

Integration of Faith and Practice Paper

Part II

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The main objective of this paper is to understand how I, as a social work student and future social worker, currently and will integrate my faith into my social work practice. I will be discussing my experiences and values that have influenced me throughout my life. Along with looking deeper into myself, I will also be interviewing a practicing Christian social worker to understand how they have integrated faith in their practice and what that looks like.

Interview

For this part of the paper, I will be discussing the conversation I had with Sherry Campbell who is a Christian social worker. Mrs. Campbell has her LMSW and works with individuals who are dying and at the end of life. She began as a hospice social worker and then built her own non-profit: Welcome Home of Chattanooga. This is a place for individuals who have nowhere to go for end of life can have a home and family support system. Sherry currently works as the executive director of Welcome Home.

When talking with Mrs. Campbell about how she has integrated her faith throughout her practice as a social worker, she pointed out that her faith has grown immensely stronger since working in a hospice setting. Working in hospice, the majority of the cases have some aspect of “faith” to them. Nearing the end of life people often tend to wonder about heaven and the afterlife. Mrs. Campbell mentioned how she loved to listen and learn about other cultures and the faith that they had. If a patient would ask her about heaven she would answer, but she never imposed her beliefs on others. Mrs. Campbell stated that her faith and personal relationship with Jesus has grown since working in this field. Just by talking with Mrs. Campbell, you can tell the God is with her. At the Welcome Home house, there is an overall ambiance of love which I believe comes from Mrs. Campbell’s faith.

One of the most challenging things that Mrs. Campbell has faced when it comes to integrating her faith in practice is when she has had to talk with and let go of volunteers who impose their beliefs. She has had volunteers at Welcome Home who have tried to “save” patients by preaching to them about something the patient does not believe in. Mrs. Campbell said that it is hard telling a volunteer who has given up their time to help out that they can no longer come because of this. Mrs. Campbell also talked about how it is so easy to burn out in this field and how holding onto her faith has gotten her through many tough situations.

Mrs. Campbell spoke about how her curiosity is what has guided her with her own integration of faith. She loves to learn about others and see life from their point of view. Narrative theory is one of her favorites to use with her clients because she is so curious about how they have lived life and how their beliefs have affected their choices. Mrs. Campbell runs Welcome Home with open arms to anyone no matter religion, race, gender, or bad decisions that one has made. She is a great example and role-model of a Christian social worker out in the workforce.

My Plan

I believe that my strong faith is why I decided on the field of social work. I grew up a Seventh-Day Adventist and still identify as one to this day. In church, school, and at home, I was taught to treat each other as I would want to be treated, the “golden rule”. I feel as though this has been ingrained in me and I have made it a part of my life. I have attended private, Adventist schools for my entire education which have played a role in my life. I have realized that the Adventist faith puts a big emphasis on mission trips and being a missionary. Both of my parents were student missionaries in college, my grandparents have been on numerous mission trips, and my sister is dedicating her life to the field of missions. I would like to say that helping others is

in my blood and this another reason why I chose social work as my lifelong career. Along with all of this, I do believe that Jesus is the perfect example of a social worker here on earth and that we should model our lives after what he did.

Jesus was a man of integrity when he was here on earth. To me, integrity means doing what you know is right even when nobody is around to see. Throughout the Bible, there are many prime examples of Christians who had great integrity. Two stories that come to mind are the stories of Daniel and then of his three friends in the fiery furnace. All four of these individuals stood up for their faith and what was right, even if it meant facing death.

Service was also another huge part of the Bible. Jesus served everyone that he came in contact with. He served his disciples when he washed their feet, he served the greater population by healing and helping those in need, and he also served his father in Heaven by spreading the good news about God to the world and training the disciples to do the same. God even tells us in the Bible to be a servant to Him by serving those around us. I believe serving others goes hand in hand with being a Christian and a follower of Christ.

Jesus also focused on the dignity and worth of human beings. A prime example of this is when the Jewish leaders brought the woman caught in adultery before Jesus expecting him to condemn her for her sins. Instead, he stands up for her and gives her worth. He treats her as a human being instead of some animal who had done wrong. Even though she had been sinning, he still loved her and made her feel loved and worth something. This is how I want to be and act towards those around me and with those that I work within the field of social work.

One specific challenge that I have already faced in the field of social work in relations to my faith is my belief of the Sabbath. Currently at my agency, there are numerous meetings, trainings, and events that occur on Sabbath and I must inform my supervisor each time that I

cannot attend because of my faith. I am scared for the future when an employer may say it is mandatory for my job leaving me with the choice of losing my job or going against what I believe.

While this does pose a challenge, I believe there are many ways to integrate your faith in social work practice. I do not believe that you must go around “preaching” to each client in order to be a good Christian. I sincerely believe that by living my life in accordance to Jesus Christ, his light will shine through me which will allow me to stand out to others. I also believe that respect plays a big role in integrating your faith into your career, no matter what the career may be. I have already had the opportunity to talk with individuals about their religion and beliefs, which requires respect. I may not believe in what they do or agree with them, but I will respect them and their decision.

In order to integrate my faith into my social work practice, I believe that I must first have a relationship with God. I want him to be a part of everything that I do, including work. I will demonstrate the value of love that I learned from the Bible in everything that I do. God is love. I believe we should love everyone even if we do not agree on certain things. I plan on being open with my clients without self-disclosing or imposing my beliefs on them. I also believe in praying for your clients privately on your own. I want to be able to trust God in every decision that I make. Whether that be what job to take, how to handle a situation, or what to say to a particular client. Like I stated earlier, I do not need to be verbally speaking about the Bible and my faith, but my actions will show the love of Jesus.

I have learned that burnout is a serious issue in the field of social work. I have actually thought about the future when I am no longer in school and in a job where I may not be surrounded by those of the same faith. I believe this is where the church plays a huge role in our

lives. I hope that as I get older and gain more experience in social work, I lean on and become involved with a church that I feel connected to. I have found that throughout college having a small group of individuals with similar beliefs has helped immensely when I am feeling stressed and drowning in my tasks. I also plan on continuing building my personal relationship with God through devotions, my prayer life, and other personal activities like journaling. I also believe that accountability plays a huge role in one's spiritual life. As a working professional, I would like to find a person or group that I can be accountable to about my spiritual life. This could mean forming a small Bible study group or talking with a good friend once a week about our spiritual challenges and successes.

In conclusion, I believe that my faith can and will play a big role in my career as a social worker. I know that God has got my back and that all I need to do is trust in him. The Bible has so many prime examples of social work that it has become hard trying to picture myself doing anything else with my life. Of course, I recognize that there will be many challenges ahead, but I know through prayer and support I will be able to figure things out. I believe with all my heart that God has called each of us to serve those around us. I have found, personally, that social work fits God's calling for me best.

References

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