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“A Vital Christian Presence in Social Work”

DEVELOPING PROGRAMS THAT INTEGRATE FAITH & PRACTICE

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This paper is a brief synopsis of the topics of the workshop given at the convention. It is meant to share methodology and to assist those in social service administration in the ways in which they may be able to create integrative programs in their agencies.

Are we Christians doing social work, or are we Christian social workers? There is a difference. It is easy to be the former, but not as easy to be the latter. For example, a Christian can be an engineer working for a company that makes widgets. As he designs the widgets, the fact that he is a Christian has no bearing on the way he designs the widgets. We too, can do our social work because it is a good thing to do, but have no impact on the immortal life of the person we help. This is how we can be a Christian doing social work. But is that enough? This presentation will discuss ways in which we can integrate faith and practice as Christian social workers.

I think as we discuss this topic it is important to begin at the beginning. That is, why did you get into social work in the first place? It was probably to help people. I have been in the social service field for 27 years and an administrator for 18, and as I look back, I realize that there are ways that faith and practice can be integrated while “playing within the rules”. There is all this concern over proselytizing, but in reality, as long as we do not make what we are doing mandatory, and we simply offer it, it is not proselytizing. People are hungry for answers. They are looking for solutions to their out of control lives.

This paper will focus on ways in which to do this in your agency. As an administrator, you have more freedom and flexibility than you may realize. It is time to take back the land. We have to take a stand. We serve a mighty God and He sits on the throne. We have to have the courage to be different. We can never compromise the sure word of God. If we do not stand out, we are not standing up for the truth.

We have to begin with ourselves, and then move to our staff, then to the workings of our programs. We do this, while keeping in mind the whole time the best interests of the clients. As Christians we acknowledge that the Bible is truth and Jesus is Lord.

Therefore, when Jesus says that no one will enter the kingdom of Heaven except through me, we acknowledge that He is the only way and that there is no other way. All people recognize that we are spiritual beings. The bodies that we are in are temporary dwelling places for our soul, which is everlasting. When our earthly bodies die, our soul or spirit goes one of two places, heaven or hell. So if someone does not accept Jesus as Lord and Savior, they are going to hell. Part of our job doing social ministry is to lead people to the way they can live eternal life in heaven, rather than hell. This is truly the helping profession. What good is it if we save a man's life from poverty, drug addiction, or trauma, but he loses his soul? This does not mean beating him over the head with the Bible. Yet at the same time we must remember the great commission is not the great suggestion. Jesus commanded us to Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them to obey everything He had commanded (Mt.) and as Mark says "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation." The original Greek word used here for go was poreuomai, which can be translated "as you go on your journey" or "while you travel." What Jesus meant by this is as you go on your life's journey; teach people what I taught you. This means that we should be mentoring people while we go about our everyday lives.

If we look at Isaiah 61, it is the call of the social worker; "We are anointed to preach good news to the poor, and to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release for the prisoners. To comfort all who mourn and provide for those who grieve and give them beauty for ashes and the oil of gladness instead of mourning and garment of praise instead of the spirit of despair.

What better way to instill hope in people than to tell them the creator of the universe loves them and has a purpose for them. They were created for a purpose. Most people we work with have been told from childhood that they are worthless and no good and that they will never amount to anything. They then begin to believe it, because these words become self-fulfilling prophecies, or in reality these are curses spoken over them. People hit rock bottom, they want answers, and not to give it to them is negligence.

I am not here to debate whether this is the right philosophy of integration, I am giving this background to give you an idea of where I am coming from. From here, we can build integrative programs.

The House

Let's look at it another way. Let's say our agency is a house in a neighborhood. The neighborhood is called Transgression Harbor. Our house is called New Hope Family Service. Our neighborhood is a blighted. The people in the other houses in the neighborhood are Fred and Wilma Cheater, John & Marie Embezzled, Mary Gossip, Johnny Infidelity, Jose & Pricilla Liar.

If we look at their houses, we see that they are built on shaky foundations, the top of their houses are self, the windows are cloudy so they have no vision, and the inside rooms are full of anger, bitterness, strife, and corrupt intention.

