

Prescience, Prophecy and Prayer: Alan Keith-Lucas Applied

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The work of Alan Keith-Lucas has informed theory and the ethical integration of faith and social work practice. An early member of NACSW and prolific writer in child welfare services, religiously-affiliated children's homes, and social work practice and faith, Keith-Lucas developed theories on children's grief and on effective helping that continue to provide prescient guidance in the field today. This article, delivered as the 2018 Alan Keith-Lucas Lecture at the annual conference, applies the helping principles and work of Keith-Lucas to current issues of child welfare, social work education, racism, work with LGBTQ+ persons, and polarized discussions. Central to the article is the discussion of Keith-Lucas' helping model of reality, empathy, and support.

IT IS AN HONOR TO BE ASKED TO SPEAK AND WRITE ABOUT THE INSPIRATION and work of Alan Keith-Lucas. This is the work of Christian fellowship and social work solidarity made possible because of the privilege of living in a country founded on religious freedom and belonging to an organization that values both our calling to the profession of social work and our deep commitment to our Christian faith. Religious freedom comes with its challenges when we want our religious freedom at the expense of the religious freedom of others. NACSW, a home for those who love Christ and are called to this profession, is also home within Christianity for a variety of perspectives, opinions, and deeply held convictions that threaten uniformity but do not have to threaten unity.

Are we Christians who are social workers or social workers who are Christians? What is our role in leading the body of Christ? In shaping the profession? We believe in social justice but like much of the rest of the country, we wrestle and sometimes disagree with what that means when discussing abortion, women's health, gay marriage, and even peaceful protest and the national anthem. Perhaps we get discouraged about these challenges and despair that our differences are a metaphor for the chasms in the country, i.e. too deep and wide. On the other hand, we might dare to believe that our commitment to Christ and each other means we are the very people who can have these discussions and can lead the body of Christ and shape the profession in these troubled times.

Context for the Lecture

This lecture is named for one of the early leaders of NACSW and one of the seminal thinkers and writers on the integration of faith and practice. I am privileged to be a part of those in NACSW who knew Alan Keith-Lucas personally. I was a young social worker at a children's home trying to figure out my faith, the faith and religion of the children, and the policies and programming of a distinctly Baptist children's home where evangelism of the children was as important to stakeholders as the children's physical, emotional, and cognitive care and development.

I grew up in a military family far removed from any nuclear family church experience. I adored my grandmother whose devotion to God and faithful prayer life continue to inspire me. Even so, attending Latin mass with her left me confused; when we moved to America when I was 12, I left that behind and gradually became convinced that there was no God. I decided that any God there might have been was woefully inadequate and had left the world in quite a mess. I fancied myself an intellectual and called myself an atheist. As an adolescent in the 1960s, the pain in the world left me depressed and suicidal. Then God, who I believe has a sense of humor, sent a cute blue-eyed guy across my path and we struck a deal. He would break his church rules and go to a movie with me if I would break my personal rule and go to church with him. I never imagined that in that church service, God's spirit would deal with me and call me, and when I responded would make me whole for the first time in my life. I understand the transformational experience that Paul describes because everything changed for me and all things became new. This love relationship with Jesus Christ and with His Word that began that day continues to be the center of my life today.

Faith and Practice Beginnings

I attended a Baptist university and after a year of working for the federal government and living with rigid separation of church and state, I went to

work for a religiously-affiliated agency, sure that I would have no further faith and practice struggles. I was there a few weeks when I discovered it was not that simple. I worked with a Catholic mother who needed care for her children for a year and wanted them to retain their Catholic faith and heritage in a place where evangelism was a core service and some staff did not believe Catholics were Christians. Other challenges through the years included work with a 17 year old who hid her forbidden abortion so she would not get kicked out and nearly died and who is now forever unable to have children; a suicidal 16 year old whose self-loathing because of his same sex attraction was amplified by his experience of unanswered prayers to change; and a seven year old whose anxiety led to clinically dangerous insomnia because his houseparent told him that if he continued to “touch his privates”, they would fall off and he would not be able to urinate. I worked with parents with mental illness and with addiction and with extreme poverty who felt judged as sinful and with two five-year-olds so desperate to return to their families that they stole a bus and drove it through a fence into a grove of trees. I did not know what to do.

