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“A Vital Christian Presence in Social Work”

CHURCH REFLECTING COMMUNITY

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Church Reflecting Community

Presentation for NACSW's 59th Convention

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Purpose

- To determine the most effective ways to integrate Social Work knowledge and skills with pastoral skills in order to have more healthy churches and communities.
- Identifying problems and suggesting some possible solutions that can be found when combining social work and pastoral interventions.

Church as a Safe Haven

- Ask the pastor to pray for me and my family
- Ask the pastor for Bible study
- Ask the pastor to pray for my son who is in jail



Church as a Hospital

- Spiritual – Is God real?
- Mental – depression (Example of a possible misdiagnosis – “the pastor said that I must be depressed because I can’t stop thinking about my mother dying and I’m very sad” (she died two months ago)).



Pastor's Office

- ...But Sis. Smith, did you pray about the situation like I suggested last week?
- Pastor I tried to do what you suggested and “just turn it over to God”, but I can't get the fact that I was raped out of my mind. What am I supposed to do about all of these feelings that I'm having?





Pastors Referring - Barriers

- Accessibility
- Lack of awareness/education of Social Work profession (or other community professional).
According to Diana Garland (1992) “Since those early years of the social work profession, the relationship between the church and the social work profession has been dramatically uneven, ranging from collaboration to mutual disinterest or disdain” (p. 4).
- Availability



Traditional Reasons for Referral

- The pastor is not available
- Drug and alcohol abuse – refer to rehab. Center
- Medical issues – (no concrete knowledge of medicine, safe to refer)
- Church member does not trust the pastor



Major Reasons for Referral

- New or recent behaviors not being acknowledged or addressed in the church:
 - Cutting (adolescents to college-age students)
 - Men on the down-low
 - HIV/AIDS (not new, but still not being addressed)
 - Homosexuality (more open) not being accepted as people, just as a sickness
 - Pornography – some men masturbate so often and so hard, that they can cause some damage to the penis



Why is this topic relevant in today's society? Or is it relevant?

- We can no longer afford to only hear “just pray about it” – or as Keith-Lucas calls it, “non-involvement - pure spirituality of the church” (1962, p. 7)
- People are hurting and they are hurting others. According to Ellor, Netting, & Thibault (1999) “In earlier times...the church brought the community together and told people how to live and love, what was right and wrong; now it's just a gathering place” (p. 25).
- The churches are suffering because while evangelism and mega churches are at an all time high, the churches are being filled with people who are hurting and some leaders who are not sure what to do for them, but aren't willing to refer them to a professional.



Pastoral Training

- What is the Biblical criteria to become a pastor/leader? 1 Timothy 3:1-7
- ¹“It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. ²An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,
- ³not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money.
- ⁴He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity
- ⁵(but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?),
- ⁶and not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil.
- ⁷And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil”.



Pastoral Training Continued

- What is the scholastic criteria for becoming a pastor?
BS in Theology (MDiv; DMin –not always required)
- Depending on the denomination, the training requirements and levels may vary; some seminaries are doing their best to offer some type of pastoral counseling classes.



Does formal training really matter?

- No, why – “all I want to do is help people, I don’t have to go to school for that” OR
- “Why do I need formal training, the Lord is coming soon and training wastes time”.
- “Clearly understood beliefs lead to a deeper understanding of God’s will”.



Formal Training Cont'

- Yes & No – some pastors who have advanced theological degrees, especially when trained to become good administrators are trained more to do program development and increase membership numbers; rather than how to meet the emotional and spiritual needs of their congregations.



Any Solutions?

- No – “Just let the Lord take care of the members’ issues, that what prayer and faith are all about”
- Yes – let’s integrate Social Work knowledge and skills into the pulpit, for example:
 - Let’s equip the pastors to help with human rights issues, social and economic justice, as well as values and ethics of the community
 - Let’s help the pastors and/or the counselors advocate for the church and community members: maintain and respect roles and boundaries, engage in personal reflection and self-correction.



Possible Solutions!

- Better seminary training on counseling issues and skills
- Continuing education requirements for pastors to build counseling and related skills in needed areas
- Taking the training to the pastors in their churches



Solutions Cont'!

- Teaching pastors how to identify mental health needs that are beyond their skills and scope; establishing a referral network within the community, especially with Christian counselors
- Establishing a church-based counseling service; using the existing skilled counselors already in the congregation



Solutions Cont'

- Utilizing skilled professionals in the congregation to develop support groups around specific church issues, such as substance abuse, domestic violence, marital issues, incest, dealing with teens at home, etc.



Conclusion

- The basis for this presentation is simply to inform or remind us all that collaboration with clergy is one of the best solutions to help church members as well as community members. Society is declining rapidly, but as people who believe in the power of faith and prayer, we should be able to help in a substantial manner, by utilizing knowledge, skill and the work that should accompany faith for the good of mankind – together.



References

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