



At the Table

President's Column

When I was a child my mother, father, brother and I watched the news and had dinner together every evening. Then I viewed that hour together as my break from doing homework, practicing piano, having dance class or engaging in church-related activities. Now, in hindsight, I recognize that that one hour was much more than a break. It was the time scheduled by my parents to keep us connected. It was the time when we shared with one another about the events of the day. It was the time when we discussed world events. (Well, since I was so young and my world only consisted of which friend took what to lunch and which one had the cutest doll baby, it was mostly my parents who discussed global world events.) Nonetheless, it was the "sacred and safe" space when we met to discuss social and personal matters of relevance.

The table in my childhood home was a safe space; a non-judgment zone of sorts. As I aged, the table was a place to agree to disagree on many issues that intersected political matters and social responsibility (i.e., the Iran Contra affair, the resignation of Richard Nixon, the impact of "trickle down" economics, and the closure of several local industrial plants which caused unemployment for the parents of my friends.

The table was also a place where we prayed and gave thanks to God for our bounty. In addition, it was a place where prayers of thanks often included prayers for people in their lived experiences. We prayed for those who didn't have food. We prayed for wisdom for our political leaders, we prayed for our various churches and denominations which were represented in our home. We prayed for all that was "wrong" in the world, including our own behaviors at times, and thanked God for all that was right (i.e., grace for not being punished for something that my brother or I had done in school that day). Yes, Lord!

Although my brother and I are long-gone from home, we both recognize the value of the lessons learned from our family gatherings at the table and both of us continue the practice of daily family gatherings at the table in our own respective homes. We both want the table in our own homes to be the designated "sacred and safe meeting space" for all persons who gather at our table.

At this year's NACSW convention, we will have an opportunity to recreate that "sacred and safe space." Similar to my parent's goal to keep us connected, our goal is to provide opportunities for folks to connect around contemporary topics that are relevant to the integration of faith and social work. While some of the conversations will take place at physical tables, other conversations will take place in workshops, the Allen Keith Lucas lecture event, informal hallway meetings, etc.). No matter where our conversations take place, the discussions are bound to be intriguing, invigorating and inviting, and that they will promote introspection and investigation of thoughts that may be different from those held by oneself or one's self-identified group. Just like some of "family meetings" in my childhood home, some of the discussion points may be contentious at times and, because we may not all agree on individual perspectives, will require extreme patience, grace and love. But, in the end, our hope is that our application of Micah 6:8 will be broadened while we sit at the table together.

So, as the current Board president of NACSW, I invite you all to the tables that we have prepared for you in Charlotte, NC from November 2 – 5, 2017. I look forward to seeing you there!