I found help. Alan Keith-Lucas, who asked us to call him Keith, came once or twice a year to consult with us, to help us problem-solve the most challenging cases, to wrestle with our mission and purpose and the ways we integrated our faith. The first time he came, I was intrigued with his distinguished look, his English accent, and his magnetism for the children who seemed to know instinctively that he was safe and their advocate. I kept a pen and paper with me to take notes while Keith began to tell stories. He connected to the children through his incredible skill at story telling of the little monkey and the Lord God Buddha, or Brer Rabbit, or the Runaway Bunny.

Faith and Practice: What Does It Mean

Much of this lecture comes from Keith’s unpublished manuscripts, shared generously by his family and by Roberts Wesleyan College and are currently being digitized by Baylor University so they are available to all of you. In one of those, Keith asked the fundamental question of what difference it makes to social work practice in being a Christian (1-48, nd).

Keith found several fundamental impacts of being a Christian on our social work identity and practice starting with the concept of reality, i.e. we know what it is like not to be perfect, to need God’s help, and to fail and be in need of grace. We understand empathy because we function from a position of gratitude for grace rather than a position of being “better than” those who we help. Because we are created as God’s children with free will, we understand the concept of choice and of the freedom to make decisions which are sometimes mistakes, always with the understanding that God loves us and is there for us. Ultimately, this provides for us the experience of support, i.e. we are loved by God in a way that makes God

accessible for guidance, grace and forgiveness. Keith was asking us to remember the picture of the prodigal son, his father waiting patiently for the day the son returns home, a father without judgment who was filled with love for the son. Throughout his writing, Keith reminded readers that it is the love of God that draws us to the father and produces change when we respond to love rather than to the judgment of others.

In another of his unpublished manuscripts, Keith makes that connection to our work with clients saying that we can devalue clients through negative terms, assessments, diagnoses, and mandates for their behavior. When we do that, we make ourselves the “ego ideal.” We place ourselves in the position of God. When clients really have a choice, they have the choice to say “no” without risking rejection or abandonment (148, nd). Our touchstone, then, is not whether or not the client is good or bad or has done good or bad but rather, our touchstone is whether or not we have demonstrated the love of Christ to them. That love is there for them whether they do good or not. This requires in the Christian social worker a purging of self.

How many times am I defensive with those who disagree with me... or who I judge as not being as Christian as I am or think I am and think they should be? What would it take for me/us to listen more, even when we disagree; to love faithfully, even when we think someone else has understood the scripture incorrectly or loved incompletely? Keith said it this way: “Religion doesn’t make us demand behaviors from others, but perhaps it demands behaviors from us: the discipline of love and the purging of pride” (148, nd, p. 13).

One Model of Faith and Practice

Many NACSW members today are teaching or working in faith-based or religiously-affiliated institutions and have a model or theory informing their integration of faith and practice. At the Garland SSW at Baylor, this is a concept the faculty and staff have been discussing actively for more than 20 years. Many graduated from social work programs where they were told that faith had no place in a social work education program or in social work practice. We talked at length about the work of Alan Keith-Lucas, David Sherwood, Ed Kuhlman, Lawrence Ressler, and others and about the work and wisdom of our founding Dean, Diana Garland. We knew that the repudiation of faith in the profession was wrong. We were also committed to the core values of the social work profession which we experienced then, and experience now, as being congruent with our faith and beliefs. We named our theoretical construct “the three-legged stool” and based it on these three things.

