



Social Workers on Church Staffs

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Diana S. Richmond Garland, Ph.D.

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PREFACE

This research project was supported by the National Institute for Research and Training in Church Social Work, of the Carver School of Church Social Work, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. My deep appreciation goes to Dean Anne Davis, who provided necessary funds and other support which made this project possible. The parish social workers who were so willing to participate in this project gave generously of their time and experiences. I am thankful to them for this. Their creative approaches to ministry speak loudly of the wonderful challenge of parish social work.

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Diana Garland
Louisville, KY
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I. CHURCH SOCIAL WORK: A SPECIALIZATION

Social workers who use their professional expertise to provide leadership for the social ministries of churches function as specialists within the social work profession not unlike medical social workers and school social workers function in their areas of specialization. A specialization in this sense refers to a particular context for professional practice which requires special knowledge and skills defined by the context.

The specialization of church social work is in many respects an umbrella which incorporates a wide variety of social work jobs and functions. A sampling of the range of church social workers' responsibilities includes developing and operating an international hunger relief program; providing family therapy through a church's child welfare agency; developing foster homes and providing services to foster families; directing refugee resettlement efforts in the United States and overseas, and writing educational materials for denominational publications focusing on Christian social ministries, social justice, and strengthening families.

Perhaps the job which most identifies church social work as a specialized practice context within the social work profession is social work in the local church, even though social work positions in local churches may not be as numerous as social work positions in denominational agencies. Many of the church's organizational structures beyond local congregations, including agencies and offices at local, state, and national levels, seem to share much in common with other agencies and contexts in which social workers are employed. Because of these similarities, the unique characteristics of the church as a context for practice may go unrecognized. The social worker who is expected, as a member of a congregation's staff, to provide church leadership, however, cannot ignore the uniqueness of the church context. By identifying the characteristics of this uniqueness, social workers employed in other church structures too may become aware of how their work is influenced by the church context.

Joseph and Conrad (1980) have called social work in the local church "parish social work." The term "parish" can be used interchangeably with "local church" and "local congregation." The term "parish" connotes a geographical area, and although many churches do not define their congregations geographically, they are concerned about the needs of the church's geographic community. Since it is not so likely to be confused with the term for the larger specialization of "church social work" and is not so cumbersome as "local church social work," the term "parish social work" was used in this project to refer to the social worker who is employed as a staff member by a local church congregation. Parish social work, then, is a subset of the larger specialization of church social work.

Most social workers are employed in contexts where they are surrounded by social work colleagues who, in interaction with one another and with their organizational context, define the norms, goals and objectives, and practice approaches applicable in that

particular context. Even social workers in private practice develop professional consultation relationships which serve a similar function. In contrast, the social worker employed on the staff of a church seldom has other social work staff colleagues who can offer help in defining the parameters of the work and in envisioning creative approaches to practice. In addition, the parish social worker has only a scanty literature on which to base practice.

A Review of the Literature

Reports of Parish Social Work Practice

Alice Taggart, in the first article found on the topic of parish social work, was hired as Parish Assistant in a Unitarian Church in New York (Taggart, 1962). Areas of responsibility included casework counseling services, consultation with church groups, and service to the community at large. She noted that emphasis was placed on keeping services less formal than in a social service agency. She worked through home, hospital, and retirement home visits and through encounters with others in shared congregational activities. Taggart was one of the first to use the term "church social work" and suggests that a generalist approach is most suited to this practice context.

Taggart noted differences between social work in a church and social work in secular settings. First, in a church, social work relationships are more personal; contact usually begins in shared church functions where both social worker and client are "members of the same in-group, the congregation" (Taggart, 1962, p. 76). This makes it easier also for the social worker to initiate the offer of help rather than waiting for the client to make the move toward services. Second, most social service agency contacts are time-limited, whereas church relationships, including connections between professional staff and church members, are open-ended. The parish social worker, therefore, may continue some form of contact with clients over many years, even though that contact is intermittent and informal. Taggart noted, for example, the frequency with which persons with chronic schizophrenia may involve themselves in a church community and avail themselves of help that may be offered there over long periods of time. Finally, the worker's total use of self in parish social work is significantly different from the limitation in other settings to the use primarily of a professional self.

In 1962, Ferm used the term "parish social work" to describe a two year pilot project in which a social worker was placed on the staff of a Lutheran church in Virginia. Financial support came from the Lutheran Board of Social Missions, although the social work position was administered as though the social worker were a staff member of the congregation. Responsibilities included casework services, consultation with the pastor, addressing community needs (developing a volunteer transportation service and a used clothing center), developing and activating a congregational social ministry program, and working with the pastors' association composed of local Protestant pastors. Ferm

noted especially the isolation of the parish social worker and the need to establish and retain ties with social workers in other practice contexts in the community.

Kenneth Smith has reported on the development and administration of a network of Christian counseling centers based in local churches (Smith, 1984). The counselors in the network come from several professional disciplines, including social work. The network operates primarily to coordinate services and to provide consultation and supervision. The network also maintains a fund to subsidize the fees of clients not able to pay the full cost of services. Each church in the network has a Christian counseling committee composed of church members who provide support and public relations for their own counselor. Counselors are recognized as church staff members. The model is predominantly clinical; counselors are considered full time when they serve an average of 20 clients per week. They are supported by fees charged to clients. At the time the article was written, eleven churches were involved in the network, including United Methodist, Presbyterian, and Lutheran congregations.

Bailey edited a volume entitled Models for Ministry (Bailey, 1986) which describes models of parish social work designed and implemented by social work interns. The five chapters of the volume include descriptions of the development of Christian social ministries program in five different congregations. The authors describe (1) how a white social worker can launch a Christian social ministries program in a black congregation; (2) how to develop and maintain a short term residential program for chronically mentally ill persons in crisis, using church volunteers and the church community to provide a treatment milieu; (3) how to launch Christian social ministries in a church; (4) how to organize an effective Christian social ministries volunteer program; and (5) how to spark organizational change in a local congregation. The project from which this volume was developed is still under way; it is expected to produce an additional volume each year. The project places social work interns in local churches with the specific purpose of developing new and innovative approaches to church social work with specific population groups.

Conceptual Frameworks for Parish Social Work

Other literature has focused on developing conceptual frameworks for parish social work more than it has describing actual parish social work practice:

Joseph (1975) has articulated the theological base of parish social work as incarnational in nature. She has described the local church as by its nature an ideal community structure in which to locate social work practice, close to individual and family life cycle events, and a natural social structure for community organization and action. She concluded that "its characteristics as a social unit and its theological orientation combine uniquely in creating an ideal matrix for a service model" (Joseph, 1975, p. 45). She argued that an ecological systems approach is particularly suited to parish social work. The core services offered in parish social work, according to Joseph's

model, are access services (information, referral, follow-up and case advocacy, case management, and case finding), specialized direct services (individual, family and group counseling) social organizational services (social advocacy and action), crisis intervention, resource development (volunteer recruitment, training, and support), and development and support of natural support systems.