If we look at our house it is built on a solid foundation Jesus. The walls are built with character, faithfulness, integrity, humility, and honesty. The roof is the Glory of God, The door is the Love of God that leads to repentance, it is a door that is always open and never closes, the windows are revealed truth, revelation and understanding, inside the house are the rooms and the great architect planned each room's placement and purpose. First there is the kitchen, which is the heart or intent. This is where prayer and intercession occurs, then there is the dining room, this is the WORD, where there is a banquet feast on the word, Then there is the family room which is the gifts of the holy spirit, then there is the bathroom, this is where we get cleansing, deliverance and freedom, where we let it all out, last there is the bedroom, where there is passionate and expressive, intimate worship. It is the incubator of the God life. It should be our hope and focus to make our programs like this, a safe harbor in a rough sea, or a city of refuge in a cruel world.

In many ways, this falls right in line with a study conducted by The American Psychological Association in 2000 on the outcomes of change after treatment. They had some interesting findings:

Outcome Research on the Helping Relationship

- 40% of change can be attributed to factors outside of the therapy itself. These factors are items such as neighborhood, workplace, and spiritual supports, as well as client intelligence, trust, and resilience. The importance of culturally sensitive, service accessibility, user friendly and reasonably priced services is a second factor in this category.
- Another 30% of outcome variance comes from the therapeutic relationship, which includes caring, warmth, empathy, acceptance, mutual affirmation, and encouragement. So this shows that the way in which the helper comes across to the client, how they interpret the helper as connected to their context such as with warmth, caring, and empathy is another critical factor in change.
- Only 15% of outcome variance is attributed to therapy technique.
- The remaining 15% of outcome variance has to do with the hope and expectation that comes from knowledge clients have that they are working in a ritualized format that is an accepted approach to successful change.

Therefore, a big part of change is attributed to in the way in which clients are treated by all staff, and the way in which we react to them.

I run a residential program, so since the clients live in our facility, they are residents of our community. When we encourage our community member and show warmth, trust and empathy is built. This, along with total staff participation the resident will develop

hope and expectations that the program will help them. By creating a comprehensive and effective treatment philosophy that utilizes techniques from treatment modalities that have proven through research to be effective with the treatment of substance abusing individuals. The combination of each and every one of these factors can do nothing but increase our success rate.

When you hear the word proselytizing all kinds of negative emotions arise. And, the use of guilt-induced methods of evangelism really only causes people to build walls around themselves and they close their minds to what we are saying no matter what degree of truth there is. However, if we treat people in a kind and loving way, usually they are very open and we begin chipping away at the walls. If we think of ourselves as missionaries, we would want to know the culture and the language well enough and build relationships that then lead to breaking down walls and opening doors.

As we think about those to whom we reach out, we find as Lee Stobel found in his book Inside the Mind of Unchurched Harry & Mary, that many have “rejected church, but not necessarily God and they are morally adrift, but want and anchor. They are really not sure what they believe spiritually, they want concrete answers, they distrust authority, but are receptive to biblical models of godly leadership”, in other words, they would rather see a sermon than hear one, and there is a good chance they would try church if it is something different and they were invited by someone.

Doug Addison in his book Prophecy, Dreams and Evangelism says “many people have felt unaccepted in traditional religious settings and want a God who has real power, not just a historical figure in a book, but one who can identify with their pain while bringing them a higher, more abundant life here and now.” He goes on to say that “as we learn to display God’s love to the unlovable and His acceptance to the outcasts, we will see divine intervention in people’s lives.” Every one has free will or if we want to use clinical terminology, self-determination. If we give them time to feel comfortable in a Christian environment (our house) where we do not pass judgment, we will see the incredible power of unconditional love and acceptance. When we live the love of God, people are drawn to us. And, when we honor the people we serve, it releases their destiny.

In other words, relationship-based evangelism is the most effective means of helping someone come to know and understand God’s love for them. This causes them to ask spiritual questions. This makes them more open to the gospel, thus giving us freedom in assigning homework reading assignments. This creates an atmosphere of receptivity for prayer. By responding to these requests, we are simply practicing holistic care of our clients.

The Six Steps of Milieu Change

Step 1. Staff

When I began my current position, my purpose was to make change. To begin doing this, I include staff at all levels. I began with what they thought was working and what was not working in how the program was running. In this, I identified weaknesses and began planning on ways to strengthen them.

This also gave me the opportunity to get to know the staff and where they stood. It helped me to identify who should stay and who should leave. It helped me to identify who should change positions. Right at this time, the book Good to Great came out. In this book, Jim Collins did a study of companies who went from good companies to great companies within a time frame and which companies just stayed good, or even became worse. One factor that he found worked in the great companies is to determine which of the staff should stay on the bus, which should get off the bus, and which should change seats on the bus. Over an eighteen month period, 90% of my staff got off the bus, and several changed seats on the bus.