The Three Legs of the Stool

First, the faith of the client matters. The first leg establishes our work with clients: we believe that the faith or belief system or religion or worldview of the client is the lens through which the client experiences the world and the challenges and blessings of life. It is often the center of “meaning-making” for the client. It cannot – must not- be ignored in our work with clients. There are times when the client’s experience with God (whatever name they express) and with God’s representatives is a strength, i.e. a source of resource and meaning. There are other times when the client’s experience with God and with God’s representatives is painful and a source of challenge. In both cases, that experience is important to the work.

Second, the faith of the worker matters. God is present in the work, in part because of the second leg of the stool. The faith, religion, belief system, and/or worldview of the social worker is the lens through which the social worker sees the world. It is the thing that motivates the worker to get up every morning and engage the deep pain in the world. For many of us, it is the call of God and the love of God and the confidence in God. This awareness of the perspective, worldview, faith, or spirituality of the social worker has been ignored in many social work programs. The great loss is the denial of the very thing that provides meaning for the worker engaging in this painful work. Meaning-making is essential everywhere that pain is present.

Third, organizational context matters. Respect for the profession and for the agency and for my colleagues includes the reality that social work in the church and social work in a publicly funded agency will include different missions, different policies, and different delivery of the work. The work in a religiously-affiliated agency (or university) may include an environment with religious icons on the wall, scripture on letterheads, and prayer at staff meetings. The work in a public school or federal agency or child protective services (CPS) may include pictures of governmental entities, inspirational quotes from historic leaders, and motivational trainings. Separation of church and state protects us all from governmentally imposed religion and provides for us all religious freedom to worship the God of our conviction. If we do not all have that freedom, none of us truly has that freedom. Keith believed that, even while he devoted much of his career both to religiously-affiliated children’s homes and to publicly-funded child welfare systems and to social work education.

The freedom to worship includes the freedom to help our clients explore the support available in their religious beliefs. We have seen far too much forbidding of any religious discussion in schools and governmental agencies. Students hear the message that faith cannot be discussed in these contexts rather than the message that their faith is important and their questions are important. An analogy I sometimes share with students is that I would not

share my asthma inhaler with a client who is wheezing and short of breath (not my scope of practice...), but I sure never would ignore their asthma or fail to get them whatever help they need.

History and the Work of Alan Keith-Lucas and other NACSW Leaders

Perhaps understanding a little of Keith's history will inform this discussion. Keith was born in 1910. So, Keith, clearly old in my view when I met him, had been a child in London during WWI and a teacher during WWII. He even served briefly in the US Army. He cared about children displaced from their families. He worked in child care in England and the United States. He actively influenced child welfare services, social work education, and the integration of faith and professional practice. He completed a doctorate and eventually became the head of child welfare services in North Carolina and then a professor and author (Ressler, 2010).

Keith knew great loss and understood grief with the death of his father when he was only six, the death of his mother when he was a young adult, and the deaths of his wife and sister-in-law in 1979 in a car accident. Keith took the pain of each loss and life crisis and turned the energy to growth and service to others. He developed a theory about effective helping...that it required the three elements of reality, empathy and support. His thinking about that led to his reflection on the Trinity and understanding that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit provide for us the perfect helping combination of reality, empathy, and support (Keith-Lucas, 1994). His life was transformed by his faith and that transformed his thinking, teaching, and practice as well. He began writing about the integration of faith and practice in the 1950s. He spoke truth that the integration/synthesis would not be easy but was essential (Kuhlman, 2010; Ressler, 2010).

History of NACSW and Dr. Keith-Lucas

Dr. Ed Kuhlmann (2010) provided a summary of Keith's contributions to NACSW in Volume 37 and Issue 3 of the journal, *Social Work and Christianity*, published in 2010. Dr. Kuhlman listed Keith's contributions as organizational, intellectual, and inspirational. Keith served as one of the five Consulting Editors (later the Editorial Board) for the organization's journal, originally known as *The Paraclete* and now *Social Work and Christianity*. He served on the organization's board as a full member for 6.5 years and another 6.5 years as an ex officio member. He served as the first editor of an NACSW monograph series for child care professionals. Keith initiated a regional "summer institute" specifically addressing the integration of faith and practice, one of the beginning conversations. These begin to introduce the scope of his intellectual contributions.