The difference in Joseph's model and the one proposed by this project is that the parish social workers in Joseph's model are employed by a denominational organization--the diocesan social service organization--even though they functionally relate to the church pastor and congregation (see also Joseph and Conrad, 1980). This gives a somewhat different slant to the work of the parish social worker. It perhaps describes the variation in church structures more than it does a difference in how parish social work ought to be conceptualized, however. Joseph's model describes parish social work in Catholic churches, whereas this research project involved Protestant churches, predominantly Southern Baptist congregations. Compared to the hierarchical Catholic church, Southern Baptist and other Protestant churches place far more control and autonomy in the local congregation, and church staffs are almost always paid by the local congregation, not by other levels of church structure.

Garland (in press) has briefly described some of the distinctive characteristics of church social work, including parish social work. These include the church's structure as a voluntary organization, the goals of a local church and its denomination which differ significantly from the goals of a social services agency or organization, the church's role as one of the few mediating structures which can be found in virtually every American community, the culture of the church community, and the shared lifespace of social worker and client. Like Joseph (1975), Garland has proposed that an ecological systems perspective provides the most functional approach to parish social work practice. For services provided directly to individuals, groups, and families, this perspective suggests the following objectives for parish social workers: First, the parish social worker develops and strengthens the informal networks of interpersonal relationships in which persons meet their basic needs for support, nurturance, reciprocal sharing of resources, and shared meaning and purpose with one another (Garland, 1986). Second, the parish social worker provides educational programs and the impetus for the formation and growth of self-help groups. Finally, the parish social worker provides counseling and therapy designed to help persons with needs that require professional help in such a way that they are enabled through the social worker-client relationship to participate more fully in the informal interpersonal network (Garland, 1986).

Publications in the area of Christian social ministries (Davis, 1983; Delamarter, 1970; Hessel, 1982; Miles, 1986; Moberg, 1965, 1967; Pinson, 1975; and Simmons, 1983) provide a rich resource for the parish social worker. Nevertheless, Christian social ministry refers to the ministry of the church as a whole, not specifically to the professional practice of the parish social worker. Certainly, the parish social worker

provides leadership to the church in Christian social ministries. Resources in Christian social ministries, however, are usually written for the pastor or for lay ministers, not for the professional social worker attempting to use social work knowledge, skills, and values to envision, plan, inform and implement social ministries. This literature, therefore, is to the parish social worker what a basic text in psychology is to the college psychology professor; it offers a useful resource, but it alone is not an adequate foundation for conceptualizing the professional's work.

Goals of This Project

With an absence of colleagues in similar situations to help chart the way and with this relatively scanty literature, therefore, each parish social worker has to develop her/his practice virtually from scratch. This project was developed to provide an initial definition of parish social work to be used by parish social workers in defining, developing, and evaluating their own practice and by social work educators teaching church social work. It was particularly concerned with defining the practice of parish social work with individuals, families, and groups, although it was not limited only to practice with client systems. The goals of the project have been:

- (1) to locate and describe parish social workers;
- (2) to define what parish social workers are doing;
- (3) to determine the educational and professional needs of parish social workers;
- (4) to develop a network of parish social workers; and
- (5) to develop a model parish social work staff position as a basis for development of this area of social work practice.

The project was conducted in two overlapping phases. During the first phase, a group of four MSW students in parish social work field placements agreed to serve as a pilot research team along with the researcher. This group's objectives were to raise relevant questions about parish social work and suggest aspects of parish social work that differ from other contexts for social work practice. Their questions and critique developed as they attempted to apply classroom learning and the literature of social work to the church as a practice context.

From this group's experiences, a structured interview was developed to use with professional social workers currently employed by local church congregations. The second phase of the project, then, was to locate as many parish social workers as possible, and in interviewing them by phone, to develop a description of social work in the local church. Finally, the data gathered in both phases of the project was used to create a model of parish social work for use (1) by churches who want to develop parish social work staff positions and (2) by parish social workers defining and evaluating their professional practice.

II. METHODOLOGY

First Phase: An Action Research Group

A student research group met weekly for three months and bi-weekly for two months. The four students in the group had each chosen to concentrate their practice in the area of social work with individuals, families, and groups; the group was therefore concerned with articulating the role of this practice concentration in parish social work. Participation in the group was independent of any course requirements and was strictly voluntary. Students reported their reasons for involvement to be their interest in the research project and their need for the support and consultation from peers in similar placements. Students prepared weekly time logs and diaries of activities which were submitted to the researcher/faculty member for analysis and to the group for discussion. The group's time was unstructured; the group itself decided on topics and issues for the agenda. The following areas of discussion and exploration received major portions of the group's energy:

- (1) learning about one another's work and the similarities and differences in their churches;
- (2) developing a process for beginning social work practice with individuals, families and groups when there is no established role for a social worker in the church;
- (3) defining appropriate goals, objectives, and tasks for parish social work;
- (4) developing strategies for relating to church members and church staff members in problematic situations; and
- (5) presenting themselves and church social work to other church staff and to church members.

This group concluded its work by identifying a number of issues which need to be addressed by parish social workers:

1. What professional titles for a social worker on a church staff are most useful?
2. Should the social worker be required to be a church member?
3. How can a social worker modify her/his professional role as assigned by other staff and the congregation when it is not congruent with the social worker's own perceptions of a social worker's professional role?
4. How should a parish social worker evaluate practice and to whom and how should s/he be accountable?
5. How does one begin social work practice in a church?
6. What can social work offer to a church?

7. What role should the parish social worker assume in the worship of the church? (preaching? ordination?)
8. Should parish social workers charge fees for services and if not, how can clients be empowered to reciprocate services received?

These issues were incorporated into the structured interview used in the second phase of the research project.

Second Phase: Structured Interviews of Parish Social Workers

The second phase of this project began with a nine month search for social workers employed full time by local congregations. Inquiries were sent to graduates and others on the mailing list of the Carver School of Church Social Work, the only MSW program in the country currently offering a concentration in church social work. Letters of inquiry were also sent to the entire memberships of the North American Association of Christians in Social Work and the Southern Baptist Social Services Association.

Fifty three persons responded to our inquiries. All respondents were also asked to help identify others they might know who are parish social workers. Screening eliminated any who were not employed by a local church or parish, such as denominational and church agency employees, or who did not have a social work degree. Thirty persons were thus eliminated. Over half the respondents, therefore, did not fit the criteria for participation, despite the fact that all calls for participation specifically stated that a participant must be employed on the staff of a local church congregation and hold a social work degree.

