

## **SOCIAL WORK**

### **Teaching to the Mission: Spiritually-Based Professional Development of Self in Field Education - An Ignatian Approach (SOCW 420: Senior Field Seminar)**

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#### **The Context**

The purpose of the Ignatian Mentoring Program, a faculty mentoring program offered through Ignatian Programs at Xavier University, is to provide faculty an opportunity to explore the values of Jesuit education and pedagogy in the context of a mentoring relationship with the goal of integrating mission and identity into their teaching and or scholarship. My participation in the program has provided a wonderful foundation from which to explore the integration of the University's mission and identity into the professional development of self capstone paper in SOCW 420 Senior Seminar course which is the integrative seminar that runs concurrent with field instruction. How I arrived at this program and the process of the experience itself are as important as the outcome, thus I will provide some background with regard to both.

I have a long and personal history with Xavier University. My father was on the faculty for 43 years and I grew up with the campus as my backyard. I, myself, attended Xavier and graduated in 1985 with a BS in Psychology. However, even though I am Jesuit educated, I did not know much about the Jesuits nor did I participate in mission and ministry life of the University. What I did get from my father, however, was a great respect for the Jesuits values of free inquiry and the pursuit of learning. When I joined the faculty in 1998, as a part of my orientation I attended Manresa, the on-campus orientation program that introduces faculty to the mission and values of Jesuit education. I found it quite interesting, not at all what I had expected. I was intrigued by the story of St. Ignatius of Loyola, the rise and eventual suppression of Jesuit Education in Europe and the role female students played and continue to play in Jesuit education in America. However, after that afternoon the experience became overshadowed by the demands of the day. So much so that the first time I received an invitation to the IMP, I glanced at it and dropped it in my waste can.

A year or so ago, I attended a Salon dinner on the topic of Diversity at the residence of Father Michael Graham, the President of Xavier University. The dinner was an opportunity to meet new people and have an uncensored, conversation about diversity. In order to prepare for the dinner and discussion, we were asked to read the president's diversity paper. One thing that stood out to me was the notion of "listening" for the sake of listening or "listening without an agenda" as described by Father Graham. That got me thinking about the profession of social work and the role that listening plays. As a social worker, we are trained to use "active listening" to help individuals, families, groups and communities function better in society as well as work to improve society's ability to assist those in need. So this notion of listening without an agenda was freeing and exciting. This coupled by the opportunity to meet new people, listen to their diversity story and share my own became an extremely valuable experience in my personal and professional development.

In addition, as a result of some things going on in our department, I have been thinking more deeply about Undergraduate Social Work education at Xavier a Catholic, Jesuit University. Namely, last year, the department brought in a consultant to assist in the redesign of several key social work courses in the hopes that they will be included in the core. Several foundational principles of social work namely, service, our societal and personal responsibility to the poor and oppressed, and the underlying values of the profession seemed to fit well with the overall mission of the university and were concepts and information that could benefit all students at Xavier.

## **The Problem**

It became increasingly clear to me that the mission of social work couldn't be more aligned with certain aspects of the mission of Jesuit education if you manufactured it that way yet, I don't think I had ever thought about it or talked with faculty or students about this. Nor, do I think that the average student, when they think about the mission and values of Jesuit education, even when it emphasizes social justice and service, think about social work. In fact, in some ways I feel I had avoided the topic of religion and spirituality and social work practice, but why? What had caused this gap in the curriculum?

Integrating issues of spirituality into social work practice and curriculum has been a struggle for the social work profession. Canda and Furman have identified several theories to explain this: 1) it has been hard to find an agreed upon definition of spirituality, and 2) most social workers feel unprepared to address this issue with clients. As a result, the thinking is that it is best to refer clients to those who are better trained to discuss these matters, such as pastors, rabbis and priests.

When I first heard Canda and Furman speak at the Council on Social Work Education Annual Program Meeting in Dallas in 2001, I felt much the same way. As much as I agreed that this was an important area to consider, I thought, for me, discussions of religion and spirituality were best left up to those better trained and qualified. The same holds true for social work education. Many of the reasons for not addressing this area share the same idea, namely, that social work faculty by and large is not trained to address such issues and thus it is better to ignore them.