Intellectual and inspirational contributions to NACSW. Keith's reputation and work as a social worker who cared about faith was instrumental to introducing the intellectual possibility that the two could be integrated. Keith wrote about the role of the church in addressing social problems including child welfare. He wrote about ways that Christian faith informs social work practice and the dangers and risks of ignoring the power differential in the helping relationship. He called out the church and called out the profession for abuses of power. He provided significant leadership in the development of an NACSW code of ethics. He wrote a list of philosophical assumptions and of guidelines for social workers who are also Christians and Christians who are also social workers. He reflected on the problem of sin in society and, more specifically, the role of social workers in addressing sin. He cautioned us not to forget that we are sinners saved by grace and that judging the sin of others is sin itself. And then he reminded us that the term "sinners" includes us, not just those clients whose behaviors or lifestyles are offensive to us. He wrote for and to young Christians entering the field of social work (Keith-Lucas, 1985). Keith addressed the issues of systemic poverty, of power including that of social workers, and of childcare institutions affiliated with the church and responsibility to children and to their families of origin (Sherwood, 2010; Harris, 2010).

Reality, empathy, and support. Perhaps his most significant intellectual contribution was something already introduced here, the theoretical premises of reality, empathy, and support as critical to effective helping. Keith was a functionalist who cautioned Christians who were social workers to continue to emphasize concrete helping, addressing poverty, and empowering clients rather than focusing on labeling others with diagnostic categories that define them as somehow less. His ability to identify and teach ways of thinking that change how we fundamentally approach helping was in large measure his inspiration to all of us (Kuhlman, 2010).

Application: The Challenges, Then and Now

One of the most compelling evidences of the prescience and prophecy of Alan Keith-Lucas is the continued relevance of his writing. Social workers continue to see many of the same issues in the areas of working with parents, working with children, and dealing with the sin question of marginalizing others.

Reality and Not Stigmatizing Parents

Keith applied his theory of helping to work with parents in the child welfare system. He did not sugar coat the problems; he did not ignore

the question of right and wrong; and he did believe in working with the parents from a position of respect. He believed that the church had a role to play in child welfare, including paying attention to basic values and the vulnerability to judgement especially of those needing financial help and those in the criminal justice or mental health systems (Keith-Lucas, 1957; Keith-Lucas, 1962). He began by talking about reality, the reality that God in Jesus Christ called for man's goodness through love and grace, not law. Keith believed that we should not judge one another as we follow the model of Jesus who spent time with sinners and who criticized religious leaders.

Keith's conversations frequently began with: "given what has happened, what do we do now?" He saw the abusive parent as one of God's children: broken, scared, wrong, sinner, beloved. Social workers who are Christians know that we, too, are all those things. So, the reality is, given what has happened, a parent may not have unsupervised visits, or may have parental rights terminated, or may experience supervision during returns of children. This should never be without the empathy of a social worker who says, "I know this is hard and I care" and the support of a system and social workers that say, "and I am here to go through it with you as we together commit to the safety, well-being, and best for your child."

Empathy with Children

In his little and powerful book, *Encounters with Children* (1991), Keith includes a chapter titled "Celebrating and affirming children." Keith recounts many ways children are marginalized when we do not care enough to learn their names, when we are too busy to listen, when we ask "why" questions that accuse, when we fail to communicate how special they are and will always be, and when we do not understand that nothing another does can alter their worth to us and to the God who created us. This describes in story after story what Keith believed about empathy and unconditional positive regard. He recognized that "one can never really say 'yes' to something and really mean it if one could not also have said 'no'" (Keith-Lucas, 1991, p. 3).