This high rate of response by persons ineligible to participate may be due to two factors. First, definitions of church social work and parish social work are relatively new, and persons working in church contexts do not have a conceptual framework by which they can distinguish the different kinds of church social work practice. Second, the project generated a high level of interest; many persons indicated that they knew they probably did not fit the sample criteria, but they were nevertheless interested in its outcomes and wanted to participate in any way possible.

Twenty three parish social workers composed the final sample; 21 of these completed phone interviews. We were unable to reach the remaining two respondents by telephone.

Respondents accepted in the research sample were contacted and an appointment was made for a 60 minute interview at the convenience of the respondent. Interviews were conducted by the researcher or a research assistant trained to use the structured interview format. The interview combined closed response questions, e.g. "Do you see yourself as a social worker? [choose one: (1) yes, (2) a significant part but not my entire professional identity, (3) a minor part of my professional

identity, (4) no] with open response questions, e.g., "What are your responsibilities as defined by the church congregation?"

The 21 respondents in the sample hold staff positions in church congregations in nine denominations. The sample includes 11 Southern Baptists. The predominance of Southern Baptists is probably attributable to two factors. First, the research project is located in a Southern Baptist seminary and its primary sources of contacts are Southern Baptist. Second, the Southern Baptist Convention represents the largest denomination in the nation and has many large churches which can support multiple-person staffs, making the employment of a social worker much more possible than in smaller churches.

In addition to Southern Baptists, the sample also includes the following denominations: Presbyterian (n=2), United Methodist (n=2), American Baptist (n=1), Christian Reformed (n=1), Evangelical Covenant (n=1), Missionary Church (n=1), and nondenominational/independent (n=2). The churches they serve are located in twelve states, from California to Florida. The largest number, five, are located in Texas.

Respondents have been in their current church staff positions a mean of six years and a median of three years. Four respondents have been employed by their churches less than one year. At the other end of the range, one respondent had retired after 32 years of service in the same church. Respondents range in age from 28 to retirement; 15 were ages 31-50. Twelve are male and 9 are female, an interesting reversal of the usual gender ratios in social work practice. All but one indicated they were employed full time by their churches; additionally, four were also teaching in a college or university and one was in private practice. The one part time parish social worker is a social work professor.

The highest social work degrees completed by the respondents are as follows: two respondents have completed BSWs only, 13 have completed the MSW, and six have a Master of Arts or Master of Religious Education in social work. The Masters of Arts and Masters of Religious Education degrees have been offered by the two largest seminaries in the nation, both Southern Baptist, as preparation for leadership in Christian social ministries. Prior to the accreditation of Carver School in 1987, no accredited MSW was available from a seminary. Since seminary education is considered a critical factor in preparation for service in many churches, the MA or MRE from a seminary has been considered more appropriate educational preparation for parish social work by many churches than an MSW from a university. In addition to their social work degrees, four respondents also hold Master of Divinity degrees, four of those holding MSWs also hold MA or MRE degrees in social work, and one respondent holds the degree Doctor of Ministry.

All respondents indicated professional social work experience prior to their current parish social work position, suggesting that parish social work lends itself to persons who have professional experience to bring to this relatively undefined context for practice. Respondents indicated that they had experience in government welfare, family assistance, and emergency assistance programs (n=6); community mental health

(n=5); church social services and pastoral counseling agencies (n=4); church child welfare agencies (n=6); medical social work (n=6); college or university teaching (n=2); substance abuse programs (n=2); a program for the homeless (n=1); a spouse abuse center (n=1); private practice (n=1); and as a missionary (n=1). Ten of the respondents indicated that they had previously been employed in other church staff positions--as pastor, minister of youth and activities, or minister of education.

III. FINDINGS

The Social Worker's Role in the Church

Title

There is no preferred or most-used title for parish social workers. The 21 respondents, many of whom have two job titles, indicated 20 different formal job titles. Only two titles were indicated by as many as three different respondents--"Counselor" and "Pastor." Those designated "pastor" were serving as the senior, or only, staff person in the church. Table 1 lists the respondents' job titles. Functional designations within these titles include "Minister" (n=7), "Pastor" (n=4), "Director" (n=4), "Associate" (n=2), "Assistant" (n=2), "Coordinator" (n=1), "Consultant" (n=1), and "Social Worker" (n=1). Focus designations include counseling (n=5); social ministries, Christian social ministries, community, or community ministries (n=7); older adults or seniors (n=3); singles (n=1); youth (n=1); social work (n=2); administration (n=2), and education (n=1).

Respondents were asked if their titles described their work. Fourteen responded "yes," five that it mostly but not completely described what they do, and two that it only described what they do in a minor way. When asked if they like their title, 15 responded "yes," and five responded "mostly but not completely." Seventeen stated that they would pick the same title if given a choice, and five voluntarily added that they had in fact named the position themselves. Three respondents indicated that they would prefer the titles "social worker," "social minister," or "counselor."

Table 1. Professional titles of 21 parish social workers*.

Pastor (n=3)
Pastor to Singles and Seniors
Counselor (n=3)
Minister of Youth
Minister of Education & Administration
Minister of Social Work
Minister of Christian Counseling
Minister of Christian Social Ministries
Minister of Senior Adults
Community Minister
Director of Social Ministries (n=2)
Director of Church and Community Ministry
Director of Counseling
Associate in Christian Social Ministries
Associate in Counseling
Administrative Assistant
Assistant to the Pastor in Social Ministries
Older Adult Program Coordinator
Consultant
Social Worker

*Several respondents indicated more than one title for their position; all titles have been included in this listing. Those with no "n = ..." were named by a single respondent.

Professional Identity

Despite their varying job titles, the respondents for the most part identify themselves as social workers. When asked, "Do you see yourself as a social worker?", 11 responded "yes," 5 indicated that "social worker" is a significant part of their professional identity, 4 indicated that "social worker" is a minor part of their professional identity, and 1 responded that "social worker" is not at all a part of his professional identity.

Respondents believe that others on the church staff or in the congregation are less likely to see them as social workers than they see themselves, however. Only nine indicated that other church staff members see them entirely or in significant ways as social workers; seven reported that other staff see social work to be only a minor part of their professional role, and four indicated that other staff do not see them at all as a social worker. The congregation is even less likely to see them as social workers. In response to the question, "Does the congregation see you as a social worker?" 8 of the 21 responded "no," and 6 responded that social work was only a minor part of the professional identity assigned them by the congregation.

This conflict between self-identity and identity attributed to them by significant others also exists in the role designation of "minister." Nineteen respondents indicated that they see themselves as ministers or clergy. The remaining two stated that they see themselves as ministers or clergy "only in a minor sense." Only four, however, reported that their congregations see them as ministers or clergy. The remaining 17 indicated flatly that they were not seen as ministers or clergy, or, if they were at all, it was only in a minor sense.

