



**North American Association of Christians in Social Work (NACSW)**  
PO Box 121; Botsford, CT 06404 \*\*\* Phone/Fax (tollfree): 888.426.4712  
Email: [info@nacsW.org](mailto:info@nacsW.org) \*\*\* Website: <http://www.nacsW.org>

*“A Vital Christian Presence in Social Work”*

**SOCIAL WORK ETHICS IN FAITH BASED INSTITUTIONS: THE  
INTERPLAY OF PROFESSIONAL, INSTITUTIONAL, AND  
SPIRITUAL VALUE SETS**

**By: Mark De Ruyter, LMSW**

**Presented at:  
NACSW Convention 2009  
October, 2009  
Indianapolis, IN**

# Social Work Ethics in Faith Based Institutions: The interplay of Professional, Institutional, and Spiritual Value Sets



Professor Mark De Ruyter, LMSW  
Northwestern College School of Social Work



**Been Studying  
Social Work Ethics Long?**

# “Ode to the Code”

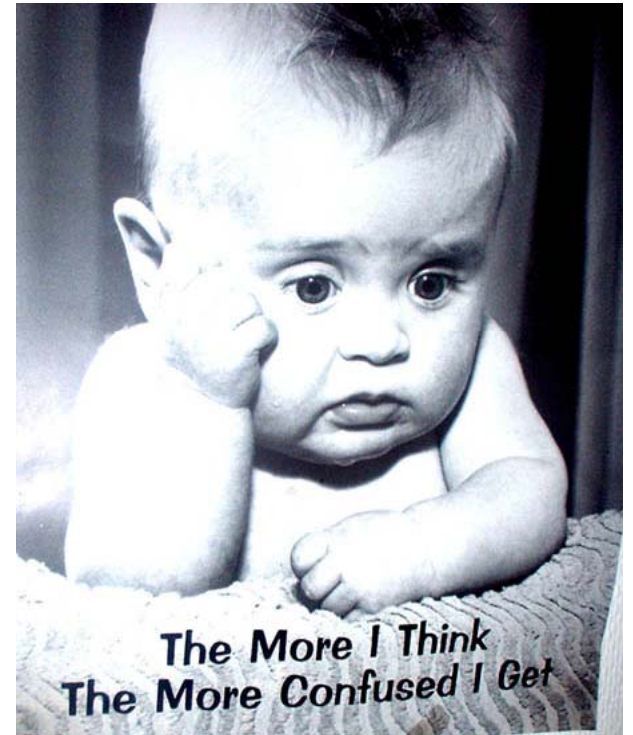
By: Rebekah Wilson

- Oh great and wise code
- How shall I fit My ethical standards to you?
- You speak in contradictory tones
- Leaving me in a Whirlwind of dilemma
- Do I abide by your vagueness?
- Or do I push the standard?
- I would love to be brought Up in the Board of Social Workers On Section 2.11
- Unethical Conduct of Colleagues
- Because you make me feel unethical
- You make me talk unethical And think unethical thoughts
- So what good are you code of ethics?
- Because I feel you are More like guidelines anyway

# In the beginning...

Socrates thought that, when it comes to the “Ultimate Questions,” we all start off as dummies.

But if we are humbly aware of how little we actually know, then we can really begin to learn...



“There is no Justice.”      “Possibly...”

“Maybe...”      “It depends...”

There is no truth!      “Generally...”

“There’s an exception to every rule...”

“Sometimes it comes down to whether the judge had their second cup of coffee that morning.”

# CSWE Stance

- Accredited Social Work academic programs must ***“integrate content about values and principles of ethical decision making as presented in the National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics. The educational experience provides students with the opportunity to be aware of personal values; develop, demonstrate, and promote the values of the profession; and analyze ethical dilemmas and the ways in which these affect practice, services, and clients.”***

-Council on Social Work Education, 2001, p. 10)

- But should we teach ethics?

- Gatekeeper

# Personal Value Sets

## “What’s Your Story?”

- Race
- Ethnicity
- Age
- Upbringing
- Past experience
- Spirituality
- Employment
- Marital status
- gender
- Gender orientation
- Past abuses/joys
- View of “family”
- Political Affiliation



# The Professional Value Set...

- National Association of Social Workers
  - Policy Statements

# End of Life Care

- **“NASW does not take a position concerning the morality of end-of-life decisions, but affirms the right of any individual to direct his or her care wishes at the end of life.”**

institutions; and of the interaction of all of these factors. The NASW policy, Client Self-Determination in End-of-Life Decisions, states “Social workers have an important role in helping individuals identify the end-of-life-options available to them. . . . A key value for social workers is client self-determination. Competent individuals should have the opportunity to make their own choices but only after being informed of all options and consequences. . . . without coercion.” Social Work Speaks: NASW Policy Statements (2003 - 2006).