In a Jesuit, Catholic institution such as Xavier, I would say that an additional argument could be made that, the core courses in theology and philosophy and the programs of mission and ministry provide students with this content, and, therefore, the social work department does not need to. In addition, the social work curriculum is overburdened with specific content, and we cannot mandate more content in the curriculum, yet we are doing our students a disservice. Our department has made some attempt to address this need by offering a course entitled, Religion, Spirituality and Professional Practice, which is a team-taught course with a professor from the theology department. However, since this course is an elective, students will only get this important content if they can fit it into their schedules.

I would argue that, due to the widespread interest in spirituality and religion in the US over the last 10 years, we need to prepare students to serve the client who may need to explore issues of spirituality and religion within the context of the professional helping relationship which is supported by the idea of treating the "whole" client and starting where the client is. Similarly, this same idea is important to consider with regard to social work education.

Educating the “whole” student, with spirituality being a part of the student is equally important. Thus, it is important to consider the student’s own spiritual and religious development as well as the possible role this may play in her or his development as a social worker.

Interestingly enough, Hodge reports that the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) now requires that a spiritual assessment be conducted on all patients. However, an important issue to consider is how equipped social workers feel to complete a spiritual assessment. In fact, Canda and Furman found that only 17% of social workers felt prepared to conduct a spiritual assessment. I recently shared this research with the seniors in my seminar class and asked them if they felt prepared to discuss matters of religion and spirituality with their clients, and they also felt that they have not had an opportunity to explore or be trained in this area. Moreover, two students reported specific ethical dilemmas that revolved around issues of religion and spirituality and professional practice and both felt unprepared at the time to manage the situations. When discussing the topic of religion and spirituality in practice with the juniors, several students felt that religion and spirituality would be an important part of their practice and were surprised that this was even an issue. Thus, it struck me as interesting that students at a Jesuit, Catholic institution in the profession of social worker, both of which share similar and deeply held values, both of which are rooted in a religious and or spiritual tradition, had not had an opportunity to discuss and be prepared to practice in this area, while also clearly identifying that for some this would be an important area of their future practice.

Thus, I have become curious about what my students think and how they feel their religious and/or spiritual values and Jesuit education interacts or not with their social work education, with specific emphasis on who they see themselves becoming as social workers. I have realized that on the one hand, I may have been taking the mission and values of the University for granted, saying to myself, what could be more closely aligned with the mission of social work while simultaneously discounting it because of the pressure to train professionals and my personal thought that the integration of institutional values and professional values was not my responsibility or an area of comfort.

So, this time, when the letter came across my desk it was almost as if it were illuminated and something that I felt compelled to pursue. To have an opportunity to form a relationship with a mentor I didn’t know and explore the values and mission of Jesuit education in the context of the profession of social work, social work education, field instruction and visa versa as well as look at ways to encourage my students to explore their experiences religious, non-religious and spiritual and reflect on those experiences as well as tell their own stories -- all this was not something that was going to end up in the waste can.

## **The Process**

Thus the journey began. When I first meet with Dr. Debra Mooney, the director of Ignatian Program, I shared with her my thoughts and how I had arrived at this place, and she asked me if I had any thoughts about who I would like to mentor me. I said, “No” and felt that I would defer to her. She suggested Dr. Trudelle Thomas and gave me a copy of her book, Spirituality in the Mother Zone. As I was reading the book, I read a passage she wrote where she mentioned Brown County. I remember thinking to myself, “is this the same Brown County boarding school that my mother went to.” Well, the first time I met Trudelle, she told that she knew my mother, and that my mother had in fact taken her on a tour of the Catholic boarding

school which she herself had attended for a book Trudelle was writing about the history of the Convent. I instantly felt comfortable and felt that this was an added bonus. Unfortunately, our lives became very busy, and we initially had trouble getting together. However, I continued to study, reading up on the values of both Jesuit education and social work, the history of religion and social work and spiritually-based social work practice.

In the beginning of my work and relationship with my mentor, a very disturbing thing happened in my neighborhood that swiftly propelled my life in a completely unexpected direction. A neighbor of mine, Phil Bates, was shot and killed in front of his house on Rosehill Avenue. Several days later another neighbor (a close friend of mine) and her two children were held up at gunpoint on their way home from the candlelight vigil for Phil Bates. Both of these events galvanized my realization that I needed to take specific, engaged action.