The love of God is never a weapon to force God's demands on us. Keith said more than once that it is difficult for a child who has been abused by a father to believe in a loving Heavenly Father. It does not make sense to talk to a child about forgiveness if that child has never been forgiven. When we reject these children of God because of our own judgment of the sin of others, we push them away from God. Empathy includes the humility of understanding ourselves as sinners who have been loved and forgiven and the insight to offer to others what we have been given. Keith confessed that empathy for him grew out of his experience of the love and forgiveness of a Savior who had experienced himself the pain of this life (Ressler, 2010).

Support in Different Contexts

In his years of consultation, Keith wrote multiple histories of religiously-affiliated children's homes. He paid attention to the histories of children's homes and services to families. He foresaw the need for therapeutic services for children with increasing mental health and behavioral health needs. He was one of the first in the field to understand that "orphan care" would not meet the needs of children who become adolescents and age out of the system. Keith decried the policies of children's homes that marginalized parents and families and was committed to helping families engage in positive decision-making that did not create blame and shame and an assumption of failure if the best place for the child was outside the home. Keith encouraged the kind of engagement with parents that did not judge and did not control their decisions but instead partnered with them in planning the best course for the child. He believed in family clarification and in family preservation that was safe and healthy for the children (Harris, 2010).

Keith's respect for children and their relationship with parents and families was the foundation for his approach to support families in their discernment of best plans for their children. Further, in a time when group care was beginning to be rejected in favor of foster care or adoption for every child, Keith understood that there were times when children needed group care rather than the intensity of a new/different family. He taught that support meant walking alongside children and families rather than directing them to the system's answers. Support assumes regard and care. Support demands respect and self-determination. He said it this way: "Helping people to find their own way is better than controlling them, however subtly" (Harris, 2010, p. 297). This means treating people as active participants in every helping relationship. So effective helping in children's homes has to include working with families to preserve, as much as is safely possible, their role in the child's life. Support begins with understanding that people are resilient and strong and capable of change.

Reality, Empathy, and Support and the Sin Question

Perhaps central to the challenge of the integration of faith and social work practice is the sin question. Keith was more concerned, however, with our participation in systemic sin than in identifying the sins of clients. Keith knew that racism, and misogyny, and the "isms" are complex issues. He asserted that where there are no easy answers, there are fundamental principles and approaches beginning with awareness that each person is a creation of God. This includes understanding that God is love and lives in each of God's children, including Judas, including the thief on

the cross, including me. Keith believed that religion can serve God's purposes and religion can distort them (I48, nd).

Racism

Applying Keith's helping model to the problem/sin of racism, Keith would say: Given what is my complicity in racism and my benefitting from racist structures and from white privilege, what do I do now? How do I own it, stop it, and link arms with my brothers and sisters in Christ and do the work to fix it?

In the book, *White Fragility*, Diangelo (2018) calls us out on the good/bad binary that allows me/us to deny our complicity in racism, in systemic inequities, and in the perpetuation of white supremacy. Similarly, in the book, *Waking up White*, Irving (2014) owns and encouraged me to own the ways I have tried to defend myself from inclusion in racism and oppression. Keith, if he were alive today, would remind me that all of the empathy and support in the world will not be authentic unless it begins with reality. In this case, that means the reality that each of us is part of the problem and contributes to systemic racism every time we benefit from it and claim it as our right.

In 2017 in the NACSW Alan Keith-Lucas Lecture, Dr. Tanya Brice called on NACSW members to think differently about racism, to stop the defenses of individualistic thinking of "it is not me," and to think instead about systemic racism, the deep history of privilege and of the wealth of this nation, much of which has been built on the backs of African Americans, Latinx migrant laborers, and others. When someone suggests that I am a racist, I respond, perhaps as many of us do, defensively with all of the reasons why that is not true. That is the binary thinking that Diangelo talks about in her book. I immediately think: "Racists are bad. They are white supremacists and bigots. They are not me." However, when I consider systemic racism, including laws like the GI Bill at the end of World War II that favored white veterans, and consider my white privilege and the benefit of the doubt I receive from law enforcement, in the tenure process in my university, in stores when I am shopping, and on and on it goes, I know deep inside that while I wish everyone had that privilege, I am surely glad that I am not one who does not have it. And I know that if I choose to "take a knee" in peaceful protest, there will not be an assumption that I am disrespecting the flag. This may be because of my family of military active duty members and veterans. However, it is probably because of the benefit of the doubt that my white privilege gives me.