# Choice

- The *NASW Code of Ethics 6* states that “social workers promote clients’ socially responsible self determination.” 7 Thus, in its *Policy Statement on Family Planning and Reproductive Choice*, 8 ***NASW encourages the recognition and protection of an individual’s “unimpeded access to family planning and reproductive health services, including abortion services, [as] a fundamental human right*** that contributes to the advancement of women worldwide.” 9

# Separation of Church and State

- **NASW “strongly supports the constitutional principle of separation of church and state.”** 18 Therefore, NASW maintains that the expression of religious beliefs “is a personal and private matter that should be neither constrained nor promoted by the government in any way.” **The nomination of Judge Alito raises concerns for NASW about his commitment to the constitutional principle of separation of church and state.** A number of **arguments** by Judge Alito **demonstrate his conservative view that courts should be more accommodating** when considering state entanglement **with religion.**

- **Iowa Chapter – National Association of Social Workers**  
Kelli Soyer, Executive Director, NASW – Iowa Chapter
- The National Association of Social Workers (NASW), Iowa Chapter, represents social workers throughout Iowa. As an organization representing social workers, we work to guide policies that affect, not only the social work profession, but issues affecting the individuals we serve and civil rights for all. **NASW, Iowa Chapter, supports the mission of One Iowa as they work towards equal protections for all.**
- In the 2000 Census, over 4,000 households self-identified as being same-sex households. Of those, 1,103 identified as child rearing homes. In our society, marriage is valued as a mechanism to support family unity, health, and well being. Because same-sex couples are not afforded the right to marry, they are unable to access the more than, 1,100 rights afforded to "married" couples.
- **The inability for same-sex couples to marry in Iowa conflicts with our value of family unity, health, and well-being.** Same-sex couples are unable to access spousal and family health insurance, often causing a financial burden of buying individual plans for each partner. Same-sex couples are unable to claim the financial benefits of being married. They lack the ability to file joint tax returns, to transfer assets without incurring state and federal gift tax and estate tax laws, the inability to collect Social Security spousal benefits. The lack of financial protections for LGBT couples provides undue financial burden that negatively affects the family. We fail to provide the basic human rights and protections to support all couples in loving relationships.
- One Iowa is instrumental in the movement to support equality and justice for LGBT individuals and couples in Iowa. **NASW, Iowa Chapter, believes the state of Iowa should extend same-sex couples the right to enter into civil marriage and to receive all of the accompanying rights, protections, and privileges. NASW, Iowa Chapter, supports the mission and work of One Iowa to assure civil rights for ALL Iowans.**

# The Institutional Value Set

- **Mission:**
- Northwestern College is an intentional Christian academic community engaging students in courageous and faithful learning that empowers them to follow Christ and pursue God's redeeming work in the world.
  
- **Identity Statement:**
- Northwestern College is a Christian college in the Reformed tradition, founded in 1882 by the Reformed Church in America. We are committed to providing a Christian liberal arts education in an undergraduate, intercultural and residential environment. We offer bachelors degrees in a variety of traditional and professional programs.

- The board approved a change in language to our Consensual Relationships Policy in the *Faculty Handbook* in order to clarify the College's position on marriage in light of the Iowa Supreme Court's recent decision. The changes recommended by the board's Academic Policies Committee and adopted by the board are as follows:
- 
- MSC to adopt the following change in language (in red/underlined) to the faculty handbook (2.34.5 Consensual Relationships Policy)—
- ~~Recognizing the possibility of sexual relations in such relationships~~ Consistent with the position of the Reformed Church in America (<http://www.rca.org/Page.aspx?pid=501&srcid=491>), the college lifts up the Christian ideal of marriage between a man and a woman and contends that all sexual intimacy shall be within the bounds of such marriage. Romantic relationships between a married individual with someone other than one's spouse also violates standards of conduct for Northwestern College employees. Any faculty or staff member engaging in such conduct, regardless of issues of consent, will face disciplinary action up to and including termination.

# The Spiritual Value Set



# Reformed Church in America

*following Christ in mission*



# Paper presented by the Commission on Theology to RCA General Synod In 1978 (Adopted)

- **Heterosexuality is not only normal; it is normative. Homosexual acts are contrary to the will of God for human sexuality.**
- **The homosexual invert** [one who does not decide to become homosexual, but for whom genetic, hormonal, or psychosocial factors have influenced his or her sexual orientation] **is no more to be blamed for his/her condition than a retarded child.** It follows, then, that the church's ministry to the invert may best begin with the attempt to lift a burden of guilt that need not be carried. Inverts may not idealize their orientation as a legitimate alternative, but neither should they blame themselves for their sexual orientation.
- While **we cannot affirm homosexual behavior**, at the same time we are convinced that the denial of human and civil rights to homosexuals is inconsistent with the biblical witness and Reformed theology. *(MGS 1978: 233-239)*

The General Synod five "**guiding parameters**" in summarizing the RCA's understanding of both biblical and pastoral approaches to homosexuality and to homosexual persons: (1995)

- 1) Homosexual behavior is **not God's intended expression of sexuality.**
- 2) Homosexuality is **no more nor less serious than other forms of human sinfulness.**
- 3) There are varied and complex causes of homosexual orientation and behavior; hence, simplistic analyses and solutions should be questioned.
- 4) Any expectation for persons of homosexual orientation to experience wholeness should be shaped by both the hope and the realism of the Christian life.
- 5) Homosexual persons should be accorded their full measure of human and civil rights.