It seems apparent, therefore, that, along with a lack of consensus about appropriate professional titles for parish social workers, significant conflict exists between how parish social workers see themselves as social workers and as clergy, and how they think they are viewed by their congregations. The parish social worker is quite unlikely to have other professional social workers as colleagues on the same staff or even on staffs of other churches in the same community, so that the congregation and staff provide virtually the only role relationships within the church community for the parish social worker. Social workers in other agencies and organizations in the community may have little appreciation for the nuances of conflicting professional identities with which the parish social worker may be struggling. This identity conflict, therefore, has even more salience than it might in another context where supportive social work colleagues are available.

Church Membership

It is normative for church staff to be members of the churches they serve, with the possible exception of some part time staff or other staff members who are not providing primary

leadership for the church community (secretaries, weekday school or preschool staff, custodians, musicians, etc.). Nineteen of the respondents are members of the churches they serve. The two who are not church members have the job titles "Older Adult Program Coordinator" and "Minister of Christian Counseling." It appears that, although there is some flexibility, church membership is normative for parish social workers.

Although this requirement is not surprising, it has a great deal of significance in defining parish social work as a field of social work practice. Parish social work and, to a lesser extent, other forms of church social work involve not only professional commitment but also private beliefs and lifestyle in a way that distinguishes church social work from other contexts for social work practice. The blurring of lines between professional practice and personal lifestyle can be hypothesized to create a variety of difficulties for both church and social worker as well as a wellspring of creativity and commitment to parish social work.

The Contract between Social Worker and Church

Twelve of the 21 respondents stated that they have a formal job description. Whether formal or informal, respondents indicated that other church staff members and their congregations hold a variety of expectations of them. Each of the following areas of responsibility was mentioned by five or more respondents: providing counseling and/or psychotherapy for church members and nonmembers; providing social services for those outside the congregation; developing linkages between church, community, clients, and community resources; directing community programs and family life or community centers; providing educational services, including family life education and preventive mental health services as well as traditional religious education programs; and visiting ill and homebound members and other persons whose needs come to the attention of the church staff. Other responsibilities mentioned by the respondents include administration, fund raising, preaching, conducting youth and senior adult activity programs, working with missions groups, and supervising students and volunteers.

Respondents were asked if other church staff members' expectations of them differ from those of the congregation. Fifteen respondents indicated that the differences, if any, were minor. Six replied that there were major differences. In addition to those mentioned in the above lists, respondents noted that the staff members with whom they serve expect them to participate in all church activities whether or not they are responsible for leadership, provide worship leadership, and provide counseling for church staff members.

Parish social workers were asked what they consider part of their responsibility even though the staff or congregation does not identify it as such. Four respondents stated that they considered being a minister or pastor to be part of their responsibility even though they were not identified in this way by their churches. Other responsibilities they volunteered as

being unrecognized parts of their positions include: program development, assistance to the pastor, city-wide planning and community networking, nurturing the church community's development as a family, public relations with the community, supervision, and change agency within the church as a political system. When asked what others consider part of their responsibility that they do not think really fits the role of social worker in a church, respondents were unanimous that there were no such responsibilities. One might conjecture from these responses that parish social workers do not feel that their churches expect more of them than is reasonable but, instead, would like to see their responsibilities expanded and visions of what parish social work can offer broadened.

The Goals of Parish Social Work

The respondents indicated that establishing goals for parish social work practice is an informal process at best. Seven stated that there is no process for establishing goals beyond what they do for themselves. Eight others initiate the process and then seek discussion and approval from other staff members and/or relevant church committees. The remaining six stated that the process begins in consultation with the pastor or the relevant church committee. Congruent with this, 17 respondents indicated that they establish their own goals for their work. The remaining 4 stated that goals are established for them (although with their consultation) by either the pastor or a church committee.

Accountability

When asked to whom they are accountable, respondents indicated overwhelmingly (n =17) that they are responsible primarily to the senior pastor. Two respondents stated that they are responsible to no one; one is responsible to another staff member, and one is responsible directly to the congregation.

Respondents were hesitant in answering the question, "How do you evaluate your work?" This hesitancy appears to indicate that evaluation is not a priority for these parish social workers. Twelve responded that they document their activities and keep daily records which are used to make reports to church staff, boards, and committees. Five reported that their own reflection on their work was the primary channel for evaluation. Three use professional peer supervision and consultation with social workers and other helping professionals in the community. Two respondents stated they have no specific way of evaluating their work.

The Functions of Parish Social Work

It was expected that a parish social worker's activities would primarily involve either direct practice with client systems or directing programs of Christian social ministries. One of the initial purposes of this project was to describe how a social work concentration in practice with individuals, families, and groups could be applied in parish social work. It appears that some parish social workers work primarily with families, individuals and groups (F.I.G.), some primarily develop and direct programs (program directing), and still others embrace a generalist practice model (generalist) and focus virtually equally on both F.I.G. and program directing.

Ten respondents indicated that they spend 50% or more of their time with clients and 20% or less of their time in the other categories of social work activities about which they were questioned; these have been categorized in Table 2 under F.I.G. social work. Nine respondents indicated that they spend 15% of their time or less with clients and spend a range of 25% to 85% of their time in supervision or consultation with staff or volunteers or in leading educational and training groups. These have been categorized in Table 2 as program directing social work. The remaining two respondents appear to bridge these two areas of practice, spending 30-40% of their time with clients and another 30-40% in supervision, consultation, and training. The primary distinguishing feature for these two generalists is the much greater amount of time they spend with volunteers (32.5%) compared to the F.I.G. and program directing social workers (3.9% and 9.6%)

It is clear, however, that although the sample can be divided into the two categories of practice, there are not distinctive tasks that belong exclusively to one or the other of the F.I.G. and program directing concentrations. All of the F.I.G. social workers perform tasks normally considered program directing, and all of the program directing social workers are also working directly with clients. When later questioned about what social work educators can do to prepare social workers for service in a local church, three respondents volunteered that they think church social work education needs to provide a generalist education for parish social work practice.

Table 2. Average amount of time spent in specific activities.

	F.I.G. (n=10)	program dir. (n=9)	generalist (n=2)
clients	59.0%*	10.8%	35.0%
meetings (committee/staff)	6.0%	11.6%	12.5%
paperwork/reports	10.2%	10.1%	7.5%
speaking/preaching	4.1%	5.3%	7.5%
supervision/consul- tation with staff	3.5%	15.6%	2.5%
supervision/consul- tation with volun- teers	3.9%	9.6%	32.5%
education/training (staff/volunteers)	7.2%	20.2%	7.5%
studying/preparation	9.7%	14.2%	10.0%

*Percentages are statistical means for the subgroup and therefore do not equal 100%.

