

Integration of Faith and Practice Paper

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### **Introduction**

Both spirituality and the profession of social work have the potential to be powerfully impactful. As a social worker, learning to integrate professional and spiritual values is essential.

### **Interviewee Summary**

In order to better develop in this area, I interviewed Terrie Ruff. She is a licensed masters level social worker who currently works as a social worker at Starr Regional Medical Center's Senior Care Program. Over time, Ruff has found practical and powerful ways to incorporate her faith into her practice as a social worker. Since she is employed by a secular program and is an ethical practitioner, she does not proselytize or bring up her faith with clients. However, she is intentional in showing kindness, compassion, and love. For example, she shows that she cares for her clients through her kind words and body language. Another way she does this is by remembering coworkers' birthdays or when are going through difficult times. Some coworkers even come to her and ask her to write down their names in her prayer journal. She described that at times the Holy Spirit prompts her to reach out to those she works with to give them gifts or advice. God's love in her heart creates a noticeable difference, which has spurred coworkers and clients to ask about her faith, which at appropriate times allowed her to share what she believes. She passionately seeks to comfort and care for others, as God has done for her.

For the most part, Ruff finds that integrating her faith and social practice comes naturally and is rewarding. She makes spending time with God a priority in her life and has learned to recognize His voice. Connecting with God impacts her attitude, disposition, and character. It is manifest in the way she treats those around her. When she

intentionally takes time to commune with God, she finds that she naturally integrates her faith into everything that she does without using words.

Ruff only finds integrating her faith into her workplace challenging when she is more focused on her own agenda than on God's. At times, He puts it on her heart to do things for others that may not make sense or seem uncomfortable for her. Although she may find it challenging to act in spite of this, she finds that there is always a blessing in obedience.

In working with diverse clients, Ruff utilizes some of the values that she has assimilated from her faith. She is able to apply these principles to a variety of different types of people. For example, she treats all of her clients according to The Golden Rule, which challenges her to treat others, as they would want to be treated. She also strives to under promise and over deliver. With all clients she seeks to first ensure that they know how much she cares for them. She believes that Jesus presented the perfect model for living a godly life, while on this earth. She believes that she too must interact with those around her and show that she cares for them before calling them to a closer walk with God. She does not refer to her personal beliefs with patients; however she intentionally shows them that she cares for them.

Whether Ruff is in a secular or faith-based setting, she seeks to conduct herself constantly with her spiritual and professional values. She pursues meaningful relationships with those that she works with by showing them care, love, and respect. Regardless of who people may be or what belief they hold, she treats everyone in this manner. Ruff is empowered by God to show love to those around her in an active and intentional way.

### **Future Plan for Integration of Faith and Social Work**

My faith, as a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, played a predominant role in my decision to pursue social work. With a theistic worldview, I believe that Jesus is personally invested in my life and has a plan even though He is the God of the Universe. Because I know His love for me and that He gave His life for me, I am inspired to give my life in a meaningful way. I knew that I wanted to serve God by directly serving and caring for people. As I began to seek His guidance for my career, I consistently kept reading in the Bible about how God calls humans to care for the vulnerable populations, such as the orphans, widows, and those who are hungry. Eventually, I concluded that God is calling me to help the oppressed and that the field of social work provides the best foundation for doing so.

In many ways, social work values strongly align with the values of my faith. I believe the Bible is the true word of God and that God's word should be obeyed out of love for Him. In James 1:27, the Bible defines pure religion before God as caring for the orphans and widows. Jesus calls His followers to service, in a similar sense to the social work value of service. He set the example by washing his disciples' feet and ultimately laying down His life. The dignity and worth of human life is also emphasized in the Bible. Matthew 5:45 reveals that God blesses the just and the unjust. He does not discriminate but values all human life.

Although I feel that social work fits well with my faith, there are aspects of the integrating these together that I will find challenging. In the past I have been involved in many evangelistic activities where I was encouraged to be bold and intentional in sharing my faith. However, in many social work settings, it is not appropriate to bring up God

without the clients first broaching the topic. As a social worker, I am called to uphold the value of service, which states that the client's wellbeing should be my priority. I firmly believe that the most effective methods of improving wellbeing will be found in a meaningful connection with Jesus. I have had a difficult time accepting that in most social work settings, it is inappropriate to incorporate God into the treatment process. I found a research article helpful because it opened my eyes to how it can be an abuse of power as a social worker to directly share about my faith with a client. I have struggled with this because I want to be in a role where I can share God's love intentionally for His glory.

Recently, I have gained a better understanding of how I can integrate my faith with my professional role in the future. Seeing how Ms. Terrie intentionally shows people that she cares through her actions brought me to this realization. In the future, I will integrate my spiritual life with my social practice by first being intentional in spending time with God everyday. I will then let Him lead me to love others intentionally through my actions. I find that this is communicated in the tone of voice, in stopping to listen to people, in remembering names, in showing thoughtfulness, and in praying for people silently. I will not impose my beliefs on others but will show them as much kindness, respect, and love as possible.

I know that spirituality in many ways will empower me and prevent me from reaching burnout. I will actively seek to grow my relationship with God. I will do this by making time with Him in the morning a priority. Another way that I will grow in this area is by going to small group Bible studies and attending church. Having a community of people that also believe is valuable and helpful for me. Jesus provides a perfect example

of serving humans. I find that looking to Him helps me not be overwhelmed by the amount of need and my inadequacy to meet all of the need. Even Jesus did not meet every human need while He was on this earth. Instead, He was focused on accomplishing what God had for Him to do. I also find healing in rest in believing that Jesus' love for me is not dependent on what I do or do not do. He gives me the ultimate dignity and worth and inspires me to show others their dignity and worth. As a social worker, I want to reflect Christ's love to all those that I interact with—this is only possible by focusing my eyes on Jesus.

References

*NKJV New King James Version.* (2016). Nashville, Tennessee: Holman Bible