Bringing in new staff is the easiest way to bring people in who have the worldview that you need to effectively bring about the change you desire. If the wrong staff are on the bus, it will create havoc for all of the bus riders. Hiring the right staff can be done easily with certain questioning during the interview process. I question based upon the agency mission statement, asking them what they think about it and their comfort level in working in a faith-based organization.

Step 2 Creating Your Corporate Culture

- Conduct monthly All Staff meetings. There are several roles to this:
 - It brings everyone together every thirty days – following the Nehemiah concept. This helps to keep everyone on the same page
 - It was here where I did teachings on developing mission, vision, and values statements.

I. The Visioning Process

- a. The process that helps staff to see the big picture and to think outside the box.
- b. Discuss strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to our program.
- c. Think 4th dimensionally

II. Mission Statement

Lt. Colonel Kurt Burger of The Salvation Army stated that while managing our services must be a primary focus, “if not handled carefully, these tasks can become the sole focus of the organization at the expense of the mission for which God call it into existence”. He also says “clear and careful leadership is required to manage our mission, to target issues where we can make a difference and say no to others”.

- Begin with the mission of the agency and work from there. Create a program-specific mission statement.
- Involve staff at all levels
- A mission statement is
 - Who we are

- Why we exist
- What we do
 - What are we really good at and not so good at?
- Why do it? The process clarifies areas of agreement and disagreement and ensures common understanding is reached early in the process. It also articulates the focus of the direction.
- How
 - Brainstorm on the questions above.
 - Break into small groups and have them each draft up a statement.
 - The written drafts are shared with everyone
 - Group input with the facilitator
 - Then you write the final version

We have to be certain that we are clear on our mission and not have mission creep. Mission creep was originally coined as a military phrase, is the expansion of a project or mission beyond its original goals, often after initial successes. "Mission creep" in non-profit charitable organizations refers to the evolution over a period of time from a doable, supportable mission to a somewhat different, always larger one requiring more and more donated dollars.

III. Vision Statement

- a. The results of the head and the heart working together
- b. Reality-rooted, but Future focused
- c. Definition
 - i. An image of how we see our purpose unfolding
 - ii. A picture of the preferred future we seek to create
 - iii. An answer to the question "What do we really want?"
- d. Qualities
 - i. It motivates, inspires
 - ii. It is a stretch, moves towards greatness
 - iii. It is clear, concrete
 - iv. It is achievable, not fantasy
 - v. It fits with the highest values
 - vi. It is easy to communicate, clear and simple

Source: Organizational Vision, Values, and Mission, by Scott, Jaffe, Tobe; Crisp Publications

IV. Values

- a. What is important to us as an organization? They are the foundation for your department's philosophy, and culture
- b. Questions to prompt discussion on group values
 - i. What do we stand for
 - ii. What behaviors would mirror these values?
 - iii. How do we treat our clients?
 - iv. How do we treat each other?
 - v. What do we mean by ethical behavior?

vi. How do we want to be seen by the community?

- We then collectively wrote each for the center (which was comprised of two major departments and several other supporting departments). We broke down into small groups after the teaching on each respective topic and then wrote them out, both for the whole center, but also for each department. I then took the drafts of each and cleaned them up. It then went up the ladder for approval by my boss and then by the Board. Once I had this approval process completed, then I had a firm foundation on which to stand.
- Strategic Planning:
 - Then we took it one step further and continued down the road of developing a Strategic Plan for each department that was built upon the mission, vision, and values. This was a slow process, but worthwhile. Each month I took a section of the mission, or vision, or values and broke the staff into small groups to come up with ways in which they would put feet to each in their respective departments. The value became the goal and how they would do it became the objectives.
- Staff Devotional and prayer time.

Step 3 Education

I then provided staff with education on how to integrate faith and practice. The trainings focused on professionalism, helping skills, etc. What I want is when a client walks through the front door of the agency he/she should feel that this place is different. For this to happen there needs to be a corporate cultural milieu of faith. This can easily be communicated in social worky terms such as dignity and respect, kindness and compassion. If we look at the Christian virtues or the fruit of the spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control and help the staff to know and understand and live these out in the workplace we are creating a culture of integration.

