

# Introduction to the 6th Edition

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For this 6th edition of *Christianity and Social Work*, we found ourselves reflecting on the very serious and important times we are in now, and how necessary the perspectives of Christian social workers are to address the many challenges we're facing. It's also important to continue to acknowledge and to some extent celebrate the ways that the social work world itself has changed since the first edition of this book was published in February 1998. Since that time, we have seen an increasing recognition of the need to understand how faith and social work practice intersect, and how we can generate meaningful and rigorous scholarship to speak to the many social work practitioners who are trying to figure out how to integrate their own faith experience within the larger context of social work practice.

## *Christianity and Social Work, 1998–2020*

From the outset with our first edition, published by NACSW and edited by Dr. Beryl Hugen, this book has focused on that integration of faith and practice. Our contributors, leading scholars and practitioners stationed in a variety of Christian and secular higher education settings, have always been aware of how complicated and ultimately rewarding the integration of faith and practice can be for social workers. Looking at the first edition of our book, we see a range of chapters that acknowledged that social work and the Christian church had deep historical roots (“Social Work’s Legacy: The Methodist Settlement Movement” and “Church Social Work”) even when there were tensions between social work as a profession and the Christian faith of the social worker (“When Social Work and Christianity Conflict,” and the “Battle Between Sin and Love in Social Work History”). The chapters for the first edition were written by some of the leading lights of NACSW, and some of those contributors (Rick Chamiec-Case, Beryl Hugen, David Sherwood) have remained with us through all six editions of the text.

Through the first few editions of the book, it was clear that the editors and contributing authors were doing truly groundbreaking scholarship. While social work and Christianity had always been connected since the start of the profession, the tone of these first three volumes represented a new phase for the field, one that was gradually becoming more confident in asserting that social workers could do good practice informed by their Christian faith, and do so ethically. Authors like Cheryl Brandsen, Diana Garland, David Hodge, Hugen, Mary Anne Poe, Sherwood, and Mary P. Van Hook were all trying to build on the nascent literature of faith and social work practice (embodied in the NACSW journal *Social Work & Christianity*, at the time in its 3<sup>rd</sup> decade). Their work on (among other topics) spiritual assessment, spiritual considerations in end-of-life

care, and the impact of faith on family-centered social work interventions may seem today to be basic to any good social worker's practice approach, but in the late 1990s, these were still rare within many social work contexts. For many, the idea that ANY of these topics would have been covered in a textbook in a social work program would have been difficult to fathom. Now as we are well into the 21st century, the field of social work and social workers who identify as Christian has begun to engage in a renewed exploration of how to best integrate faith and social work practice, and we have this book to thank for helping to move that conversation along in its own way. As of this writing, there were approximately 750 MSW and BSW programs in the U.S, and many are housed in religiously-affiliated colleges and universities (CSWE, 2020). In addition, many Christians are educated within non-sectarian colleges and universities or practicing within both religiously-affiliated and secular agencies. We are excited that this 6<sup>th</sup> edition furthers that work in new and lasting ways.

As with previous editions, it is our intention to address the historical and contemporary roots of Christians in social work and move our field into the future by employing a variety of perspectives from Christian authors. As multiple authors in this book will make clear, there is not one way to be a Christian social worker; rather it is our hope that the multiplicity of voices contained here will argue for how many ways there are to be a faithful Christian and effective social work practitioner.

Subsequent editions of this book (published in 2002, 2008, 2012, 2016 and now 2020) have furthered this exploration of faith/social work integration by adding new scholars to the book and bringing in ever more diverse and distinctive voices to the conversation. To date, the six editions of the book have seen over 60 different scholars contribute their unique perspectives to this growing field. We are determined to balance what has always made this book great with challenging ourselves to add new voices and topics to each new edition. This new edition does just that, with nine chapters revised by returning authors addressing a range of topics that we've been covering since 1998, and 10 new chapters (some of them brand-new chapters from longtime contributors, as well as new voices) addressing topics as varied as helping social work students integrate their faith journey into their practice career, empowering refugee populations, and applying a faith-based perspective to new technologies and understanding those technologies impacts on social work practice.

### *Decision Cases: Tools for Learning*

We are excited to again have decision cases in this new edition. Decision cases are tools for learning that give readers practice at "thinking like a social worker" while applying concepts and theories. (Scales & Wolfer, 2006). These cases are real; that is, a social worker reported an actual situation he or she experienced to an author who created the decision case. Decision cases differ from other types of exemplars you may have seen. They are not designed to illustrate best practices, but rather, to leave readers with a "messy" problem or dilemma to analyze and discuss. Through this application and analysis, learn-

ers may practice skills of problem-solving and be reminded that there is not always one correct answer in practice; there may be several different responses to be considered and discussed (Scales & Wolfer, 2006). Teaching notes in the Manual for Instructors will be helpful to discussion leaders. We are grateful to Terry Wolfer and Mackenzie Huyser for editing these four cases and guiding the case authors in this process.

#### *Connection to the CSWE Educational Policy Accreditation Standards*

In organizing this 6th edition, we have carefully considered the Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) from the Council on Social Work Education. These standards shape the core content of social work curricula and this book engages the EPAS in each chapter. It is important for schools of social work to show how they prepare students to demonstrate specific competencies in social work practice. To help with this integration, we are planning to provide teaching resources and materials for instructors through the publication of our accompanying *Instructors Resources for Christianity and Social Work: Sixth Edition*. We hope these tools and resources continue to be a helpful guide for students and instructors.

#### *This Book, NACSW, And Our Own Faith Journeys*

In the 22 years since this book was first published, NACSW has continued to be a major and lasting force within social work. Today, NACSW has over 1,600 members from 60 different Christian denominations in the U.S. and Canada. Its annual conference, the journal *Social Work & Christianity* (now in its 47th year), and its many online training offerings testify to its continuing impact on the field. NACSW is growing with students too, with 1/3 of NACSW members being students, many of them possibly reading these words right now. If that's you, we want you to know that both of us were once where you are right now, trying to make sense of our faith and our calling to become a social worker. We hope this volume gives you some further encouragement and ideas on your journey.

We both work in Christian colleges, informed by our specific Christian traditions (Laine at Baptist Baylor, and Michael at Jesuit Catholic Loyola Chicago). As teachers and researchers, we are eager to see more Christian social work scholarship that we can draw on to help prepare our students for careers as practitioners. We both came to the field, in part, because of the calling of our Christian faith and, while we certainly don't require the same religious commitment of our students, we want to speak to those who are attempting to integrate their faith experience with their social work preparation. We know from our own experiences that it can be a challenge to even raise the issues that are in these pages with student colleagues, faculty members, and supervisors. As you read these chapters, we hope you will feel energized and encouraged by the abundance of scholarship for Christian social workers: you are far from alone if you endeavor to become a social worker rooted in your own Christian faith experience.

## References

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