

Integration of Faith

Daniel J. Varela

Southern Adventist University

Introduction

The way we view our faith shapes how we will practice as future social workers. This paper will cover an interview of a social worker who identifies as a practicing Christian and their experiences in integrating faith and spirituality within the field of social work. There will also be a section of my personal plan for future integration of faith and social work.

Interviewees' Principles

The interviewee was Lorri Merchant. Mrs. Merchant has obtained her masters in social work, license in clinical social work, and has a PhD in sociology. During the interview, Mrs. Merchant said she has not had any problems integrating her faith as a practicing social worker. For her, the Christian faith and social work profession complement one another. Her thought processes are not simply black and white, and encompasses this way of thinking in her faith as something that takes into account context, humanity, and God's love.

Historically, Mrs. Merchant uses her faith as a coping method. She has integrated Christian methods in her practice such as prayers before and after client interaction, and prayers of guidance and leading. As a Christian, Mrs. Merchant never has felt the need to prophesize to clients in any way. She believes that if one lives their life according to their set of beliefs while treating others with love and respect that clients may ask about one's faith. Mrs. Merchant has always been open to discussing faith because she believes and has encountered that clients have some sort of faith of their own. In most cases, faith discussion serves as a resource for clients.

Interviewee Experiences

Mrs. Merchant has always been pro-choice and never has had an issue with her thoughts on women's rights, and reproductive rights. She was the only Master's level social worker while working in a county hospital in rural Missouri. A woman came into the hospital and she was

looking for help because there was not any agency in the area. The woman was pregnant and in a domestic abuse relationship and had heard of Mrs. Merchant. The advice she gave to the woman was to find safety, to leave the abusive relationship, and gave her resource information on shelters. The woman wanted a referral for an abortion.

Up until this encounter Mrs. Merchant had never really thought through how that would particularly make her feel. It was one thing to be pro-life and also be pro-choice. Those are conflicting. Mrs. Merchant does not necessarily like abortion but she believes in women's right to choose. As she should ethically, Mrs. Merchant gave her referral information and did not say anything that would pass judgement on the woman. However, Mrs. Merchant was having an internal conflict because she was giving information that could potentially end a life.

Roughly 6 months later the woman came back to give birth. Mrs. Merchant was able to find out that she indeed did not terminate that pregnancy. However, the woman was not able to make the change to leave the abusive relationship. It was a bitter-sweet experience because although Mrs. Merchant did not contribute to the end of a life, she was not happy with the unfortunate circumstance the baby would find itself in. Mrs. Merchants faith is what caused dissonance around the situation with the woman wanting to have an abortion.

Mrs. Merchant found it challenging while working for a hospice client who was terminally ill and had no faith. The reason why it was so difficult is because at that stage most people have some sort of faith to help them make sense of their death. For Mrs. Merchant, her faith has been a comfort. Although she has been discouraged about the ugliness in the world, partly because of expectations of employees in Christian settings she has worked in and then transitioning to the "real world" where faith does not equal idealism, rather God's justice alone.

Personal Journey to Social Work

My Christian faith to show God's love and serve others has, I believe, been placed in my heart since I could always remember. I desire to show love for all the unique persons I come into contact with and desire to understand others life narrative. The social work values that correlate with Christian faith principles are importance of human relationships, integrity and competence.

I anticipate that the potential challenges for integrating my faith with social work practice will be understanding internal conflicts. I strongly believe very similarly as Mrs. Merchant in the sense that I too feel that the social work profession and my faith complement one another. There may or may not be opportunities that will aid in faith conversation while practicing as a social worker. However, I will integrate my faith with my role as a social worker by integrating Christian methods in my practice such as prayers before and after client interaction, and prayers of guidance and leading.

Spirituality is a protective factor value and can help guard against burnout. I will continue to develop, improve, and grow spiritually as I embark the social work field by having a personal intimate relationship with God. Prayer is my way of worship and for me is used a way of talk therapy with Jesus. There are many times where I can simply tell Him what is going through my mind. But it is just as important to ask and talk with God just as it is actively listen to His calling of action when dealing with my personal life and professional life when having client interaction.

References

Merchant, Lorri. (2018, November, 12). Phone interview.