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**THE BIBLICALLY GROUNDED FRAMEWORK
FOR SOCIAL WORK**

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Abstract

This paper explores the Biblical view of social responsibility and suggests a framework for experientially living both the personal and professional mission and vocational calling to engage in social work. In the postmodern sweep of self-aggrandizement, selfless service to the poor and needy offers those of us poor in spirit an opportunity for revival. Social work among the world's hurting requires an applied private outreach and offers an unlimited venue for professional practice. As such, this paper reflects a more practical epistemology, rather than a scholarly theological discussion. Both authors have worked for a number of years to assist the Church to understand better the mission and role that social work can play in helping people of the end-time Church to increase our commitment to tireless service for the "least of these." The paper ends by suggesting that while the poor may benefit from our efforts, we may be the greatest beneficiaries.

Introduction

We are God's chosen people, created in His likeness with a yearning to be united in social harmony with Him. Genesis 1:26-27 elucidates this relationship between the Creator and His creature, stating that "God created man in his own image." David further articulates this eternal social linkage. "What is Man that you are mindful of him, or the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honor" (Psalm 8: 4-8). As unique creations, we have a spiritual design essence whose most salient feature is our ability to understand, exercise and respond to authority for the purpose of being obedient and faithful stewards of God's social order on earth, living and working for Jesus Christ. Yet something horrible has breached this perfect Creator-created bond. Severed are the ties that linked us to the unmarred divine resources and perfect social order we were originally destined to share. Sin has wreaked havoc with the security and focus that we were created to live with. In our post-modern daze we look everywhere for meaning and purpose. David also noted

this dilemma in Psalm 39: “Man is a mere phantom as he goes to and fro: He bustles about, but only in vain; he heaps up wealth, not knowing who will get it” (Verse 6).

At no time in history has this postmodern truth been more perspicuous than in our modern world of technology, affluence and leisure time, where the phenomena of apathy, depression and suicide are all in the process of increasing exponentially. Social and material advances, which are supposed to be a blessing to human life, are found to be correlated instead with feelings of hopelessness and social breakdown. From the Biblical viewpoint, however, the correlation seems perfectly reasonable. Apart from an intimate connection with God, our existence is hopeless. What is surprising from the Biblical point of view is that this pall of futility does not hang even more heavily over the unbelieving postmodern world (a phenomenon to be attributed to the complete spiritual blindness which sets in once God is rejected and materialism and relativism rule).

The Bible, especially Old Testament tenants, has historically played a central role in crafting social meaning, building civil and social order, and defining individual rules and norms. God’s covenant in the Old Testament demanded that society and social responsibility as a whole should be ordered in accordance with the will of God. God’s covenant with His people demands that social commitment and responsibilities be ordered in harmony with the His will and His divine plan. Throughout history, God’s chosen people have lived selfless lives in service and sacrifice for helping those who struggle for meaning and survival.

Historical Call to Social Justice

Long before the birth of the profession of social work, the Church, living Christ’s model, concerned itself with meeting the needs of hurting, oppressed and marginalized people. Hinson (1988) describes the historical involvement of the Church in social ministries prior to the

Reformation. In the first three centuries of the Christian era, Christ's followers amazed the world around them with the extent to which they ministered to the needs of others, especially those who had no one else to care for them. Hippolytus, around C.E. 217, considered care of widows as a test for baptism. The early Church took on the major task of caring for abandoned and orphaned children who had been left on waste heaps to die, taking them into their own homes or creating fondling homes for nurturing these little ones, left abandoned.

Early Christians sought to ransom slaves, some even by voluntarily placing themselves in bondage. Within the fellowship of the Church, class of distinctions ceased to have meaning. New converts who had to leave "debased" occupations to join the fellowship (e.g. gladiators, actors, prostitutes) were given work by rich Church members or were provided support from a communal fund (Hinson, 1988).

Following the Biblical mandate, Christians have historically created institutions to meet human needs. The *agape*, a fellowship meal for the hungry, began as part of the Lord's Supper celebration. It was traditionally taken for granted that the Church was responsible for caring for the poor and vulnerable as a community of care. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Church groups formed voluntary societies, often as the result of spiritual awakenings that were commissioned to meet the social needs of those in their communities. During this time, and into the twentieth century, Bible believing denominations formed "helping societies" or agencies to formalize their commitment to social action and meet the needs of the "least of these." Problems of hunger, slum life, unemployment, mental and physical illness, and disabilities, as well as prison reform and caring for widows and orphans became efforts tackled by Victorian women eager to live out their personal faith in action (Smith, 1976).