As a social worker, some things came easily, providing support, assisting in community organizing, i.e. helping to establish a Block Watch program and attending the Citizen on Patrol training to establish an active chapter in North Avondale. Other things were not so easy: dealing with my own trauma and grief at the loss of my perceived or perhaps misperceived safety, the sadness I felt for the Bates family and his friends and family members, explaining all of this to my children who were understandably frightened and upset and as my 8-year-old said one night when I went out, "I don't want you to get shot."

Then an important thing happened that I found very helpful. I attended the burial mass for Phil Bates at Bellarmine Chapel and listened to the wonderful words of the priest, Father Richard Bollman, as he eloquently managed to deal with the complex issues that presented themselves. What he said had a major impact on me as he tried to deal with the complex emotions of fear, sadness, anxiety and grief for the Bates' family, the neighbors and the city as a whole into 3 words: faith, hope and love. It was in those three words that I found such comfort and realized that, with those important things, we can overcome events and experiences that seem insurmountable. At the time, I didn't really think that it related to my work for the IMP, and in fact, I was concerned that my time was so consumed by neighborhood meetings, e-mails, patrols, etc. that I was neglecting what I was supposed to be doing. However, as I continued to reflect on the values of Jesuit education, I saw that this was an important experience in the process.

The next and equally amazing experience as a part of the IMP came when Dr. Debra Mooney sent out an e-mail announcing a conference that was coming up at Fairfield University in Fairfield, Connecticut called, "Jesuit and Feminist Education: Transformative Discourses for Teaching and Learning Conference." I almost couldn't believe what I was reading. To see those two words, Jesuit and Feminist, in the same title was amazing to me because they are at the core of who I am.

I immediately contacted Debra and asked if I could use my stipend money, and she said she thought that would be great. Once again, I almost did the oh, it's too expensive, it's too far away, it's too short notice, etc., but fortunately something again told me to go for it. Words cannot describe the impact this conference had on me personally and professionally. It was an incredible experience in two primary ways. First of all, the tone of the conference was so welcoming, and I felt as if I were home. To be surrounded by such wonderful women, and, yes, some men and Jesuits, made me proud, proud of who I was, and the level of the scholarship and the complex ideas that were discussed was dizzying. I felt that my Jesuit

education prepared me well; however, I admit that one presenter had me reeling. The day was spent looking at this intersection, what is it to be both Jesuit and Feminist, where do they compliment each other, and, of course, where do they diverge. The further grounding in Jesuit pedagogy was extremely exciting and helpful to me, but, for it to be in the context of Feminist theory, was icing on the cake.

In terms of the major Jesuit idea of “Who Am I,” or identity, I felt the conference helped me find myself, and who I am is an interesting combination of things. It also encouraged me to embrace who I am in all its commonalities and differences and bring that “magis” or excellence to the table as I participate in my students’ and future social workers’ lives who are also in a process of answering that same question. What better way to assist others in this journey than to reflect on my own.

I spend a great deal of time studying the values of Jesuit education and reflecting on those values in the context of my current teaching activities. One of the values that most significantly impacted my thinking is “cura personalis” or the educating of the “whole person.” The idea of considering the student from a holistic perspective, encompassing all aspects of who she or he is, with specific emphasis on spirituality, fit well with my vision of what I wanted to bring to the table in my teaching. In addition, I became very interested in feminist spirituality and exploring my own spiritual development and the impact that spirituality may have on one’s professional development. Lastly, I explored the history of religion and spirituality in social work practice and the values of the profession.

Toward the end of my year-long mentoring relationship, my mentor asked me to think about what she had done as a mentor that was helpful and to share that for other mentors. As I thought about that question, it occurred to me that some of it was serendipity, meaning, I think so much of what I got from her was based on who she was. However, in addition, my mentor provided excellent reading suggestions that seemed to be on target and helped advance my thinking. She also helped me address my writer’s block which was very beneficial. I found myself looking forward to my time for reading and writing. Lastly, our discussions were wonderfully stimulating, and she was able to help me focus my ideas and always challenged me to look deeper. The outcome of my year-long mentoring experience was the adaptation of the professional development of self capstone paper to better integrate the values of Jesuit education with specific emphasis on what I call spiritually-based professional development of self. In addition, it has stimulated me to look at other ways to bring the mission and identity of Xavier to life in the field education program.

