

SOCIAL WORKERS: Allies in Crises, Partners in Progress
THE ROLE OF SPIRITUALITY IN CRISIS SITUATIONS
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The world today is appalled by the succession of tragedies, natural or man-made, happening across nations bringing pervasive anxiety to humanity: the global occurrence of natural disasters; ecological imbalance; socio-political strife; terrorism; widespread poverty; breakdown of social institutions; influx of ideologies; values disintegration; mass media explosion, violence and exploitation.

At the micro level, persons, groups and communities journey through life edging on crises and stresses because of life transitions and difficulties of letting go. Issues of growing up whether at adolescence, mid-life, illnesses, aging, death, difficulties in relationships, breakdown of families and traditions, issue of control & power, dynasties, conflicts. . .

The succession of tragedies in our era whether at the macro and micro level, show that we, humans, are not in complete control of our lives. Who and what is there to help us?

The trimedia and literature abound with testimonies of how people recourse to God who is with us always or a Presence or a Power beyond us, that saves, supports and strengthens especially at our darkest moments when we are left with nothing else, (is very much palpable and even openly acknowledged).

Spirituality has never been considered as an important buffer against stressful and uncontrollable events which help people to bounce back, overcome their difficulties and gradually lead normal and productive lives. One's spirituality impacts a person coping mechanism and ability to manage life's adversity.

Jeff Levin surveyed more than 200 articles/works from leading universities in the US (Yale, Michigan, Duke, Berkeley, Rutgers and Texas) reporting the statistical findings on the impact of religious involvement on health and illness." (2001, p.6) These findings are:

*People who regularly attend religious services have lower rates of illness and death than do infrequent or non-attenders

*For each of the three leading causes of death in the United States-heart disease, cancer and hypertension-people who report a religious affiliation have lower rates of illness.

*Older adults who participate in private and congregational religious activities have fewer symptoms, less disability, and lower rates of depression, chronic anxiety and dementia.

*Religious participation is the strongest determination of psychological well-being in African Americans-even more important than health or financial wealth.

*Actively religious people live longer on average, than the non-religious. This holds true even controlling for the fact that religious folks tend to avoid such behaviors as smoking and drinking that increase the risk of disease and death.

From the research study, we can deduce that religion and/ or spirituality contributes to the general well-being of individuals.

What then is spirituality?

Dr. Edward Canda, MA, MSW, Phd thinks of Spirituality as the “ universal aspect of human existence and search for meaning and purpose, fulfilling relations and connections between other people and myself.

I would like to define :

SPIRITUALITY as a particular way of living oriented to God or Supreme Being, leading our lives meaningfully in the daily journeying with others with a sense of purpose and mission and caring for the whole creation which eventually will lead us to wholeness.

Spirituality is:

- A dynamic dimension of the **Spirit of God within us** -- body, mind, and soul.
- That which calls us into **relationship** with God, self, community (others), and creation (environment) as we journey through life and beyond.
- That which calls us to **explore our identity** (Who am I?), **our purpose and place** in living (Why am I here?), and **how we live our lives** (What values do I hold?)
- That which calls us to prayer, worship, and enlightenment, and **draws us** into the mystery, wonder, awe, and an openness **to God's** breaking through (grace).
- That which gives us **awareness of God's Presence** and Grace in our lives, **affirms our being, and empowers us to move** from despair to hope, meaning and contentment.

Given the definition, what is your spirituality?

With the trend of persons raising issues related to spirituality, Human Service Professions like Social Work, Psychology and Psychiatry are challenged to honor the Role of Spirituality not only in the lives of their clients but first in the lives of the professional helping persons.

We are a generation of social workers educated to the science and the art, skills-based practice of problem solving. Social Work has its roots from the Judeo- Christian Practice. In the process of making

social work gain ground in the social, political and academic sphere, the emphasis on scientific mode of inquiry took center stage marginalizing spiritual perspective.

We can note a reluctance among social workers in incorporating spirituality in our practice. It may be a fear of not being scientific, nor the myth that psychology and social work runs counter to spirituality or it may be due to a bias or inadequacy to demonstrate and verbalize one's spirituality, or a concern arising from personal and historical experience of abuses of spiritual and religious ministers. Shall we allow our fears and biases to block the wealth that is within and at the beginnings of the profession.