Dr. Brice told the story of a boy whose bicycle was stolen by another boy who refused to give it back and rode it around with impunity. When the "thief" (yes, I said thief) went to the original owner of the bike and asked

if they could be friends, the second child responded that friendship was not possible until his bike was returned. My family of an orphaned father and immigrant mother did not have generations of family wealth to pass along to heirs. However, it only took one generation to move from nothing to home ownership, college education, and inheritance for their children and grandchild. They passed their part of the bicycle down to me and to my children. I can argue that that was because they worked so hard. But Keith's commitment to reality demands that I recognize the truth that many people of color work equally hard and do not experience the same financial success because of systemic barriers, including racism and misogyny. So, it is on me, when I recognize the reality to own my responsibility and take action. Without that, no amount of empathy or support will change things. This is true for systems as well. Dr. Brice's book (2016) on racial reconciliation and restoration provide prescience around potential for the church's response.

Sexuality

I have read through many of Keith's unpublished manuscripts and, frankly, found him to say very little about homosexuality, sexual orientation, or sexual identity. This may be because the subject was so much more taboo in the years Keith was writing and so much more underground so that, as a consequence, he did not address it. I do know that I worked with several adolescents as a child care caseworker who struggled with same sex attraction and with their faith and relationship with the church and with us as a consequence. That makes me think Keith would have addressed it. But I do not have that to share with you. What I do have is his writing about other "differences" and I quote here:

It makes no radical difference whether the scale we measure by is one of morals or one of adjustment; whether we think of people as "good" and "bad" or "normal" and "disturbed." In each case we are saying that there is something wrong with this person, in his morals or in his personality, and it is our job to put it right. We hold to what might be called a medical or a therapeutic model, which says, in effect, there's something wrong there. Counteract it or control it, we're in no position to judge or assign blame. What we need to do is help people make sense of the world, see their options, make their decisions, experience something other than censure and defeat. I call it, myself, the co-planning model, and it puts us in quite a different relationship to those we serve. We are no longer the good people, the experts, the treaters, the authority, but the partners, the colleagues, of those we

serve. We come not to tell what to do, but to clarify the options, to help the confused come to decisions. To give them the sort of experience that may make sense to them.” (Keith-Lucas, I48, nd, pp. 10-11).

Keith went on to say that that would not mean giving up but it would mean that we know ourselves to be dependent on grace and that judging is God's prerogative. It means experiencing forgiveness, not seven times, but seventy times seven and learning not to insist on our own way.

I will not presume to tell anyone how to interpret the holy scripture or what God is or is not convicting you of or calling you to. I will pray for me and for each of us that we each seek the face of God and the wisdom and direction of the spirit. And I will pray that if we fail, we fail in love (Keith-Lucas, I48, nd, p. 11).

Polarization and Divisions

The monolithic certainty of polarization is immobilizing many of us today. The church and Christianity are enmeshed with politics and party. A speaker in our church recently commented that he knows church members who are Republicans who have no Democrat friends and he knows church members who are Democrats who have no Republican friends. And he asked the question: Are you a Republican or Democrat who goes to church or are you a Christian who engages in political/civic life? What is our identity? Keith spoke clearly about that; we are citizens first of God's Kingdom. A similar question is: Am I a Christian called to social work or am I a social worker who attends church and identifies as Christian?, Keith found those fundamentally different questions because he saw social work at its core congruent with our faith as long as we remember that we are sinners saved by God's grace, that the problem of sin is not the problem of clients. It is the problem of all humanity (I48, nd). The love of God is not about doctrine or policy or exclusion. It is about loving others as we have been loved, without condition, and beyond nationality or political party, or other affiliation. Keith would remind us of the words of Christ that his kingdom was not of this world. Salvation makes citizens of the Kingdom of God. As citizens of a country on earth, we may certainly work for policies and programs that promote justice and mercy (Keith-Lucas, H74, nd). Those policies are never more important than our relationships with each other and with God.