## **The Outcome**

In the spring of the senior year, in the Senior Seminar course, which is the integrative seminar that goes along with field instruction, the seniors write a Professional Development of Self Capstone paper. The objectives of the seminar course are to provide an opportunity for students to share their experiences in field and integrate the course work into their professional practice as social workers. Field education is often referred to as the capstone experience, where the students are able to bring together their classroom and “real” life experiences as social workers. Field education is an excellent and appropriate avenue for the integration of the mission of Jesuit education and social work education. At a national gathering of Jesuits at Santa Clara University, Peter-Hans Kolvenbach stated that,

“The real measure of our Jesuit universities, [then,] lies in who our students become. Tomorrow’s “whole person” cannot be whole without a **well-educated solidarity**...Solidarity is learned through “contact” rather than through “concepts.” When the heart is touched by direct experience, the mind may be challenged to change.” (cited in Traub, 10).

Thus, field instruction becomes an opportunity for the student to not only pursue and reflect on what it is to be a social worker, but, more importantly, what is it to be a Jesuit-educated social worker. This is what is truly at the heart of mission-driven education.

Thus, the professional development of the self capstone paper is an opportunity for students to reflect on their professional development as soon-to-be professional social workers. They review writings from their texts that explore this area of curriculum, as well as engage in personal reflection, exploring from their perspective what the process of engaging in field instruction has been for them and how it has assisted them in who they are becoming as social workers.

Prior to the Ignatian Mentoring Program, this activity had only been focused on the students’ professional development as social workers as it relates to various skills, values and behaviors and only specific to their experiences in field and in seminar. As a result of the IMP, I have expanded this reflection to encourage the student to consider larger questions of, who am I? And, who am I called to be? Thus, by taking into account *cura personalis*, the value of considering the whole person, which is central to Jesuit education, students have a more grounded and better integrated perspective from which to view the notion of professional development.

### **Professional Development of Self in Field Education**

Professional development of self in field education is an area of social work education that I have been interested in throughout my 8 years at Xavier. According to the Council on Social Work Education, schools of social work are mandated to produce professionals who demonstrate an infusion of professional knowledge, values and skills. Professional development of self is often defined as the acquisition of a set of skills. For instance, Cochran and Hanley define, “markers of active practice” (Cochran and Hanley, pg 117). Some of which are: being grounded in practice, practicing self-care, continued education (life-long learning), use of self, use of supervision, developing a support system, acting to eliminate oppression and injustice and pursuing social or organizational change. In addition, professional development is viewed as an adherence to the profession’s values and engaging in ethical practice. Lastly, professional development is identified as engaging in professional behavior versus that of an employee and related to attire, arriving on time, managing one’s workload and being able to function within an organization.

### **Professional Socialization**

Although the above mentioned attributes of a professional are fairly agreed upon, according to Mariatta Barretti, “relatively little is know about how social work students become professionals” (Barretti, pg 9). The notion of how it is that students become professionals (individuals who engage in the aforementioned professional behaviors) is something that has intrigued me as the Field Education Coordinator for the Social Work program.

It has been humbling and heartwarming to watch from year to year, the development, even transformation, that occurs from the first day I meet the juniors in the pre-placement seminar to the last day when they graduate. It is hard to describe what exactly it is that I am witnessing. I contend that it is more than just the maturational development that occurs as a student moves from the second semester of the junior year to graduation. Although one cannot deny that simply aging over a year and half, particularly for our traditional students, is significant, it is clear to me that there is more going on. Something significant is happening in that year and half which is more than just aging. This can best be seen in our non-traditional students, who, even though the minority, appear to have an equally significant process of development as people, students and soon-to-be professional social workers. It is tempting to try to reduce this transformation to simply the acquisition of a set of skills or behaviors, but I would argue that it is much more than that and name it the realization of a professional identity.

### **The Realization of a Professional Identity**

Every year I have students write a Professional Development of Self Capstone paper where I ask them to reflect on their field experiences and their development as professional social workers. The students share many common experiences that could easily be reduced to skill sets and a strong integration of values or simply the development of basic professional behaviors, but it is also important to explore that which may be less visible, the process that results in the realization of a professional identity or ability to bring to life or make “real” one’s professional identity.