Traditional Protestant thought held that the salvation of the individual would lead to social improvement, and so social improvement was never considered an end in itself. Certainly a just society would make the Church's job easier, but it could be achieved only by converting one individual at a time. Further, that was the work that had eternal value. After all, no one expected God to ask men and women how they contributed to their governmental and economic systems as they stood before Him in eternity. The ideas of the Social Gospel were different. Adherents came to believe that many individuals were a product of their hostile environments and could only leave sinful lifestyles and habits if they were extracted from the social and economic challenges that had driven them into sin in the first place. Conversion and life in the Church, therefore, had to offer something better than sin and addictive habits, as well as alleviate the suffering that drove men and women to such despair. As a result of this reasoning, individual salvation was important but considered secondary to social reform, which would convert multitudes into God's kingdom. Salvation of the individual, then, stood as an important byproduct of working for a literal kingdom of God on earth. Working for social improvement, the Kingdom of God on earth, then, was the thrust of the Social Gospel movement (Ahlstrom, 1967).

Biblical fundamentalism was another parallel theological framework promoted by the turn-of-the-century Churches that challenged the Social Gospel movement. Fundamentalism arose from a radically different impulse than the Social Gospel. Early in the 20th Century certain prominent Christians began to see the Bible as a historical text rather than a revealed truth. The Bible, according to these so-called "higher critics," had evolved over time and simply reflected the views of the men who wrote it. Fundamentalism rose within the Church to combat this modern view of the Bible. The names came from a series of pamphlets called "The

Fundamentals," published in 1912, which outlined the bedrock truths that all Christians should believe.

Both Fundamentalism and Gospel theorists have ebbed and waned over time. Fundamentalism emerged later in the 20th century as a far more radical and sophisticated movement. As for the Social Gospel, the phrase is no longer used, but the commitment continues in the delivery of charitable works by Evangelical and faith groups throughout America and globally (Public Broadcasting Service, 2001).

Out of these movements the church crafted formal outreach efforts desired to fulfill the mandate for helping and loving one's neighbor. Social work was one of those professions born in the Church. The Church was the "mother of social work" (Johnson, 1941, p. 404).

Biblical Framework for Social Work

One of the most significant Biblical texts delineating the Church's mandate for helping the "least of these" is Matthew 25. This passage sets forth the evaluation criteria for life's final portfolio exam for one to be considered fit for the eternal Kingdom.

"When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger

and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me. Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.' Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.' Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?' Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life" (Matthew 25: 31-46).

This is one of the last lessons taught by Jesus. Here he summarizes what his life of service was all about. While he has taught many constructs, this one highlights the overall expected outcome for each of our lives. Heaven or hell, serve me or die! Pretty serious theology! But our motivation is not to be fear, but love. We are to love God with an untiring commitment. That becomes our motivation for living a life of

selfless service. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with your entire mind; and, Love your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10: 26-28).

Social work’s professional value base is uncompromisingly congruent with the Bible. While other disciplines may struggle with finding a Biblical mandate for their existence, social work does not. “The purpose of the social work profession is to promote human well-being by strengthening opportunities, resources, and capacities of people and to create policies and provide services to prevent and address conditions that limit human rights and the quality of life. Acknowledging a global perspective, the social work profession strives to eliminate poverty, discrimination, and oppression” (Council on Social Work Education, 2008). Social work embodies the commission of Matthew 25 (doing “unto the least of these”) through organized, professional services that use social work policies, practices, and expertise to accomplish its purposes.

Besides meeting Jesus’ mandate to serve, the Biblical framework of social action is congruent with professional social work values. According to the code of ethics for the National Association of Social Work, social work values focus on service, social justice, the dignity and worth of the person, the importance of human relationships, and the integrity and competence of the worker (NASW, 1999). The table that follows provides a few examples of Bible texts that support social work values. From the table, one can see that social work values are adequately supported by scripture. There is a good fit between our professional values and Biblical principles.

