

## Graduation? Commencement!

How many of you remember graduating with your undergraduate degree? I do!

I easily remember the moment when the speaker called my name to walk across the stage and receive my degree. Yes, the moment when I graduated from Oakwood College (now University) was (at that time) the happiest one of my life.



Kesslyn Brade Stennis

Thankfully, I have the opportunity to experience those same feelings every year at the university where I teach. During the annual graduation season, social work educators like me are able to celebrate with those who have successfully completed the academic rigors of social work programs, often while balancing a variety of personal challenges in their lives. For so many students, families and professors, the graduation ceremony symbolizes the culmination of many years of arduous effort and determination.

Yet while graduation from an undergraduate program is a noteworthy measure of success, I shudder when social work graduates – our emerging leaders for the future - consider this to be the “end” of their social work education. While “graduation” may suggest a completion of sorts, the essence of “graduation” is “commencement,” which actually means “beginning.” “Commencement,” signified by the conferring of a degree or diploma, suggests that there is another level to strive for which will require the knowledge, values, skills and experiences of the past coupled with the time, talent, effort and opportunities presented in the future. Simply stated, the conferring

of a degree or diploma should lead us to embrace the opportunities of new beginnings in our futures: new service, new efforts, new actions, new roles, new opportunities and an ongoing commitment to do God’s work.

I am thankful that our social work education coupled with NACSW’s ongoing support provide us with the forum and opportunity to live into this season of new beginnings. Moreover, our unique training and faith prepare us to competently address the twelve grand challenges (<http://aaswsw.org/grand-challenges-initiative/12-challenges/>) that social workers face in this season. Through NACSW, we can use our faith in God, our educational background, our experiences and our action-orientated professional organization to address the 12 Challenges for Social Work:

- Ensure healthy development for all youth
- Close the health gap
- Stop family violence
- Advance long and productive lives
- Eradicate social isolation
- End homelessness
- Create social responses to a changing environment

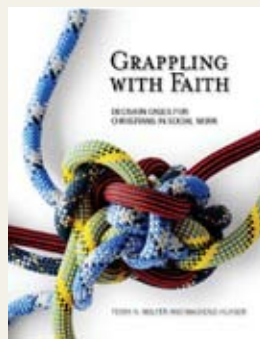
- Harness technology for social good
- Promote smart decarceration
- Reduce extreme economic inequality
- Build financial capability for all
- Achieve equal opportunity and justice

NACSW friends, my message is simple. I encourage all of us to more fully embrace this season of new beginnings. Get involved in collaboratively working with other members and member-interest groups within NACSW to impact lives. Make friends with our emerging leaders who are seeking mentors and opportunities to learn and grow. Connect in a personal and professional way with people who may differ from those normally in your relational circles. Join with other NACSW members and participate in the organized community service projects that will benefit our 2016 convention community of Cincinnati (you will learn more about this in the coming months). No matter who you are, what you look like, what Christian denomination you belong to, where you are from, or how you identify, I beg of you to get involved or more involved within NACSW during this season of new beginnings. Happy Commencement - let’s go!

### PUBLICATION AVAILABLE FROM NACSW

**GRAPPLING WITH FAITH:  
DECISION CASES FOR CHRISTIANS IN SOCIAL WORK**

*Terry A. Wolfer and Mackenzi Huyser (2010) \$23.75 US, \$18.99 for NACSW members or for orders of 10 or more). For price in Canadian dollars, use current exchange rate.*



*Grappling with Faith: Decision Cases for Christians in Social Work* presents fifteen cases specifically designed to challenge and stretch Christian social work students and practitioners. Using the case method of teaching and learning, *Grappling with Faith* highlights the ambiguities and dilemmas found in a wide variety of areas of social work practice, provoking active decision making and helping develop readers’ critical thinking skills. Each case provides a clear focal point for initiating stimulating, in-depth discussions for use in social work classroom or training settings. These discussions require that students use their knowledge of social work theory and

research, their skills of analysis and problem solving, and their common sense and collective wisdom to identify and analyze problems, evaluate possible solutions, and decide what to do in these complex and difficult situations.

Want to meet local NACSW members? Area representative contact information is on page 11. E-mail pictures of your local NACSW event to [info@nacsww.org](mailto:info@nacsww.org).