Prophetically and Prayerfully Forward

Keith was born in 1910 and died at age 85 in 1995 (Ressler, 2010). He was still thinking deeply and writing with concepts significantly ahead of the trends in culture, in society, in residential child care. He had seen and learned from the lessons of history. He knew that the deep challenges of life

are uniquely human and so recycle themselves in future generations. He knew that real change is available in relationship with God and commitment to the truth of God's love. These lessons did not come without pain.

Prescience

This prescient, critical, forward thinking included Keith's ability to prophesy and to call forth the potential for good in human helping. His clear refusal to judge others, even as he acknowledged the realities of decisions and behavior with consequences, was prophetic. How much we would benefit today from that prophetic voice that as the body of Christ our mission is to love as Christ loved, to embrace the Samaritan and the leper and the prostitute even as we hold ourselves to account.

Given what is the incivility in public discourse, how might reality, empathy, and support, the elements of real helping and change, impact the tone and substance of our discourse? NACSW has taken the lead on that with letters to the writers of articles in the journal, roundtables each year, and commitment to more listening, less defending, more humility, less arrogance, and more awareness that care for each other demands civility.

Possibility

You may say it is not possible; that judgment and polarization and self-righteousness are too deeply embedded in us and in our culture for that to change. Keith would answer that it is possible, i.e. that part of our reality is access to higher power, to the power of the Creator. Keith would answer that our reality is that prayer changes things. Prayer changes our hearts, connects us to the heart of God, changes reality, and inspires empathy and enables support (Keith-Lucas, 1994).

Summary and Application

This lecture is a call to take on the mantle of prescience, prophecy, and prayer. Alan Keith-Lucas left us a legacy of work and thinking and prophetic vision. We do not have to look far to find examples of NACSW members beyond Keith who have modeled and continue to model this for us. I will mention just a few:

Dr. Tanya Brice taught us the metaphor of the bicycle last year; that I have part of someone else's bicycle is real. Now, what can I do to return the bicycle? How can a spirit of reality, empathy, and support address my historic white fragility and my defensiveness...and in the humility and confidence that come from God's forgiveness, step up to address generational poverty, systemic inequity, and my opportunity to really listen to Jesus answer the question: Who is my neighbor?

Dr. David Sherwood gave us the gift of understanding that we are confronted with difficult choices and have the responsibility to draw deeply on our relationship with Christ, our faith, to do all we can to serve Him. The Sherwood maxim, we cannot maximize all values simultaneously, is one most of us quote around here. Dr. Sherwood spoke to one of my practice classes recently and shared the story of his aborted hiring at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary because he would not abandon his deeply held belief in women and support for women in the ministry. Imagine the respect of those students when Dr. Sherwood also told them that while he did not agree with the position of the administration at Southern, his belief in religious freedom means he believed in their right to take that position and action. He could not maximize all values simultaneously but he could prioritize them in a way that preserved his own integrity and fidelity to his Savior. He went on to tell them that he recently left his congregation because of his deep understanding of scripture and conviction that it is not his to judge his brothers and sisters in Christ and his unwillingness to exclude Christians who are LGBTQ+. He did not try to change the minds or hearts of our students. He testified to his own convictions with prescience and prayer.

Dr. Denise Levy probably does not know that she is one of my NACSW heroes. She quietly, gently, and affirmatively treats everyone with respect and care. She models her faith in her welcoming of all, her love for all of God's children, and her dedication to the discovery and dissemination of knowledge. She has led us in discussions and workshops and quietly provided guidance to welcome our LGBTQ+ brothers and sisters in Christ. Her forward looking prescience gives me hope for a time when we are more focused on love than judgment; more certain that when we open ourselves to the Holy Spirit, we can embrace our diversity and our development and trust God to be God.