Social Work Values	Texts Supporting Core Social Work Values
Service	Matthew 25:31-45; Luke 10:25-37
Social justice	Micah 6:7-9; Isaiah 58:6
The dignity and worth of the person	Isaiah 49:14-16; Matthew 10:31
The importance of human relationships	Matthew 5: 23-24; Mark 12:31
The integrity and competence of the worker	Matthew 25:13-30; 2 Timothy 2:15

Jesus' life and teachings aptly illustrate the social work mandate to serve with the right motives. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus cautioned, "Take heed that you do not do your righteous works before men to be seen of them" (Matthew 6:1). Service is not to be done for the applause of humanity. Jesus continually shrank from being in the limelight. Whenever crowds threatened to make him king, Jesus quietly slipped away. He would not be moved by the praise of people. In contrast, Jesus performed acts of service in obedience to his Father's will. "Your Father which sees in secret will Himself reward you openly" (Matthew 6: 4). This implies that Jesus was directed by the Father in serving His fellow human beings.

By serving humanity, Jesus felt closer to the Father for He was actively engaged in doing the Father's will. When social workers offer effective service to those in need, it must be from a heart that longs to be like Jesus and the Father. Ellen White, a divinely-inspired Victorian period social welfare author, herself notes in her book *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, "Only like can appreciate like. It is as we give ourselves to God for the service of humanity that He gives Himself to us" (p 81). By serving others, we can more easily receive Jesus into our own life. In beholding Him in the faces of "least of these" we become changed into His likeness.

Who was Jesus' target population? During His time of active ministry, Jesus was known for associating with the undesirables. Jesus was not afraid to touch the "untouchables." Similarly, professional social workers are commissioned to work with those whom the rest of society rejects. Social workers serve the poor, homeless, orphans, older adults, prisoners, persons living with HIV/AIDS, domestic violence abusers and victims, sexual assault victims and perpetrators alike, drug addicts and alcoholics, to name only a few.

By Jesus' example we are to touch the "untouchables." In John 4, Jesus gives us an example of approaching a person that was considered far beneath Him. The Jews never voluntarily talked to a Samaritan. They were allowed to trade with them out of necessity, but not to socialize in any way. When the town's "harlot" came to get water at the most unlikely time of day, Jesus did not hesitate to engage her and affirm her worth and dignity.

Another group was marginalized, not on the basis of culture or occupation, but morality. The woman at the well and Mary Magdalene both illustrate this type of "untouchable." Mary was considered an immoral woman. She was tricked into an illicit sexual relationship that nearly cost her life, yet Jesus was not afraid to touch her and later in a public setting be seen allowing her to anoint His feet with costly perfume and wash them with her tears of gratitude. This was such a serious social error that, in the mind of the host of this event, if Jesus were a prophet, this would not have happened.

Related to the cautions of interacting with "the immoral" is the prohibition of interacting in any way with people inflicted with leprosy. People with leprosy were considered cursed by God. The Bible records several examples of Jesus healing people with leprosy. Anyone even casually touching a person inflicted with leprosy became unclean, but not Jesus, our touch-friendly Savior.

Jesus interacted with hated cultural groups, occupational groups, and people who were considered immoral and unclean. Thus, Jesus is the social workers' example in reaching out to those on the margins of society, the despised, and those considered contaminating and unworthy to mix with.

Modern missiologists speak of hungers (often labeled "felt needs") among people. In a more restricted sense, felt needs are deeper personal needs—the life issues that all of us face: loneliness, managing relationships, family and parenting, handling money, finding fulfillment, coping with stress and worry, workplace problems, illnesses, and the tragedy of death. None of these is directly what we might call a 'core spiritual issue' (e.g. sinfulness, fallen human nature, rebellion against God, and the need for salvation), though all of them are impacted by "The Fall" and our own sin and self-centered nature. But they are precisely the amplifier that God very often uses to begin a process that ends in conversion. Of course, God is sovereign throughout this process. But it helps us to understand the progression. Jesus addressed the environmental context of the human existence that included physical hunger resulting from poverty, social hunger resulting from injustice and marginalization, emotional hunger resulting from socio-familial disconnect, and spiritual hunger resulting from a disconnect with the divine.

