

NACSW Board Proposes Revision to Membership Requirements

For a number of years, NACSW has discussed how to make our organization as inclusive as possible of members from the various church denominations and traditions in ways that maintain our distinctive identity as a Christian organization made up of individuals who are Christians. At the current time, NACSW has three membership requirements. First, we ask applicants for membership to affirm the organization's mission statement, which is as follows: "NACSW equips its members to integrate Christian faith and professional social work practice."



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Second, we ask applicants to affirm a Statement of Faith and Practice, which has been revised several times over the past several decades, most recently in the mid 1980s.

Finally, we ask applicants to affirm the following statement: "I accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior."

About a year and a half ago, your Board of Directors appointed a special task force to study the membership requirements and bring a recommendation regarding whether to maintain these requirements or suggest a revision for the NACSW membership to vote on. The Board asked me to chair the group. We have been working diligently since that time. First, we carefully reviewed documents prepared by previous Board members and Board committees that had explored our membership requirements over the past several years. Second, we discussed our own thoughts and concerns, as a group of Board members with varying lengths of tenure in the organization and views about the issue before us. Next, we interviewed members as well as other social workers who are Christians but have felt excluded by the current NACSW membership requirements. We then engaged the full board in an extensive discussion of what we learned from our research in the June 2011 and August 2011 meetings. At the August 2011 meeting, the Board voted unanimously to recommend to the membership of NACSW the follow-

The Motion

That the statement on the membership application be revised to read:

As a Christian, I affirm that I understand and support the mission of NACSW, which is to equip its members to integrate Christian faith and professional social work practice.*

* On NACSW's website, the term "Christian faith" will link to a webpage that reads as follows: "The members of NACSW represent a rich diversity of Christian denominations and traditions. The mission of NACSW is to equip its members to integrate Christian faith and professional social work practice. By Christian faith we mean historic Christian faith as expressed, for example, in one of the following statements." After this statement will appear three statements in full: 1. The Apostle's Creed; 2. The Nicene Creed; 3. NACSW's current Statement of Faith and Practice.

ing proposed change in the membership requirements: (see inset)

NACSW's Board presented this motion at the October membership meeting in Pittsburgh, and then led focus groups, so that we could hear members' reactions to this proposed change in membership requirements. Of course, many of you could not be present in Pittsburgh, so we are now expanding the conversation to you by asking that you reflect on what we are recommending and respond to us with letters to the *Catalyst*. We want to hear from those of you who have concerns about this change, as well as from those of you who welcome it.

What Led to This Recommendation?

We identified the following challenges created for some NACSW members or potential members by the current three-fold requirement for membership:

1. *Some feel that the Statement of Faith draws a boundary that includes as members only those Christians in a tradition comfortable with the language "Lord and Savior."* Although those within an evangelical tradition may not recognize the culturally contextualized framing of

this phraseology, those from Christian traditions outside American evangelicalism experience this language as "code" for an American evangelical viewpoint. Yet NACSW has not intended to exclude brothers and sisters from the diversity of Christian traditions. We have never meant to be an "evangelicals only" organization.

2. *For some, the Statement of Faith and Practice is a creedal document.* A number of Christian traditions eschew any creedal document, many of them expressing a desire to follow the Bible only, and not human interpretations of the Bible. As such, our Statement potentially discourages Christians from non-creedal traditions from joining NACSW. The Statement of Faith and Practice thus actually draws the boundary of membership NACSW more tightly than many congregations do.

3. *The Statement of Faith and Practice is misperceived by some to be a professional code of ethics,* replacing or in competition with the NASW and other codes of ethics. NACSW has never intended to portray itself as a competitor with or alternative to NASW, nor our Statement of Faith and Practice as an alternative to the NASW Code of Ethics.

Your board unanimously supports this change. We didn't start out here, however. We spent hours in careful listening to one another's perspective and praying together. We came to the conclusion that we want to welcome all our Christian brothers and sisters in social work into our fellowship, so that we can learn from one another and fellowship together in ways that may not happen naturally in our own congregations and communities.

Many members attending the membership meeting in Pittsburgh expressed support for the change. Some of the statements include:

- As a faculty member in a Catholic university, I opened the NACSW website to some of my colleagues and they were taken aback at the evangelical tone of the membership requirements. They wondered whether they or some of their students would fit in and be welcome.
- Feeling at home is important to me. You're going to make me feel more at home [with this change] but some who have felt more at home are going to feel less at home.
- More complicated wording equals a

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NACSW Growth in Social Media in 2011

2011 was a great year for NACSW, especially from a technology side. I have enjoyed seeing the NACSW Facebook grow from infancy in January of 2010 to flourishing by the time of the 2011 Convention. By the time you read this, the group will be over the 1,000 member mark.