The idea that the development of a professional self is more a process as opposed to simply gaining a set of behaviors or values is supported in the literature. Marretta Barretti found in her study “that students undergo a journey consisting of roughly six phases of professional socialization to the social work profession” (Barretti, pg 15). They are as follows: expectation, revelation, refutation, negotiation, adaptation, and affirmation. In the second phase, revelation, students identified the field as “the most significant aspect of training for student’s professional identity” (Barretti, pg 17). In addition, Cochrane and Hanley articulate a developmental process that students go through during field education and identified 4 stages: Beginning, Reality Confrontation, Relative Mastery and Closure.

The most interesting finding in Barretti’s study was the notion that professional development begins long before students enter social work programs. Barretti states:

“Because students hold well-defined conceptualizations of social workers and of the profession through previous experiences with both, it behooves social work programs to start where the ‘client’ is by building upon students’ breadth of experience rather than assuming they are blank slates on which only they will write “(Barretti, pg 22).

Thus, the realization, or making “real,” of the professional identity is a process as well as the acquisition and articulation of a critical set of values, knowledge and skills. By moving from the inward out, meaning starting where the student is, taking a holistic approach and acknowledging what they are bringing to the table while simultaneously socializing them into the profession, is how the student realizes herself or himself as a professional. So how does social work education go about facilitating the student to realize their professional identity?

## **Spiritually Based Professional Development**

Spiritually in social work practice has been written about extensively for the last 10 to 20 years. David Derezotes writes about a “second phase of spirituality,” one that is concerned not only with personal spiritual growth, but also with a transformation that leads to a deeper awareness of responsibility for the well-being of others. He goes on to say that, “there is a growing awareness that spiritual development brings with it an increased responsibility to serve, and that personal spirituality and service are themselves interconnected and interrelated” (Derezotes, p2). He further advocates a holistic model, a biopsychosocialspiritual model, when viewing clients. Thus, it becomes critically important to recognize the possibility that the spirituality of the student may be a driving force in the realization of her or his identity as a social worker and may be one of the things that the student is bringing.

In order to combat one of the previously identified arguments for not addressing spirituality, namely, that there is no agreed upon definition, I offer a definition of spirituality that will provide the foundation from which students can look at their development, both as people and professionals.

Canda and Furman in their book “Spiritually Sensitive Social Work Practice,” provide a definition of spirituality that is an excellent backdrop to this discussion. They state that, “spirituality relates to a universal and fundamental aspect of what it is to be human -- to search for a sense of meaning, purpose, and moral framework for relating with self, others and the ultimate reality” (Canda and Furman pg 370). They go on to say that, “spiritually sensitive social workers address clients as whole persons, applying professional roles, rules and assessment labels in a flexible way that is responsive to the values of the client and his or her community” (Canda and Furman, pg 32). In addition, they espouse a model for integrating spirituality across the curriculum. David Derezotes distinguishes spirituality from religion by stating:

“Spirituality can be seen as the *individual’s* sense of connectedness, meaning, peace, consciousness, purpose, and service that develops across the life span. In contrast, religiosity can be seen as *socially* shared rituals, doctrines, and beliefs that may or may not support and enhance the individual’s spiritual development” (Derezotes, p3).

I chose to look at and ask students to reflect on spirituality and the definition that I offer as opposed to religion. However, I recognize that for many they are inseparable; thus, I leave it up to the student to decide how she or he frames the reflection.

### **Three Areas of Spirituality Based Professional Development of Self**

Thus, it becomes important to apply the above-mentioned ideas of spiritually sensitive practice to social work education and more specifically the area of field education. There are three main areas of spiritually-based professional development that I asked students to reflect on specifically. They are meaning and purpose in professional life, reflection and discernment for ethical practice and spiritually-based self-care. I will provide a discussion of each and link them to the values of Ignatian and Jesuit education.

#### **1) Meaning and Purpose in Professional Life**



The first area is meaning and purpose in professional life. Cochran and Hanley in their text Learning through Field specifically address the area of meaning and spirituality and relate them to one's professional identity. Social workers become intricately involved in the deepest of issues their clients are struggling with, such as the social worker who works with Hospice, and is intimately involved in a client's process of dying. It is in the moments of intimate human interaction that recognizing and drawing on spirituality can be very beneficial to both the client and the worker.

