North American Association of Christians in Social Work and was Editor of the journal *Social Work & Christianity* for 36 years.

**Jon Singletary** is dean of the Diana R. Garland School of Social Work at Baylor University and holds the Diana R. Garland Endowed Chair in Child and Family Studies in the School. Dr. Singletary received a B.A. in Communications from Baylor, a M. Div. from the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, and a M.S.W. and Ph. D. in Social Work from Virginia Commonwealth University. He helped to launch the Texas Hunger Initiative and the Baylor Interdisciplinary Poverty Initiative while directing the Baylor Center for Family and Community Ministries. His scholarship has focused on religiously affiliated organizations, including family-based care for orphans and vulnerable children in Sub-Saharan Africa. More recently, his research has focused on Christian contemplative practices and the Enneagram as a tool for spiritual formation. Prior to academia, he served as a Mennonite Pastor and a community organizer in Richmond, VA.

**Hope Haslam Straughan** earned a BA from Samford University (Alabama), a MSW and Certificate in Theology from the Carver School of Church Social Work at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (Kentucky), and a PhD in social work from Barry University (Florida). Presently she is Interim Chair and Associate Professor of Social Work at Wheelock College, and the Director of the MSW program (Massachusetts). Previous social work experience has been as consultant to APERFOSA (Spain) around the establishment of an AIDS hospice,

serving as a Volunteer Foster Care Case Reviewer for the Department for Children and Families, and co-leading a dynamic collaborative within the community of Codman Square (Boston) in order to improve the lives of children and families in a diverse, impoverished, and complex neighborhood. Her research interests include spirituality within social work practice with children and families, spiritual development across the lifespan, transracial adoption narratives, and community and organizational collaboration. She is currently working with two other NACSW members to establish a MA Chapter of NACSW, and serving as a board member for FAMILY, Inc.

**Allison Tan** holds a BSW from Taylor University, MSSA from Case Western Reserve University, and a PhD in Social Work from Loyola University of Chicago. She worked for years in the field of HIV, both as a program director at a faith-based community health center and as a consultant. She is currently Assistant Professor of Social Work at Trinity Christian College as well as Director of Programs for NACSW. Over the past decade, she has advanced a research agenda focused on the intersection of religion/spirituality and LGBT issues. Additionally, as a trained facilitator in the model of Reflective Structured Dialogue, she has begun much work and presenting in the areas of dialogue around contentious differences as well as religious hospitality in the social work classroom.

**Esther R. van der Woerd** is a 4<sup>th</sup> year student in BA (Honours) in Applied Social Sciences (Social Work emphasis) at Redeemer University in Hamilton, Ontario. Recently she has gained experience as a Social Services Worker for a community outreach organization working with vulnerable mothers and children in Waterdown, Ontario, and plans to pursue an MSW and continue working with children and families.

**James R. Vanderwoerd** is currently Professor of Social Work and Chair of the Department of Applied Social Sciences at Redeemer University in Hamilton, Ontario. He received a BA from Calvin College, an MSW from Wilfrid Laurier University, and a PhD in Social Welfare from Case Western Reserve University. Prior to Redeemer he was the BSW Program Director at Dordt University and worked for seven years as a community researcher with the Ontario government's innovative prevention project Better Beginnings, Better Futures. He is the co-author of *Protecting Children and Supporting Families* (Aldine de Gruyter, 1997), and has published over 20 articles and book chapters and made numerous presentations at national and international conferences. He was the 2014 Alan Keith-Lucas Lecturer at the NACSW Convention, and currently serves as the Associate Editor for Book Reviews with *Social Work & Christianity*. His research and teaching interests are in prevention of sexual violence against women on college campuses, religion and non-profit organizations in social welfare, and social welfare policy and history.

**Kendra Wright** earned her BSW at Trinity Christian College and her MSW at the University of Illinois–Chicago, concentrating in Community Health and Urban Development. Kendra serves as Director of the Social Work Program & Strategic Program Initiatives at Chicago Semester, an academic experience-based program that provides internship and field placement opportunities as well as housing and coursework in the city of Chicago. Chicago Semester serves undergraduate students from 30 Christian and historically faith-based colleges across the United States. Before joining Chicago Semester, Kendra worked in multi-cultural non-profit settings, preparing refugees and high school students for the workforce.

**Melody York Zuniga**, LMSW, earned a BA in Spanish and MSW from Baylor University. Currently she serves as Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Senior Lecturer for Baylor University's Diana R. Garland School of Social Work. Prior to serving as the Associate Dean she was the Director of Field Education, supporting faculty teaching internship courses, placing student interns in both the BSW and MSW program, and training and supporting those supervising students in the agency setting. Her practice experience is in child maltreatment and sexual violence, working as case manager and counselor with child and adult survivors of sexual assault and other forms of violence, as well as their loved ones and caregivers. She is a trained Forensic Interviewer and has worked closely with a multi-disciplinary team that included Child Protective Services, law enforcement agencies, and the District Attorney's Office to help ensure coordinated efforts in child abuse investigations.