How do we do this? By treating people right from the minute they walk through the front door. How you answer the phone, how you greet someone at the front desk, how you treat people, what you say to people, how you act towards them will communicate the love of Christ. Have to be conscious about compassion. Remember the WWJD, how would Jesus treat them?

Step 4 Change of Vocabulary

A language change

- Inmates to residents
- Clients to persons served
- Monitors to Resident Assistants
- Infractions to doing something wrong
- Punishment to consequences

Also be aware of any “Christianese” you might use:

- Born again to spiritual awakening
- Calling to you are uniquely gifted to ____.
- Faith to trust what you cannot see yet. You feel like there is more to life.
- The Lord to God

We can take this a step further if we discuss the similarities of clinical terms and spiritual terms. Ego or psyche, that is OK in the psychological world, but what about if we talk about heart, soul, mind, spirit. Because really they are all the same.

Ego is the organized conscious mediator between the person and reality; the superego in partly conscious and the internalization of right and wrong, and the id is unconscious instinctual needs. In other words, this is our inner being, our psyche or our soul. Let’s look at it in spiritual terms:

Soul: Hebrew means the inner being of the man, and Greek is psuche which means seat of feeling and desires; and is from where the word psyche comes. But as I studied this further I also found that:

Hebrew for Mind is the seat of emotions or passions, the man himself

Heart: Hebrew is conscience, seat of emotions and in Greek the word is kardia which means the center of all physical and spiritual life;

Spirit: Hebrew is ruwach which literally means breath, but also means seat of mental acts and moral character, and in Greek the word is pneuma which means the rational spirit or the power by which the human feels thinks and decides.

So, pulling this all together, the psyche is the psuche or the soul. It is just use of language. Yes, it also has very different meaning to different people, but the question is do we let the trend of the New Age Movement take over the “spiritual” or “holistic” when it comes to teaching on these matters. In reality, when we discuss psyche or ego we are really speaking in holistic terms. “We know that only can the whole person be best served when we minister not alone to the body and mind, but also to the immortal soul.”— Charles Booth (Volunteers of America, 1951)

Step 5 Structure

- Orientation of new staff
 - Once all of the staff are trained, whenever you bring in a new person it is imperative to provide them with the same training so that they are working off the same sheet of music and understand the milieu in which they work.
- Weekly staff devotional
- Weekly Administration meeting with prayer
- Prayer
 - All staff meeting & devotional ...this is also the Nehemiah concept
 - Admin meetings

- For help – church groups came
- For staff to leave or expose evil - it happened
- For the right new staff – they came
- For clients who want to change and are seeking they came and asked for prayer. See your role as a pastor also. Deliverance prayer
- Empower staff to use verses and Bible lessons
- Orientation of new clients
- Morning meditation by clients
- Box for prayer requests

Step 6 Client Activities (Volunteer driven)

- Bible studies
- Celebrate Recovery
 - Christian Addictions Groups
- Speeches
- Sermons Sunday night
- Baptism
- Events – in-house and outings
 - TD Jakes
 - Joyce Meyers
 - Joel Olsteen
 - Perry Stone
 - John Bevere
 - Christmas program
 - Messianic Jew events
 - Various church events
 - Christian nutritionist
 - Godspell
 - Church performance groups
 - Christian event on homosexuality and abortion
 - The Passion movie
 - One Night with a King movie
 - The Nativity Movie
 - The Perfect Stranger
- Building Life on a Solid Foundation class (Discipleship)
- Mentoring Program (one-on-one discipleship)
- Fairs
- Church groups volunteers to serve clients
- Church groups do baby showers and mentoring
- Tracts in food baskets and Christmas gifts.
- Distribute Bibles to every family at Christmas
- Offer prayer when people are going through difficult times [People in crisis want it. Often you see many tears in their eyes and they receive the love of God as you pray with them].

Summary:

As Christian Social Workers we have the ability to not only help people with their earthly life difficulties, but with eternal life. This can be done in a way where we are not beating people over the head with our Bibles or pushing our religion on them. Sometimes we make things too difficult. If we just approach people in the way Jesus did, they would be attracted to us and want what we have. Once the door is opened by the person served, we can enter it by explaining our faith and our relationship, not “religion” with the true and living God. Our job as administrators is to create this environment, this culture, this milieu. The right staff will be excited when they hear about it and will flourish in it. We will see our outcomes or rate of success increase, and the world will question how did we do it?