

9:15 to 9:30            *Survey of American Housing Policy and Practice – JB*

9:30 to 10:00        *Social Work Theory and Shalom Building: Getting There From Here*

- *Housing deficiencies in Social Work Practice – JC*
- *The Importance of Housing in Goal Fulfillment -- Sue*
- *Life cohesiveness and complete communities – JC*

*I. SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION/FOCUS*

- A. Historical roots were Charity Organization Societies and Settlement Houses*
- B. Focus on clinical work – MSU psychotherapy, more related to the COS orientation, individual casework*
- C. Practice focused on addressing the individual’s issues, paid less attention to the context in which his/her issues play out*
- D. Social workers have often focused on the individual’s functioning in a vacuum, i.e. addressing the symptoms without considering the broader context within which the symptoms occur*
- E. Holistic social work practice demands attention to environmental factors that can dilute the impact of treatment*
- F. One essential element that is often ignored is decent, affordable housing in the context of a supportive and nurturing community*
- G. Housing occupies a fundamental place within hierarchy of need concept – without the security of a permanent place to live gains made in treatment may be lost*
- H. Social work values around individualization require that the unique needs of the client be considered, which in turn demands a community that provides an array of housing options from temporary to permanent*
- I. How can wholeness and thriving (Shalom) occur when the client does not have access to stable housing?*
- J. The traditional clients of social work are the poor and disenfranchised – people without access to affordable housing*
- K. Biblical concepts of justice call us to seek equal opportunity and access to the resources necessary to thrive and experience Shalom*
- L. Christian social work practitioners must attend to the whole person, which includes access to decent, affordable housing*
- M. As image bearers of Christ the people we serve deserve access to these resources and opportunities*

*Social work practice has long been distinguished by its focus on the poor, the oppressed, the vulnerable, and the disenfranchised. In spite of this proud tradition, social workers have often failed to take a holistic approach to practice that paid sufficient attention to the subject of affordable housing. In general, social work agencies have done a fine job of addressing individual issues that impact a person's well-being...relationship problems, addiction/ substance abuse, legal issues, etc. have all been effectively addressed by social work practitioners.*

*Unfortunately, while we pride ourselves on our person-in-environment frame one area that is often neglected is that of affordable housing. The best treatment protocols and programs can be undermined by failing to consider whether the client has adequate housing that is of decent quality and affordable.*

*I want to begin by anchoring these thoughts in theory, specifically systems/ecological and hierarchy of need theory.*

- *Systems theory generally posits that people exist within a context, and initiating change in one area of the general system will produce change in other areas.*
- *In other words, people exist within an "ecology" that provides context, nutrients (resources), connectedness, etc.*
- *When people exist within an impoverished system or ecology their lives are similarly impoverished.*
- *When people exist within a system or ecology that provides resources, stability, safety, nurture, etc. their lives are similarly enriched.*
- *Hierarchy of needs concepts posit that life fulfillment, personal growth, stability, achievement, etc. are possible only when certain basic needs are met. Clearly basic assets like food, water, and shelter are generally recognized as essential for human thriving – in our terminology for purposes of this conversation Shalom.*
- *We expand the notion of shelter to include elements such as affordability, proximity to resources (food, employment, services, culture, etc.), design features that affirm the dignity of the occupant as image bearers of Christ and promote community, diversity (including economic and cultural), efficiency and health maintenance, and general condition.*
- *Access to safe, decent, affordable, healthy permanent housing creates a level of basic stability for adults and children that enables further higher order achievements, regardless of how they are characterized.*

- *Not having access to safe, decent, affordable, healthy permanent housing results in a fundamentally unstable context that can prevent adults and children from “broader life accomplishment” and achievement.*
- *A community, or ecology, that provides people with access to this type of housing is one in which people have the opportunity to thrive, enjoy peacefulness, and achieve personal fulfillment – Shalom.*
- *Micah 6:8 – what is required of us? “To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God.”*
- *Our historic commitment as social workers to poor, oppressed, underserved, and disenfranchised people fits nicely with what it is that God requires of us*

*Let me then suggest several conclusions about how access to good quality permanent housing can affect us as social work practitioners, particularly as Christian social work practitioners.*

- *The biblical call to just action and mercy demand that we pay attention to fundamental basic needs of the people we serve. Not to do so means that we are neither attending to the whole person nor fully serving our clients.*
- *An often disregarded arena for social work practice is that of advocacy. Because social workers understand the importance of context and a holistic view of the people we serve we are in an excellent position to speak to the public policy arena on their behalf. This could include practice arenas such as fair housing advocacy and education, community organizing, workforce development, use of public resources, etc. A local example is a recent move by our state legislature to eliminate the state Earned Income Tax Credit benefit to working poor people. Social workers should be engaged with legislators to help them understand the benefit to working poor people. Another area in which social workers can have an impact is in the availability within a community of a continuum of housing opportunities. Whether temporary/emergency housing, affordable rental options, or ownership opportunities social workers should engage their community as advocates for a range of housing options.*
- *Regardless of the client group we work with, access to good quality affordable permanent housing must be in our “frame.” Whether we are engaged with chronically mentally ill adults, substance abusers, returning citizens, refugees, domestic violence victims, domestic violence perpetrators, Child Protective Services, sex offenders, etc. we should regularly be attentive to whether they are permanently and adequately housed.*

- *When a client possesses good quality affordable permanent housing he or she is more able to make use of our interventions. CBT, psychotherapy, family therapy, marital therapy all depend on the client possessing sufficient cognitive and emotional resources to engage in the reflection and processing necessary to overcome whatever issue has brought them into treatment.*
- *Conversely, we would assert that the client who does not possess good quality affordable permanent housing is less likely to experience good outcomes in treatment, regardless of the presenting issue or the therapeutic modality deployed. The client who is preoccupied with where his/her family will stay tonight or whether their housing is affordable, healthy, and non-stigmatizing will find it more difficult to focus on successfully addressing problems in human functioning, regardless of the life arena.*
- *One of the things that distinguishes good social work practice is our ability to understand and “broker” community resources. Navigating complex human service systems can be challenging at best. In addition, some types of housing have built in barriers to access, e.g. public housing is out of reach for most returning citizens, sex offenders; the ability to obtain living wage employment is compromised by involvement with the legal system; because we know what is available and how to access it we are able to provide more holistic and effective support to our clients.*

*Cohesiveness = well-integrated; unified; arises when bonds link members of a social group to one another and to the group as a whole;*

*Living – To create and preserve communities that provide affordable housing, integrated transportation systems, and quality education*

*Working – To enhance regional economic prosperity through jobs, training and education accessible to people which are designed to retain and attract new businesses*

*Moving – To promote increasing and improving movement around the region using public transit, electric cars, and encouraging walking and bicycling to achieve better physical well-being*

*Thriving – To support communities that provide access to healthy foods, arts, recreation, and entertainment, which make us happy and feel meaningful through active civic engagement*

*Life satisfaction*