The Ignatian Mentoring Program was first and foremost an incredible opportunity for me to consider my identity and spiritual development. The time I spent in discussion with my mentor and the reading and reflection I engaged in throughout the entire process of the IMP has helped me embrace who I am as a whole person. Thus, for me Identity and Self are central to meaning and purpose. Without having a strong sense of who you are and what you are being called to do, it is very hard to understand your purpose. Furthermore, meaning and purpose are central to spirituality and to the realization of a professional identity as a social worker. Most social workers state feeling called to the profession or joke that they don't know what else they would do if they stopped being a social worker. Finding meaning in one's work is an important idea that has been well articulated by Matthew Fox in his book, The Reinvention of Work. He states:

“Good living and good working go together. Life and livelihood ought not to be separated but to flow from the same source, which is Spirit, for both life and livelihood are about Spirit. Spirit means life, and both life and livelihood are about living in depth, living with meaning, purpose, joy, and a sense of contributing to the greater community. A spirituality of work is about bringing life and livelihood back together again. And Spirit with them (Fox, pg 1&2).

Thus, an increased clarity around meaning and purpose in one's work is also important to sustaining one's professional life or, as Trudelle Thomas calls it, “composing your life.” However, the ability to fully embrace one's identity and one's greatest resource as a social worker can be complicated by how the individual and the wider society view that individual's identity. I experienced this first hand in that I rejected my brand of spirituality which tends to humanistic, feminist and non-religious because I didn't think it was right particularly in a Catholic, Jesuit institution. However, as a result of the mentoring program, I have fully embraced my identity and see that I have been missing an important aspect of who I am as a faculty member. Thus, it is critical that faculty be open to enabling the students to discover, embrace and fully utilize their identity and true selves.

Canda and Furman go on to talk about spirituality in the everyday. I love this idea, and I think it is helpful for students as they embark on looking at meaning and purpose for themselves. The three words that really exemplify for me spiritually based practice in the everyday are faith, hope and love. Often in my practice, I would have to take a leap of faith that a child that I was working with would be okay when I left for the evening or how I tried to routinely bring hope to the table during very difficult situations or lastly show measures of love, or, as I would rename, positive unconditional regard for the uniqueness, dignity and worth of each person with whom I worked. These aspects of my practice were decidedly spiritual in nature, found in the everyday, provided deep meaning and grounded me in my purpose as a social worker. However, it has only been through the result of the IMP that I could see this. Prior to the IMP,

I would have said the above-mentioned activities were just what social workers do, which is fine, but now I see them as deeper, more meaningful and thus sustaining.

## **2) Reflection and Discernment for Ethical Practice**

Janice Staral in her paper, "Introducing Ignatian Spirituality: Linking Self-Reflection with Social Work Ethics," emphasized the need for self-reflection, decision-making and self-care and relates those specifically to her experiences with Ignatian spirituality. She states that Ignatian spirituality supports the social work values of social justice, the dignity and worth and the person, and the value of personal growth and self-care. She also felt compelled as I do, to bring these ideas to life particularly at Marquette University, a Catholic, Jesuit institution. She states, "It seems important to find appropriate means to introduce social work students to some concepts from Ignatian spirituality" (Staral, pg 39). The ideas of self-reflection, decision-making and self-care are equally important as they relate to professional development. The Examen of Conscience, as Staral describes it, supports a need for reflection as a critical aspect of Jesuit education. She explains it as, "This prayer form concentrates on a key principle of Jesuit (or Ignatian) spirituality, which is 'reflecting on daily life' and gaining insights and resolutions regarding daily experiences as a result of this reflection" (Staral, pg 40). She goes on to suggest that this would be helpful for students in making professional decisions and navigating the waters of professional life.

For me, this supports the emphasis that I place on reflection and the Jesuit value of discernment as it relates to the day-to-day of social work practice. The processing of what happens in the field and the need for the student to be able to take in what it is that they are experiencing and process it such that it can be integrated into who they are and who they are becoming as people and professional social workers becomes incredibly important. Furthermore, developing the skill of reflection and discernment is critical to the practicing professional social worker not just the student.

The field students engage in weekly reflection that results in them writing a journal entry where they have engaged in what I call "reflective experiencing," a term I adapted from Canda and Furman's idea of "reflective reading" (Canda & Furman, p. xxi). In order to accomplish this, students engage in a four step process, first outlined by Trudelle Thomas, English professor, and then adapted for field education: 1) attending to the experiences of field, 2) engaging in critical thinking regarding those experiences, 3) acting through writing or establishing specific action plans and 4) sharing either through the journal entry or in the senior seminar class. This process was laid out in a handout I wrote called "Reflective Reading and Experiencing: An Ignatian Model for Writing Reflection Journals," the purpose of which was to take the weekly log assignment and adapt it to reflect a deeper sense of the student's experiences in field and reactions to those experiences. I have received positive feedback from the students, one of which said that he felt the new direction, away from a blow-by-blow of the day, was "freeing" and more fun. Reflection and discernment are also critical skills for the professional social worker to develop and to consider ways to utilize this skill for on-going professional development.

