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“A Vital Christian Presence in Social Work”

**CURRICULUM MODULE OR INTEGRATING FAITH AND
SPIRITUALITY IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION**

Holding on Loosely

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Primary course: Comparative Theories – MSW Clinical Practice Course

CURRICULUM MODULE ON HOLDING ON LOOSELY

I. Core Competency Addressed:

Competency 3: Apply critical thinking in practice

Competency 4: Incorporate Diversity into Practice

II. Specific Practice Behaviors Related to the Module:

1. Integrate evidence-based practices and best practice methods into practice
2. Change one's behavior in response to recognition of self biases
3. Adopt information and interventions to meet the needs of diverse populations and / or to challenge oppression
4. Engage in ongoing learning about diversity and culture

III. Materials Needed and/or Assigned Readings:

Tolstoy, Leo (2003). The Three Hermits In: *Walk In the Light and twenty-three tales*. Orbis Books; Maryknoll, N. Y.

This Folktale retold (seven pages) by Leo Tolstoy illuminates eternal truths with a gift for simply conveying to the neophyte social worker the importance of listening, being present, knowing the other, and respecting the others tradition, culture, and religious expression. The folktale portrays a Bishop who meets three Holy Hermits who are living on an island for the salvation of their souls. The Bishop assessed the Hermits prayers to be miss-guided and teaches the three Holy Hermits the "Our Father." The Bishop bids his goodbyes and leaves the island by ship. Shortly, the three Holy hermits walk across the water rapidly over taking the ship and calling out "we have forgotten your teaching, Servant of God . . . teach us again." The Bishop recognizes the miracles and responds "your own prayer will reach the Lord, men of God. It is not for me to teach you. Pray for us sinners."

Berzoff, J.; Melano Flanagan, L. & Hertz, P. (2007). *Inside out and outside in: psychodynamic clinical theory and practice in contemporary multicultural contexts*. Second edition. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. Chapter 12.

Theories provide hypotheses to organize information and give a perspective to engage and work with our clients. Theories are imperfect tools. "How do we hold in our minds a multiplicity of theoretical models without letting them clutter our thoughts or our hearts, or without creating an agenda that may be irrelevant to the person with whom we are sitting? How do we organize what we hear into meaning that does not foreclose other possibilities and other interpretations?" (p. 272). As we hold the theories loosely we can allow them to inform practice.

IV. Description of the Module:

This module will challenge the students to critically think about their personal worldviews, the therapeutic process and the theoretical constructs presented in this course. Each social worker has a personal worldview or philosophy of life, which is impacted by personal experience, development, education, family, culture, spiritual views and more. It is important for social workers to take the time to ponder their worldview and how it affects their therapeutic attitude or the theoretical model that is favored.

Students will read the assigned article by Tolstoy and Chapter 12 in the text book. In the Tolstoy article, we see that our own worldview is not necessarily reality for everyone. Chapter 12 challenges the social worker to hold theory loosely within the practice setting.

Students will write a five page reflective paper addressing the following questions:

1. Identify your preferred theoretical model and briefly explain how this theory aligns with your worldview and personal experience of change.
2. How might the therapeutic process be impacted if the social worker begins to see and understand their theoretical paradigm as the only way to do social work interventions?
3. How might the intervention process be impacted if a social worker assumes that their culture or religion is the only reality to live by?
4. Use the analogy of the Bishop in the short story and his relationships with the three holy hermits on the island to illustrate three ways the relationship was affected.
5. Based on chapter 12 “From Theory to Practice” in the book “Inside Out and Outside In” consider the following ideas and their impact on the therapeutic relationship: arrogance, humility, self-reflection, conflict between two equally good lenses to view the world, challenge, discernment, vision, clarification, learning from another, and congruence with one’s own experience/inner truth.
6. How might concepts such as holding theories loosely in our minds, knowing and not knowing, evenly suspended attention, the unexpected and mystery and emptying our self have helped the Bishop in his relationship with the three holy hermits?
7. Provide three examples from your field experience illustrating these concepts.

V. Additional Class Activities and Assignments:

Students will discuss their papers as an entire class. An alternative to this, if the class is large is for students to meet in small groups and discuss their field experience examples with each other. A larger group discussion will follow with each group sharing a summary of their learning.

VI. References

Berzoff, J.; Melano Flanagan, L. & Hertz, P. (2007). *Inside out and outside in: psychodynamic clinical theory and practice in contemporary multicultural contexts*. Second edition. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. Chapter 12.

Tolstoy, Leo (2003). *The Three Hermits In: Walk In the Light and twenty-three tales*. Orbis Books; Maryknoll, N. Y.