These findings corroborate the experiences of the student research group. Although all were F.I.G. social work students, they quickly discovered that, in order to establish social work in a church setting, parish social workers must engage in activities other than working directly with clients. These activities include community analysis, auditing community ministries currently in place, sharing pastoral visiting and other staff responsibilities as a means of "joining the system," educating the staff and the congregation about Christian social ministries in general and the needs of the church's own community specifically, and developing a Christian social ministries program. From these activities, clients begin contacting the parish social worker and a more recognizably F.I.G. social work practice develops. Even so, the other tasks and responsibilities continue and in many ways define the distinctive nature of parish social work as contrasted with clinical social work in other social work practice contexts.

The Tasks and Responsibilities of Parish Social Workers

Ongoing Activities and Programs

The parish social workers were asked to describe their current activities and goals. The responses indicate the wide variety of ministries churches are involved in under the leadership of social workers (see Table 3). Some of these programs and activities are those traditionally expected of churches and often offered by other staff members in churches without a parish social worker. These include outreach in the community, emergency food assistance, evangelism and discipleship training, single adult programs, senior adult programs, and youth programs. Other activities listed in Table 3 indicate the unique contribution a parish social worker can bring to a church staff, such as developing community networks, a telephone reassurance program, an adult day care program, volunteer training programs, lay counseling training, and programs for persons abusing substances and their families.

These programs are supported by a variety of activities, some of which were specifically named by the respondents, as listed in Table 4. An examination of those designated F.I.G. social workers and those designated program directing social workers indicated no significant difference between the two groups in the number or nature of the programs or activities in which they are engaged. One might conjecture that the difference may be that F.I.G. social workers offer many of these services to clients themselves, whereas program directing social workers develop and coordinate these programs, which are then actually conducted by others. Since respondents were asked simply to list the programs and activities in which they were involved, it is likely that they did not report everything that they do. Each of the items listed in Tables 3 and 4 were mentioned by a maximum of three respondents, although one might guess that a much higher proportion of the sample would indicate these items if asked specifically about each. The only exception is emergency and benevolent assistance; all 21 respondents listed this as a service for which they are responsible. Based on this study, future surveys can provide respondents with a comprehensive list to which they can respond, which may give a more complete picture of what kinds of services parish social workers are providing.

The parish social workers in this sample offer a myriad of educational programs (see Table 5). These activities are, in fact, a major portion of their work. Again, an examination of the programs offered by the F.I.G. and the program directing social workers yields no identifiable difference between the two groups.

 Table 3. Programs directed by parish social workers.*

emergency and benevolence assistance (food, clothing,
 transportation, money for medication, money for utilities,
 shelter, home furnishings, home care support, school supplies)
 telephone hotline/crisis intervention
 refugee resettlement
 jail ministry
 Mother's Day Out
 telephone reassurance for senior adults and latchkey children
 day care for adults
 lay counseling
 community outreach
 children's summer activities
 premarital preparation
 substance abuse outpatient treatment
 groups for families of substance abusers
 shelter for victims of family violence
 clothing store
 senior citizens activities and programs
 services and shelter for the homeless
 youth activities and programs
 services and activities for single and recently divorced adults
 and their families
 educational and preventive services (see Table 5)
 Meals on Wheels for the homebound
 daily feeding program for poor, isolated, and homeless
 evangelism/discipleship/shepherding
 weekday ministries
 --tutoring
 --children's activities
 --crafts and educational programs
 housing for senior adults
 services to the homebound
 literacy programs
 counseling with individuals, families, and groups
 developing and providing support services to foster and
 emergency shelter homes for children and developmentally
 disabled adults

*Respondents were asked to indicate the nature of their current
 work and short and long term goals. Each of the items listed in
 this table were volunteered by one or more respondent.

Table 4. Tasks of parish social workers.*

volunteer recruitment, training, supervision, and support
community network development
long range planning
evaluation of current services
fund raising
supervision of building construction
 --family life center
 --community ministries center
 --making current facilities accessible to the handicapped
student, volunteer and other staff supervision
program administration, coordination, direction
direct services to client systems
integration of different family groups in the community with one
 another (e.g. single, divorce, married)
counseling and referral for other church staff members
consultation with other churches and service programs
education of the church about social ministries in general and
 specific issues and concerns for the community
preaching, speaking to church and community groups
writing in church publications
conducting Bible studies
coordinating and supporting self-help groups through the church
 (Parents United, Parents Anonymous, Alcoholics Anonymous,
 etc.)
coordinating and integrating work with other staff and ministries
 of the church
political resource development

*Respondents were asked to name the tasks that they are responsible for in their work. Each of the items above was listed by one or more respondent.

Table 5. Educational services and programs offered by parish social workers.*

parenting (n=9)
substance abuse and families of substance abusers (n=7)
family life education (n=6)
grief/widowhood (n=6)
marriage enrichment (n=6)
stress/coping with crisis (n=6)
mother's club/women's support groups (n=4)
personal hygiene/nutrition/safety (n=4)
volunteer training (n=4)
Bible study (n=3)
divorce (n=3)
missions/social issues (n=3)
self esteem (n=3)
adolescent life experiences (n=2)
children in crisis (n=2)
job skills training/unemployment (n=2)
housing assistance (n=2)
assertiveness (n=1)
child development (n=1)
children of aging parents (n=1)
children with special needs (n=1)
literacy (n=1)
international peace (n=1)
personality development (n=1)
political resource development (n=1)
premarital preparation (n=1)
sanctuary movement (n=1)
sexuality (n=1)
scouting (n=1)
spouse abuse (n=1)
tutoring (n=1)
witnessing (n=1)

*Respondents were asked to indicate the kinds of educational groups with which they work. Each of the items in this table was volunteered by one or more respondents. The number of respondents indicating each item is listed in parentheses following the item.

Clients Served

Respondents were asked if they provided services to nine specific client systems: couples, families, adults, children, adolescents, therapy groups, and education groups. As Table 6 indicates, parish social workers generally work with the whole range of client systems. Again, there was no distinction between F.I.G. and program directing social workers. Differences between these two subgroups would have more likely appeared if respondents had been asked to indicate the proportion of their time spent with each these types of client systems.

Table 6. Client systems served by parish social workers.

	Number of respondents who work with these client systems
adults individually	20
families	19
couples	18
educational groups	17
adolescents individually	15
children individually	10
therapy groups	10

Respondents were also asked what kinds of issues their clients present for help in counseling. Their responses can be found in Table 7. Again, the wide range of problems with which social workers are involved can be found in the practice of these parish social workers, regardless of whether they spend their time primarily with clients or in directing programs. Parish social workers indicated, however, that they often make referrals when their church does not have the resources or they do not have the professional expertise required to address the presented problem. One respondent added that she makes a referral when the client is a church member she knows "too well" to offer professional services.

Situations for which one or more respondents make a referral include suicidal behavior, mental illness, sexual abuse and incest, substance abuse, long term financial needs, health problems, family violence, need for child placement, and need for long term therapy. Practically every respondent added, however, that they continue to remain involved with the client after the referral is made, offering support and representing the church's concern for the client.

Table 7. Kinds of issues presented by clients to parish social workers.