With a small step into Facebook, we all watched NACSW open its arms to a whole new realm of membership interaction and engagement. We by no means have gotten everything right, but hopefully you are proud of the accomplishments of 2011.

As Rick reported in Pittsburgh at the annual membership meeting, you can now connect with NACSW on Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube and Flickr. If you don't know what I just said, don't



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worry - you are not alone! We hope to take you with us on our journey and will provide opportunities to learn alongside us as we utilize new technologies.

At the beginning of 2011 we crafted 3 goals to guide our leap into the social media realm. They were to:

1. Increase member engagement (both active, as well as passive engagement) through the building of an on-line community,
2. Bring in new members and friends to NACSW, and
3. Provide a convenient medium through which to keep members and friends aware of NACSW events and activities, as well as useful resources for integrating faith and practice.

With these goals in mind we surveyed over 300 NACSW members and friends. We used the data to identify some easy first actions to meet our goals and got to work. Here are a few fun facts from the data:

- 80% of respondents use Facebook
- 50% use YouTube
- 34% use LinkedIn
- 44% of respondents primary use of Face-

book is personal

- 31% said their primary use was both personal and professional
- 35% of respondents own a smartphone of some type
- 8% said they text continuously, 21% never text.

We are always looking for feedback and suggestions about how to use these tools to improve both your member experience and your daily practice. Please feel free to share.

Stay tuned in 2012 for more great things from NACSW. For now make sure you stay connected and connect with us:

- Facebook Group - <http://on.fb.me/nacsw-facebook>
- Facebook Page - <http://on.fb.me/nacsw-facebookpg>
- LinkedIn Group - <http://linkd.in/christiansinswk>
- LinkedIn Company Page - <http://linkd.in/tvomWI>
- Twitter - <http://bit.ly/sta4UK>
- YouTube - <http://bit.ly/rWQ71c>
- Flickr - <http://bit.ly/nacswflickr>

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NACSW Social Media Consultant

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greater potential for divisions, and confusions. "This [proposed change] has our essence."

- It is important for members to be expected to self identify as Christians.

Others at the membership meeting expressed deep concerns. Here are those expressed most often:

- It feels too open; "we need to stand for something." Boundaries define our culture.
- This could just be a trend to becoming more liberal, or will be perceived that way.
- I am concerned that the change will allow those I don't consider Christian . . . , such as Mormons and Jehovah Witness to join NACSW. The change represents "a slippery slope."

These concerns are important to us, and we have considered them carefully. It is true that persons may join the organization who call themselves Christian that some of us would not, but that is already a risk we have. We have never screened persons out of joining based on their denomination or religious affiliation. We agree that we definitely need to stand for something,

and that "something" is our Christian faith – and that is a significant stand in our profession! We need all our brothers and sisters in Christ to join us in reflecting and developing the ethical integration of our Christian faith with our social work practice.

As for the perception that we are becoming liberal, NACSW is a fellowship organization, a place where Christ followers can have conversations about what it means to be Christian in our profession and in our world. What a gift that is, when we have so few safe places for these conversations. We want to include all who are looking for a safe Christian harbor and fellowship with other Christians, a place where Christians who are politically conservative and Christians who are politically liberal can put faces and fellowship to perspectives different from their own.

In summary, some will experience this proposed change as an embrace of their journey as Christians that is deeply meaningful. Others of us will recognize that the familiar will shift, just as when older

adults who love the traditional Christian hymns make room in worship for the drums and praise choruses of young adults and teens, or when we invite immigrant Christians to share our congregational life and bring their music and traditions. We will all face a little stretching to welcome one another. It is our choice; it may be more comfortable to just be with Christians who worship the way we do, who believe just what we believe, but is that really a good way to represent the body of Christ to our profession?

Now it's your turn. What do you think? What excites you about this proposed change? What worries you about this proposed change? We want to hear from you. Please write your thoughts to the *Catalyst* and send to rick@nacsw.org.

Above all, please pray for NACSW. The decision before us is too important not to bathe it in all of us praying together. "Thy will be done."

Diana Garland

Board Member and Chair of the Membership Requirements Task Force