Mr. Michael McKernan, MSW, Director of Catholic Family Service in Canada believes that there are 3 important factors that are allowing spirituality to become more accessible to the business of social work today: First, our connection to spirituality is changing outside traditional religious formulas with the emergence of spiritual perspectives such as quantum physics, chaos theory, creativity studies, biology, on ecology. Second, these unstable times of widespread anxiety is calling us for paradigm shifts, for a new vision of life (humanity's inner life). As social workers we are always invited to welcome and have a great respect and tolerance for differences. Let us watch a documentary on paradigm shifts.

(click youtube). There was an interest in the past on the importance of Intelligence Quotient to measure the intelligence of the person, then the Emotional Quotient, is the ability of the person to monitor his emotions capacity to withstand pressures and relate with others. Today, a huge interest is fast emerging on the Spiritual Quotient of persons. It is said that human beings have six senses. Spirituality is the ability to recognize that there is intelligence beyond six senses. And this intelligence creates and governs everything within and beyond the worlds we know. Wikipedia states that human beings can surrender to this supreme intelligence through: awareness (also known as mindfulness), contemplation (self enquiry), and prayer (dedication).

This brings us to the third factor that makes spirituality more accessible to social work which is founded in its origins, the Judeo-Christian charity movements. The Social Work Code of Ethics (1997) has incorporated this belief in the inherent worth of all persons, emanating from a Supreme Being who directs our actions.

It was in the late 1990, when the trend in social work shifted its practice from biopsychosocial approach to include the spiritual resources of clients hence the biopsychosocial spiritual assessment in case management.

Dr Mo Yee Lee, PhD, author of Solution-Focused Treatment of Domestic Violence Offenders: Accountability for Solutions, embodies spirituality in a cohesive manner: "Spirituality entails cognitive, philosophical, experiential, emotional as well as behavioral aspects. I personally believe in interconnectedness of phenomena and different domains of human experiences, as well as with the broader system. I try not to treat myself or others as objects or compartmentalized bits. Of course such a belief affects my professional pursuit. I embrace a systems perspective, strengths based and/or body-mind-spirit approach in my clinical practice and intervention research."

Spirituality contributes greatly in the clients' resiliency to manage life crisis. Having worked with sexually abused girls exemplify their resiliency. They have the capacity of being able to manage well their angry and hurt feelings and helplessness because of their faith in God as their real healer and companion in their journey in rebuilding their broken lives and enable them to regain their damaged personhood. This facilitate their becoming healthy survivors. This is confirmed by the research done by Dr. Lourdes Arellano-Carandang documented in her book "Listen to the Their Inner Voice, Street Child Speak".

In many programs esp. at the Parenting Effectiveness Service (PES), the role of spirituality as an integral key component in strengthening family life is well defined. In the DSWD SIPAG (Sustaining Intervention for Poverty Alleviation and Governance Project, the level of the family is being scored as monitoring indicator in the poverty alleviation. A study of the psychosocial first aid session in the management of Filipino disaster victims, identified spirituality as a coping mechanism that the victims used. The Filipino faith is source of courage, daring optimism, inner peace and ability to accept tragedy and grief. This helps them accept reality with sense of optimism in the context that all events in life are within God's will and plan.

Mr Edward Canda stated, "We need to do more in our education to go beyond intellectual and skills-based training to help social work students dig more deeply into self-cultivation and their life journey and how it interfaces with their practice."

Burnout/compassion fatigue is likely to catch up on us, service providers, given the workload of a great number of clients with highly stressful circumstances to manage. How does one cope?

Mr. Charles May MSS. LSW says that what assist him in maneuvering through a potentially frustrating job, working with people who carry many emotional wounds and behaviors that would be easy to judge," is my choice to see myself as being as likely to have experienced similar symptoms had I had similar circumstances". Mr. Edward Canda founded a Society for Spirituality and Social Wok. Along with other colleague, the society helped people connect not only through sharing information but to develop relationships and a mutual support network. It is a web of interest and synergy.

Dr. David Wilde said that each night he would reconnect with who he is and why I am here. This is to stay sane, at peace, and calm inside. He said that this is a powerful means of warding off the vicarious traumatization that can occur when working day after day with people who are experiencing pain.

Mr. Edward Canda states that the social work profession in the United States is in a process of recovering from collective soul loss. Many social work practitioners and scholars are now promoting this recovery of professional soul. Let us embrace a Spiritually Sensitive Social Work Practice. Setting aside Spirituality in the Social Work Practice impoverishes us, our clients and the Social Work Profession. Let us rediscover the richness of the roots and soul of our Profession.