	Number of respondents who deal with these issues
depression	21
family conflict	20
responding and adjusting to life changes (illness, aging parents, etc.)	20
alcoholism and/or drug dependency	19
finances and vocational decisions	19
grief	19
family violence	17
family communication	17
sexual problems	14

Support for Parish Social Work

Seventeen of the respondents indicated that they are financially supported by the congregation, not by client fees. None of these seventeen churches charge clients fees. One charges a token fee for education programs, and several do accept donations to the church or to specific ministry projects.

The remaining four respondents are financially supported in part or entirely by client fees. These fees are based on a sliding scale based on the client's financial resources. No distinction is made between the fees charged to church members and those charged to non-church members. One respondent stated, however, that members are served first and nonmembers are placed on a waiting list when necessary.

None of the respondents indicated any problems with their arrangement for charging or not charging client fees. As one might expect, those parish social workers supported by client fees are much less involved in developing or directing other Christian social ministries programs and responsibilities in their churches.

It is interesting that there is such support in many of these churches for parish social work, as indicated by fully salaried positions. It can be hypothesized that in those churches where the social worker is supported by the congregation, parish social work is more distinct from social work in other practice contexts. By contrast, those parish social workers who are supported primarily by client fees likely have practices that more closely resemble clinical social work in community mental health or family service agencies. This conjecture is supported by the difference between these two groups' leadership in Christian social ministries other than professional counseling in their congregations.

Theory and Knowledge Base of Parish Social Work

Respondents were read a list of common theoretical bases for social work practice and asked to indicate which of these inform their practice. As can be seen in Table 8, parish social workers most often use client-centered approaches, systems theories, and behavioral/learning theories in their practice, although all the items were frequently chosen. Nine of the respondents indicated spontaneously that they are eclectic in their approach, and from the number of theories named by most respondents, this would appear to be the generally accepted approach to practice.

Table 8. Social work theories which inform the practice of parish social workers.

Theory/approach	Number of respondents
client-centered approaches	18
systems theories	18
behavioral/learning theories	17
task-centered social work	16
psychodynamic theories	10
ecological theories	9
Gestalt approaches	9
existential approaches	7

When questioned about other sources of knowledge and theory upon which they draw, 16 respondents stated the significance of theology, Christian philosophy, and Biblical studies in their practice. Other sources of knowledge and theory were mentioned by three or less respondents (see Table 9).

Table 9. Other sources of knowledge and theory in parish social work.

	Number of respondents
theology, Christian philosophy, Biblical studies	16
New Testament concept of community	3
psychology	2
pastoral care	2
administration and business	2
social work seminars and literature (journals)	2
urban studies	2
education	1
neurolinguistic programming	1
substance abuse literature and programs	1
psychiatry	1
gerontology	1
conflict theory	1

As one might predict, the relationship between theology and social work practice receives a great deal of attention from parish social workers. When asked "How does your theology and the theologies of your church community affect your practice?", 16 respondents answered that theology is central to their practice, "the heart of my work." One respondent stated "What I am doing IS theology!" Another stated that theology is the energy in social ministries, the momentum to "go for it." Without exception, these parish social workers view theology as a freeing, not a constraining force. They regard as valuable resources the empowering image of Christ, Christian ethics, prayer and Biblical study, and the concepts of reconciliation, the self-worth and dignity of every human being, and unconditional love. All 21 respondents stated that their personal theology and the theology of their church community was complimentary, not conflictual. Six respondents added, however, that they do experience conflict in some areas. These include the use of the Bible, how to use money and other church resources most effectively, the integration of community persons into the church family, and translating social work knowledge into the language of the church.

Professional Ethics in Parish Social Work

Because the church congregation is in many respects a community or, in some cases, a large extended family, it was hypothesized that confidentiality might pose some interesting dilemmas, especially when volunteers form a significant part of the social ministries team. When asked if assuring confidentiality is problematic, nine respondents stated that confidentiality is no more a difficult issue in the church than it is in other contexts for social work practice. Six stated that it is only rarely a problem. Six respondents, however, stated that it is a "serious problem."

When asked to elaborate, these respondents indicated that there are two problems with confidentiality. First, other staff members, especially pastors and church secretaries, may have access to knowledge about clients but do not always handle it appropriately. These parish social workers stated that they attempt to handle this by educating staff about confidentiality, by confronting breaches of confidentiality, by attempting to circumvent certain staff members, and by keeping their records elsewhere than the church office. Second, church members may ask the parish social worker for information about others in the congregation. One respondent stated that she simply announces her policy, "You can ask anything you like of me but I won't respond if it is a breach of confidence." Another responds to the query by telling the church member to "Ask them yourself."

Respondents were asked the open-ended question, "What other ethical dilemmas do you face?" The issues they mentioned can be found in Table 10. Six respondents replied "none." The only issues mentioned by more than one respondent were "staff members acting unethically" (n=3), relating Christianity across cultural differences (n=3), and racism and prejudice in the church (n=2).

Table 10. Ethical issues faced by parish social workers.*

homosexuals who want to remain homosexual
integrating secular modalities (e.g. hypnosis) into parish practice
staff members acting unethically (n=3)
charging fees
other staff who emphasize number of baptisms as the basis for
practice evaluation
separation of church and state
abortion
lack of freedom to invite clients to church
relating Christianity across cultural differences (n=3)
resource deployment; making hard choices
getting the church to face relevant social issues
racism/prejudice in the church (n=2)

*Unless otherwise indicated, each item was mentioned by only one respondent.

Social Work Education and the Profession

Respondents were asked what issues need to be addressed in educating future parish social workers. This was an open-ended question; respondents could list as few or as many issues as they liked. Overwhelmingly, respondents volunteered that they think Biblical and theological studies, Christian ethics, and an understanding of the politics and structure of the church as a social system are vital in the education of parish social workers. These and other responses can be found in Table 11. In addition, four respondents expressed their wish that other church leaders be required to take at least one social work course during their seminary education.

 Table 11. Issues which need to be addressed in educating parish
 social workers, as listed by respondents.

Biblical/ theological foundation (n=8)
 politics, structure/system of the church as a context for
 practice (n=6)
 Christian and social work ethics (n=6)
 field experience in church contexts (n=4)
 professional/clergy identity (n=4)
 relationship with church staff (n=3)
 educating the church staff about social ministries (n=3)
 generalist approach (n=3)
 networking (n=3)
 knowing both social work and theology and being able to integrate
 them (n=3)
 evangelism (n=1)
 the church as a family (n=1)
 professionalism vs. friendship with church members/clients (n=1)
 volunteers (n=1)
 relationship with the social work profession (n=1)
 business sense (n=1)
 family systems theory (n=1)
 counseling in a local church (n=1)
 grant writing (n=1)
 advocacy training (n=1)
 integrating faith and practice (n=1)
 psychopathology (n=1)
 health and wellness (n=1)
 how to maintain credibility in both secular community & church (n=1)

When respondents were asked what they wish they knew more
 about, theology and Biblical studies were most commonly
 mentioned, followed by time management and knowledge about
 business. Other items included the nature of the church, staff
 relationships, working with volunteers, ecumenicity, preaching,
 coping with burnout, planning, ministry to a church staff,
 combating conservatism, translating social work practice into a
 church setting, change agency, and how to develop community
 resource networks. Particular targets of practice were also
 mentioned. These included poverty, cross-cultural practice, self
 esteem, crisis intervention, parenting, marriage, seniors,
 developing church "families," singles, groups, and
 psychopathology.