## **3) Spiritually-Based Self-Care**

The last area I asked students to consider is spiritually-based self-care. Janice Staral makes the link between spirituality and self-care. For me, this is incredibly important and one that I

think our students will benefit from greatly. Ruth Barton in Sacred Rhythms discusses the concept of “a rule of life.” The author describes it as an important part of the Christian tradition that supports a process of spiritual transformation “day in and day out.”

“A rule of life seeks to respond to two questions: Who do I want to be? How do I want to live? Actually, it might be more accurate to say that a rule of life seeks to address the interplay between these two questions: How do I want to live so I can be who I want to be?” (pg. 147)

“A rule of life” supports the idea of spiritually-based self-care and one that intentionally looks at what is it that we need to do daily, weekly, monthly, yearly to sustain ourselves, our spiritual development, and, I would add, our professional development. The idea is to go beyond the consumer-oriented “me time” of spa treatments and retail therapy, and develop a deeper sense of how one goes about sustaining a professional life. I think this is also important, given that social work is a profession based on care that its professionals develop ways to engage in meaningful self-care. This is not an easy expectation given that caregivers tend to see their needs as secondary to others, particularly female caregivers who are often socialized to see the needs of others as more important to themselves.

Spiritually-based self-care is going beyond the surface to consider the needs of the inner self. This can be very challenging given our superficial, consumer-oriented culture which tends to be very externally focused. Spiritually-based self-care demands an inward out perspective, drawing on the inner most fundamental aspects of who we are as people and what is important to us as opposed to a more superficial outward emphasis on manicures, facials, working out, shopping etc. It is through meeting the deeper inner needs that one develops the ability to sustain oneself as a person and a professional. The challenge for all of us is to find those inner things that bring deeper meaning to us and nurture them. Thus, the critical first step is placing one’s self-care as primary and discovering ways to build it into one’s day-to-day life.

One area I have discovered that has been helpful to me in my recent professional development has been having a mentor. It has been very beneficial, and, although my current mentoring relationship is coming to an end in the context of the IMP, it is clear to me that I need to continue this model in my professional life. In addition, having time for quiet reading, reflection and discussion has been invigorating for me. The notion of self-examination in the context of consultation is very helpful, having professional peers with whom you can share your concerns and ask questions and open yourself up to receive feedback, support and encouragement as well as to be challenged and questioned is very helpful. Margorie Thompson states that, “self-examination is an occasion for spiritual refreshment, whatever we discover within ourselves at the time of the review. Its purpose is always to bring us into greater intimacy with the Lover of our souls...,” (Thompson, pg 104). In addition, one may find keeping a journal as very helpful in exploring one’s personal and work life. Lastly, finding ways to connect with family and my home life has been very important to me as well.

## **The Method**

I provided an opportunity for students to reflect on several things:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Values of Jesuit education:</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Discernment</li></ul></li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Values of Social Work</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Dignity and worth of the individual</li></ul></li></ul> |
|---|---|

- Service of Faith and Promotion of Social Justice
- Finding God in all Things
- Cura Personalis
- Women and Men for Others
- Magis
- Service
- Social Justice
- Importance of Human Relationships
- Competence
- Integrity