Dr. Diana Garland, my former dean and forever friend, led in the integration of faith and practice, called out clergy sexual misconduct, and encouraged us all to make NACSW a place where the people of God who are called to social work and ministry to the oppressed come together and learn from each other from a variety of faith traditions and positions. She was not afraid of difference; she took her lumps as a woman in leadership and did not falter in willingness to include those whose convictions and understandings of scripture were different than hers even while having the hard conversations. Her prophetic voice called for us to know that we are our best selves when we see each person as God's creation.

Dr. Kesslyn Brade Stennis, NACSW's immediate past president, who stood on the podium last year and sang us to solidarity and an enduring model that leadership is always of unity, always of love, always of confidence that in Christ, we are one. Her leadership in cultural competence and taking on the hard topics makes each of us better. She is consistently prayerful and her example calls us to prayer in silence, prayer in voices together, prayer in protest, and prayer in song.

Dr. Allison Tan, our current president, who with Kesslyn and with Rick Chamiec-Case, has committed us to processes that enhance each member's ability to listen to each other, to roundtable discussions, that give space for every voice, and give boundaries to dominance. She is prescient in her recruiting of and development of young leaders for NACSW, new members and board members who represent a variety of perspectives and faith traditions and a shared commitment to the centrality of Jesus Christ.

Dr. Rick Chamiec Case, NACSW Executive Director, embodies grace and wisdom, works tirelessly, and has the prescient belief that we can trust each other and work together. Rick's prophetic voice asserts that NACSW is best when we, as Christians in practice, in scholarship, and in teaching, add our voices, our dissension, and our research findings to the processes of questioning, practice, evaluation, and continued fidelity to the teachings of Christ.

I think of Dr. Ed Kuhlman who consistently stands in the gap for religiously-affiliated social work programs, Dr. Mary Van Hook whose work with and on behalf of women and international social work calls us to a higher standard, Dr. Erma Ballenger who gently and persistently shows us the opportunity to be our best selves, Dr. Michael Sherr and Dr. Terry Wolfer who mentor others in the rigors of research and publication, Dr. Laine Scales whose love for oral history and narratives keeps our past informing our present, and so many others.

Conclusion

The challenges of today do not diminish the opportunities of service to the Creator who holds all in His hands and whose gift of reality must never be feared or avoided. Racism and all of the isms include realities that we have the capacity to face and the promise that, when we do, empathy and support are ours to access and provide. We have a Savior who understands every challenge, every weakness, and every pain and who responds to each with love and presence. We have a Comforter who never leaves us and who provides the supports of knowledge, wisdom, prayer, and grace.

Because our God is not a God of scarce resources, our reality is that God can and does still multiply loaves and fishes when we are faithful to give what we have. Because I am a sinner saved by God's grace, I can admit to being part of systemic racism and benefitting from it. I can drop my defenses and listen to the reality of others, own my part in it, ask for forgiveness, and respond to the leadership of the Holy Spirit to be part of restoration and reconciliation.

Because God has provided us with the Holy Spirit to convict us of sin, I do not have to exclude others because of what I believe is their sin and my determination that they should respond to my conviction. Because sin is personal and the Holy Spirit and God's Word are available to each of us,

I can open myself to the conviction of the Holy Spirit and when God's light shines on my sin, I can commit to change, not because I have been called out, but because I love the Savior. I am in love with my Savior and never want to hurt or disappoint my Lord.

That is what Keith knew and taught. Reality, empathy, and support. The work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in our lives. Those concerns and more are born out in his published and unpublished writing. I am ever grateful to God for the gifts of Keith, and Rick, and Kesslyn, and Tonya, and Erma, and David, and Denise, and so many more. May the grace and peace of God be strong in you and around you right now and ever more. ❖

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