# In 2004, The RCA General Synod:

## Amended R-92

**“To affirm that marriage is properly defined as the union of one man and one woman, to the exclusion of all others; and further, To direct the Commission on Church Order to consider an amendment to the *Book of Church Order* which places this affirmation into our church order, for report to the 2005 General Synod. (ADOPTED)”**

# Examples of the RCA Stance

- 2004. The ousting of Dr. Norman Kansfield from his Presidency at New Brunswick Seminary
- The withdraw of the United Church of Christ from the fold of the RCA.



- ***Tenets emphasizing vocation:***
- **16** Christians in social work ought to use the insights of their faith in helping people, and to treat everyone as Jesus Christ would have them treated.
- ***Tenets emphasizing human relationships and responsibilities:***
- **7** Every individual is a person of worth, with basic human rights and essential human responsibilities.

- ***"NASW supports legislation, regulation, policies, judicial review, political action, and changes in social work policy statements and the NASW Code of Ethics (1996), and any other means necessary to establish and protect the equal rights of all people without regard to sexual orientation" (p. 202).***

- *"If a client is uncomfortable about his/her sexual orientation, the sources of discomfort must be explored, but without prior assumption that same-sex attraction is dysfunctional" (1992 p. 1, 2).*
  - National Committee on Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Issues, NASW, position statement regarding reparative therapy or *"transformational ministries."*

- *☒ Civil marriage vs. religious marriage*

- Marriage is the social institution in the U.S. through which couples enter into legal and/or religious unions. Same-sex couples have sought legal recognition of their relationships through civil marriage. Civil marriage is a legal, relational contract between two persons that conveys the rights, protections and responsibilities of marriage under the authority of the state. Because the First Amendment of the Constitution provides for the separation of church and state, religious bodies retain their own separate authority to determine whether or not to affirm, sanctify or conduct sacramental marriages or religious ceremonies for same-sex couples. Religious congregations may choose not to conduct marriage ceremonies for same-sex couples, even when the state legally recognizes same-sex civil marriages; conversely, religious congregations may choose to perform same-sex religious marriages, absent any legal recognition of same-sex civil marriage by the state. Thus, extending civil marriage to same-sex couples in no way infringes upon the separate rights of religious congregations regarding marriage •



- The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) official policy statement:
- Social workers are guided by the NASW Code of Ethics which bans discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. . . NASW believes that non judgmental attitudes toward sexual orientation allow social workers to offer optimal support and services to lesbian and gay people. NASW affirms its commitment to work toward full social and legal acceptance of lesbian and gay people. The profession must also act to eliminate and prevent discriminatory statutes, policies, and actions that diminish the quality of life for lesbian and gay people and that force many to live their lives in the closet. (National Association of Social Workers: Lesbian and Gay Issues. Washington, DC, NASW Delegate Assembly, 1993.)

# Some Examples of the NASW Stance:

- **2004, Social Workers Come Out in Support of Marriage for Same-Sex Couples**
- NEW YORK – The National Association of Social Workers filed a friend-of-the-court brief today in support of the American Civil Liberties Union's lawsuit seeking marriage for same-sex couples in New York.
- “Lesbian and gay people are capable of being perfectly fine parents, and their families need the same protections and safeguards that the families of different-sex couples receive through marriage...”

- **2006, Social Workers Hail New Jersey Supreme Court's Decision in Favor of Equal Benefits and Privileges for Same Sex Couples**
- **[NASW](#) and [NASW-NJ](#) *submitted amici curiae brief to support same sex couples***
- Edison, NJ – In a landmark decision, the New Jersey Supreme Judicial Court ruled that the state must amend its marriage statutes or create an equivalent legal structure for same-sex couples. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and its New Jersey Chapter (NASW-NJ) laud the court's holding that there is no legitimate governmental purpose to denying the financial and social benefits and privileges of marriage to same-sex couples while acknowledging that this falls short of recognizing a right to marry.

# My Two Cents

- **Separation** of faith and Learning?
- Social Work is not a religious profession?
- Represent the Profession Accurately?
- Examining the “Big Three.”
- Advocacy?
- Marriage vs. Civil Union