Respondents are relatively active in professional
 organizations. Twelve are members of NASW; ten are ACSWs; eight
 are members of NACSW (North American Association of Christians in
 Social Work); five are members of SBSSA (Southern Baptist Social
 Services Association); and three are members of AAMFT (American
 Association of Marriage and Family Therapists). Nevertheless,

all 21 respondents indicated their need for and interest in a network of parish social workers. One respondent succinctly put it, "Get me out of this vacuum!" The degree to which these social workers feel isolated is indicated by the fact that only three respondents knew even one other social worker on a church staff.

IV. CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE CURRENT STATUS OF PARISH SOCIAL WORK

From these interviews, then, a concluding profile of the parish social worker and church social work in the particular context of the local congregation can be drawn:

Parish social workers, as identified in this research project, likely have either an MSW or a seminary degree with a major in social work, and may well have both. Their current church staff position is not their first professional social work employment; they have extensive experience in professional practice, often in a church social services agency. In addition, many have been a member of a church staff before in another professional role. Their tenure on the church staff is relatively long, certainly longer than the tenure of pastors on church staffs and likely longer than social workers in other practice contexts. The parish social workers in this sample were either Southern Baptist or belong to a similar conservative evangelical tradition. They are members of the churches they serve.

Parish social workers hold a variety of titles as church staff members, and often are called "minister" and have as their target "Christian social ministries." Nevertheless, there is considerable conflict between the professional identity of parish social workers and how they are viewed by other church staff members and their congregations. Parish social workers see themselves both as social workers and as ministers; they are much less likely to be designated as either of these by their churches.

Defining goals and evaluating their practice is primarily an informal process for parish social workers that may or may not involve others in the church. When others are involved, it is usually more as a matter of approval than real involvement in the goal-setting process. For the most part, parish social workers tend to focus either on direct practice with individuals, families, and groups, or on directing programs of Christian social ministries. Nevertheless, they are involved in both kinds of activities and their work appears to be generalist with a leaning toward one or the other specialization.

Parish social workers are involved in a wide variety of social programs and ministries. About the only common denominator is their responsibility for emergency and benevolence assistance. A significant part of their work is the provision of wide-ranging educational and preventive services. Parish social workers serve virtually the entire range of client systems. Even when they make referrals because they lack needed resources or expertise, they maintain contact with the client, offering support and assistance as a representative of the church community.

Most parish social workers do not charge fees for their services but are supported entirely by their church congregations. This raises the interesting question of how reciprocity can be built into the client-social worker contract.

The aim of reciprocity is not eking out of clients needed resources for the organization, but instead recognizing that being able to give valued resources in exchange for those resources received is empowering for the client. Reciprocity also strengthens the relationship between both parties, in this case, between the client and the church as a service system. This issue received considerable discussion in the student action research group. That group proposed and implemented the following suggestions for dealing with the presumed need for client-church reciprocity:

(1) First, reciprocity should be explicitly discussed and agreed upon in the client-social worker contract, even though it may well remain informal. If the church chooses not to charge fees, the client may be encouraged to select another avenue for contributing to the ministries of the church. Suggestions may include financial contributions to specific ministries or volunteer services during the period of the social worker-client contract or as a goal of the contract.

(2) Second, social work services in the church with church members should have a qualitatively different focus than those offered in a mental health center or by a private practitioner. Specifically, the parish social worker, as a church leader, is responsible for "equipping the saints." The negotiated goals of client services with church members ideally should not be limited only to problem resolution and/or personal growth, but should be placed in the context of better preparing the client for ministry in the life of others. In other words, accepting the help of the church through the parish social worker carries with it the responsibility to "pass it on." Although this research project did not explore with the 21 parish social workers the issues of reciprocity in client-social worker contracts, this will be an interesting avenue for future research.

Theology, Biblical studies, and Christian ethics are key resources in the practice of parish social work. These social workers emphasize the importance of these areas of knowledge for their current practice and their desire for further learning in these areas. They are eclectic in the social work theory base from which they draw. A key issue for them is the integration of theology with the professional knowledge, attitudes, and skills of social work practice.

Perhaps the most distinguishing feature of these parish social workers is their isolation. Without a literature which targets their particular kind of social work practice and without colleagues in the same community in similar practice contexts, the need for a network that can bridge the geographical distances over which this small group of social workers is scattered is clear. The story they have to tell about their work is an exciting one that they need to share with one another and that needs also to be heard by churches and by the social work profession.

V. A MODEL FOR PARISH SOCIAL WORK: FROM DESCRIPTION TO DREAM

With this description of parish social work and the issues raised by parish social workers about their work and their work context, we can compose a suggested framework for parish social work. This framework can be used by both churches and social workers in designing social work staff positions that will fit the particular needs of a specific congregation for leadership in Christian social ministries.

This framework is a hypothesis and not a conclusion, a first draft and not a final document. The research project has been clearly formative and descriptive in design; it has not attempted to evaluate the effectiveness of the work of parish social workers or particular approaches to parish social work practice. Nevertheless, this framework is a beginning map for heretofore uncharted waters. It is hoped, therefore, that it will be a useful resource for launching new social work positions in local churches, and for reconceptualizing established positions in light of possibilities for parish social work that may not have been identified before.

Requirements of the Church

Before a social worker is added to the staff of a congregation, there needs to be a time of consideration on the part of the congregation of their purposes and goals. What do they want to accomplish through the services of a professional social worker? What are the dreams and goals for the church for which they envision this person providing leadership?

Through this process of self-examination, the congregation can then identify the particular strengths and capabilities they would like the social worker to bring to the position. For example, do they want more emphasis placed on clinical expertise and the ability of the social worker to address directly the needs for crisis intervention, counseling, and preventive services? Or, are they more concerned with the development and administration of social service programs?

Although the church may expect the parish social worker to be able both to provide clinical services and to develop and direct Christian social ministries programs, the church needs to establish priorities for several reasons. First, the church will want the search for the staff member to focus on those who have the repertoire of abilities called for by the goals they have established. Second, the very structure of the position and salary need to reflect the goals for the position. For example, if the church is seeking primarily some way of providing counseling services within a framework of Christian values and beliefs, basing the social worker's salary at least partly on fees charged clients may be feasible. On the other hand, if the social worker is to provide leadership for the congregation's Christian social ministries, participate in the normally assigned tasks of a church staff person (worship leadership, administration and program directing, hospital and homebound visitation and other shepherding ministries), and serve in other

ways than counseling services to individuals, families, and groups, a salary not dependent on client fees is in order.