- **The student's own religious and spiritual development**
- **Three areas of spiritually based professional development**
  - 1) Meaning and purpose in one's work,
  - 2) Reflection and discernment for ethical practice,
  - 3) Spiritually-based self-care.
- **Their individual professional development**
- **Seminar Session: Integrating Spirituality and Work: Developing a Personal Rule of Life presented by Dr. Trudelle Thomas – Professor, English Department**
  - The students participated in a session of the senior seminar course that was devoted to laying the foundation for their reflection and the writing of the capstone paper. In order to prepare for this discussion, the students read chapter 5, Composing Your Life, from Dr. Thomas' book, Spirituality in the Mother Zone. In addition, they read a paper I wrote on spirituality sensitive professional development and two booklets on the values and mission of Jesuit education supplied by Ignatian Programs. The class was experiential and provided the students with an opportunity to explore spirituality as a means to define and sustain their professional life. Trudelle presented her wheel of creating a Personalized Rule of Life with specific emphasis on two areas, solitude and home front economic. (For more information on Dr. Thomas's work, see in this book under "Mentor Reflections.")
- **Additional areas to consider:**
  - Individual strengths, weaknesses, successes and challenges related to your development
  - Any value-driven or ethical issues, dilemmas that you have encountered in the field and discuss what you learned from them
  - How you define yourself as a professional. What has been easy for you? What has been challenging?
  - Your own spiritual and/or religious development and the role it has played or not in your development as a professional social worker
  - Your observations of professionalism as it relates to your supervisor, co-workers, peers and agency, as well as the profession as a whole as you have observed and experienced it in your field placement

Note: It is important to state that I had no expectation for what any of this should mean to a particular student, I can only speak to my own process as a result of my participation in the IMP over the past year and reflecting on these areas. What is important for me, however, is to provide

an opportunity and invitation for students to look at the bigger picture of who they are, who they are called to be, and how they can sustain themselves throughout their professional lives. For me, these questions reflect spirituality and are extremely useful for the professional social worker.

## **The Papers**

Overall the feedback from the students verbally and in writing was supportive of this content area and the paper. In fact one student stated, "If this paper had not had the spiritual focus, I don't think I could have written it, I mean I would of, but I don't think it would have been as helpful or meaningful to me." Most all of the students connected to the idea of meaning and purpose stating that they feel "called" to be a social worker. Several appreciated the opportunity to reflect on their own religious and spiritual development, stating that even though Xavier is a Catholic, Jesuit institution, they have not had a chance to explore their own religious and spiritual development. Furthermore, many reported feeling that they didn't think that spirituality was an important area of who they are as people until they were asked to reflect on it and then realized that it was important to consider. They reflected a continuum from deeply religious and spiritual to not at all, but all agreed that, regardless of where each of them were as individuals, from a professional practice perspective, this was an important area to consider. One student shared a story of having had an uncomfortable experience with a client and not knowing how to handle it at the time. She states she now has an understanding of how she would handle that same situation in the future and feels that this has made her a stronger social worker. In terms of spiritually-based self-care, they all reported feeling that this was important to consider and could be a valuable resource in managing a professional life. One student stated that for him reflection was interwoven with self-care and both had a spiritual foundation. Through quiet reflection and listening, he was able to make better choices professionally and thus take better care of himself throughout the process. Lastly, the notion of spirituality flowing through all aspects of one's professional identity and being an important resource was supported by many students.

## **The Future**

Although the official IMP program is ending, it is my plan to continue to develop my work in this area. Several future directions, include but are not limited to, introducing field instructors to the mission of Jesuit education through either a specific training or inviting them to attend Manresa on Campus. Looking more specifically at the student field instructor relationship and providing opportunities for field instructors to reflect on the quality of field education supervision from a spiritual or mission-driven context. Further exploring this area for students and continuing to develop and refine those initiatives outlined above.

For the general Xavier student, I have an interest in offering these ideas around composing an academic life, particularly finding ways to mentor and encourage quiet reading and reflection. Lastly, to consider offering social work students an opportunity to participate in the "spiritual exercises." The central purpose of all of these activities is to offer more inclusive mission-driven education that truly reflects and considers the "whole" student.

With regard to the field education program, at the suggestion of one student who stated she wished she had received this information earlier, I will introduce the content area of religion and spirituality earlier in the curriculum in the pre-placement seminar given that it is the beginning of the field education program. Similarly, I will encourage students to reflect on the

three main areas of spirituality sensitive professional development in the beginning of the senior year. By laying this foundation earlier, it is my hope that the student will achieve a deeper, more integrated reflection at the end of the field education program.

The Ignatian Mentoring Program proved to be an important experience in my development as a social work educator. Mission-driven work is not new to social work practice; however, mission-driven education is not something that I have read much about. Thus, I feel this is an important area for further exploration and scholarship. I feel fortunate that I have this opportunity and feel that it has greatly benefited myself, my students and, hopefully, will contribute to others. Thus, I would like to thank my mentor, Dr. Trudelle Thomas, English Department, Dr. Debra Mooney, Director of Ignatian Programs, and the University for this incredible opportunity.

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