Finally, priorities are essential because a church is often a diverse group of persons with quite different expectations of their staff members. A parish social worker may be deluged with conflicting expectations by staff, church members, and the community. The parish social worker is in a more vulnerable position in this regard than a social worker in another practice context, since the social worker serves at the pleasure of the entire congregation. The congregation also has a virtually unobstructed view and unusual access to the social worker's activity. In many churches, any member has the right to stand up in a regularly scheduled church meeting and comment on the work of the staff. The church's stated priorities therefore provide the parish social worker both with (1) protection from being formally evaluated on diverse and conflicting criteria by individual church members, as well as with (2) direction for organizing the work to be done, which otherwise may have no boundaries or structure.

In addition to considering the goals for the parish social work position, the church also needs to consider their own willingness to support this staff member. In particular, the parish social worker needs the support of (1) a well-defined job description; of (2) the church's blessing and recognition of the social worker's clergy identity, which empowers the social worker as a church leader; and of (3) those willing to share the yoke of Christian social ministries with the parish social worker, instead of expecting the parish social worker to be a minister in behalf of the congregation.

Requirements of the Parish Social Worker

The independence and professional autonomy required in parish social work suggest the importance of graduate social work education; an MSW needs to be considered the appropriate preparatory degree. In addition, the parish social worker needs graduate education in theology from a seminary, where theological education is placed in the practical framework of church leadership. Of course, a program which offers a specialization in church social work and includes theological education would be the ideal preparation for parish social work. Since there is currently only one such program in the country (The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary), however, social workers with other educational backgrounds may find it helpful to augment their educational foundations with appropriate seminary coursework and continuing education in church social work.

One of the ways the parish social workers in this study documented their preparation for their current positions was by describing extensive experience in church leadership in other professional capacities. In addition, they have had a wide range of professional social work experience. For none of the social workers in this sample was his or her current church staff

position a first job upon completing their education. Experience both in church leadership and in professional social work, therefore, appears to be important in preparing for parish social work. Such experience needs to be considered mandatory except in church staff positions where close professional supervision in social work is to be made available to the fledgling parish social worker.

Parish social workers need to have a breadth of knowledge and skills in direct practice with families, individuals, and groups, as well as in program development and administration. They may focus on one or the other of these areas of practice, but it is unlikely that they will be able to make this focus exclusive. In addition, they need to have particular expertise in recruiting, training, and retaining volunteers. Finally, since a major area of service provided by parish social workers is educational groups and preventive services, the parish social worker needs to have knowledge of group dynamics and skills in group formation, leadership, and program development.

Title

Although the title chosen by the church for the parish social worker may seem a relatively small issue, it in fact involves much more than the words typed under the social worker's name in professional correspondence. First, the title will (or should) reflect the church's goals and objectives for which the social worker is being hired to provide leadership. Second, the title signifies the standing of the social worker relative to other staff members. For example, if all other staff are titled "Minister" or "Pastor" (e.g., Senior Pastor, Assistant Pastor, Minister of Education, Minister of Music, Minister to Children), and the social worker has some other title, (Director of Christian Social Ministries, Social Worker), the church inadvertently may have cut the social worker off from the clergy identity given other church staff members, and, therefore, the sanction to provide church leadership. This may be of little importance if the social worker is expected primarily to offer professional counseling services to individuals and families, but it may, on the other hand, be of key significance if the social worker is expected to provide the church with leadership in Christian social ministries.

Finally, the title not only reflects the relationship between the social worker and other staff members, but also the relationship between the social worker and the congregation. For example, a "minister" is one who provides service in the name of Christ. If the church staff member is the "minister," what are the church members? Are not all God's people called to ministry? If so, are members then considered junior ministers, or ministers with a small "m", and staff members considered senior ministers, or ministers with a capital "M"? "Director," on the other hand, implies that the staff member is providing direction for someone else who is doing the target activity. "Director of Christian

Social Ministries," implies that the staff member is providing leadership for others--church members--who are involved in social ministry.

It is apparent that these issues create considerable conflict. One may conclude that the title "Director" is most appropriate for a parish social worker, since it implies the inclusion and empowerment of members as ministers. On the other hand, if other staff have "Pastor" and "Minister" titles, this creates a less-than-clergy identity for the social worker, and clergy identity is a powerful resource in the development of one's leadership role in the church. These conflicts may not have a satisfactory resolution, but being aware of them in the title selection process moves the church, and the parish social worker, toward a clearer understanding of the role of the social worker in a particular congregation and its community.

Tasks and Responsibilities of the Parish Social Worker

One cannot summarize the findings regarding the tasks and responsibilities of the parish social worker without restating the entire "findings" section of this monograph, since the work of the respondents in this study is so broad and diverse. Nevertheless, a core of central tasks and responsibilities appears to have emerged in this diversity. These include the following:

- *community analysis and needs assessment;
- *audit of current social ministries and resources in the church and its community;
- *participation in the staff team;
- *education of the church about Christian social ministries in general, specific needs in the church and its community, and the possible relationship between specific needs and the unique configuration of resources in the church;
- *resource finding and development, including volunteer recruitment, training, and support, as well as service as a catalyst for the development of community resources;
- *case finding and referral;
- *provision of direct services (counseling/therapy);
- *consultation with and support for self-help groups;
- *crisis intervention and emergency services;
- *advocacy in behalf of specific needs and population groups both within the church and in the larger community;
- *development and leadership of education and prevention programs; and
- *development and support of natural support systems.

Conclusion

The church provides a challenging context for social work practice. On the one hand, it offers the freedom to serve as an advocate for persons in a way not often open in other social service contexts. On the other hand, the parish social worker serves in a glass office; the entire church community has the opportunity to have a voice in the definition and focus of the parish social work position and the direction of the Christian social ministries for which the parish social worker provides leadership. Parish social work therefore steers a course somewhere between unusual freedom to shape practice to fit client needs and the varying constraints which come with being directly responsible to and responsive to a congregation.

Additionally, parish social work offers opportunities to practice on the cutting edge of professional theoretical development, applying ecological perspectives of practice in a setting which is integral to the lifespace and natural support systems of persons served. Yet parish social work also includes responsibilities which are as old as social work itself--emergency assistance with material needs and advocacy for oppressed persons.

Parish social work, therefore, represents both the historical roots and the cutting edge of social work practice. It deserves the interest and support of the profession. It is hoped that this research study will be instrumental in generating additional research in parish social work and identifying other parish social workers, who need to be encouraged to share their experiences with the larger profession.

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