How did Jesus model this for us? How did he go about doing good? Jesus set the example for social work by meeting people's material, physical, and emotional needs as His initial approach in ministering them. Jesus' first miracle was performed during the wedding feast at Cana. Jesus' mother performed a key role in the wedding arrangements, and when she discovered that there would be a lack of wine, (therefore indicating a lack of courtesy), she told Jesus with the secret hope that He would perform a miracle. In connection with this story, Ellen White in *The Desire of Ages*, states, "Not alone from the pulpit are the hearts of men [and

women] touched by divine truth. There is another field of labor, humbler, it may be, but fully as promising. It is found in the home of the lowly and in the mansion of the great; at the hospitable board, and in gatherings for innocent social enjoyment” (p. 152). In His first miracle, Jesus gave us an example of meeting temporal felt needs.

Along the same lines, after a long day of teaching on a mountainside, Jesus challenged his disciples to implement a mass feeding program for 5,000 men, not counting the women and children. After scouring the multitude for food to share, the disciples found a boy that was willing to give his lunch of five loaves of bread and two small fish. People were hungry and Jesus provided food from the scant supply. Feeding hungry people is so important to Jesus that he involved his disciples actively in the process and left us a model for social work to follow. Christian social workers need to use the resources at hand. They may seem meager and insufficient, but in the Lord’s hands they will multiply and fill unmet needs.

Much of Jesus’ life as recounted in the Gospels was dedicated to healing physical disease. To the casual reader, these many actions may have nothing to do with social work. But with closer examination, the lesson for social workers and others is clear: to bring healing is central to gaining a foothold in people’s hearts. Jesus often spent entire days engaged in healing. People would begin bringing their sick to Him early in the morning, and Jesus would continue to heal until late into the evening. He was steadfast in His mission to bring healing in spite of the cost to Himself. Social work’s focus centers on socio/emotional healing rather than physical healing; however the principle of reaching out to heal hurting people remains the same. Health care providers can attest that when doing holistic interventions, professionals cannot separate the psycho and somatic issues in treatment.

Finally, an act that occurred as one of Jesus' last deeds was to wash the feet of His disciples. This single act of service embodies the image of Jesus as a humble social worker. There is no room for pride in social work. Social workers must engage in whatever service is needed, however humbling, in a given situation. Jesus saw a need and acted to fill that need. He was proactive in his approach to service. Social workers must be diligent in noticing and meeting human needs. We must not wait around hoping for someone else to do the "ugly" jobs. We must be like Jesus; see the need and address it.

A quick story in point. There was a professional SDA social work educator from Andrews walking down a ghetto street in Birmingham, Alabama. He was approached by a feeble elderly, but spunky, African American woman who confronted him. Putting both hands on her hips and stepping toward him, she said, "You ain't from around this neighborhood are you, sonny?" Taking a step back, he responded, "No, I'm here for an Adventist Community Service conference and just checking out the needs in your area!" Stepping closer still to him, she went on, "Well, if you're one of them there Adventists, then you're from one of them there foot washin' churches, ain't you?" Before he could reply, she went on. "Well there are a whole lot of feet around here that needs a-washin'! Foller me!" She took this 6 foot 4 professional social work educator by the hand and pulled him around the street corner.

The neighborhood mirrored the best of ghetto living, and the house she pulled him toward featured a rundown porch with a shade magnolia tree in the garbage-strewn front lawn. On this porch sat 5 senior men who, to say the least, had hit the bottle too hard that day. In their filthy clothes, unshaven and unwashed, they sat chatting about life. "Hey guys, I got someone here I want you to meet!" the old women said, pushing the professor forward. "He's here from that foot washin' church and he will wash your feet!" In shock, the professor did a double take.

She was serious! Next thing he knew, she was in the house and back with a bucket of water. “Here you go, now wash these nice men’s feet!” she said with authority of a mother. Slowly, the reality of this divine appointment sank in and the professor stooped to take the socks off the first man, the second, and then the third, fourth, and fifth! By this time tears were streaming down his face. He was humbled and overjoyed with the privilege he had, but his lesson was not over yet. “Now,” she added with a note of confidence, “Please come with me to the Family Dollar Store down the street, and we’re going to get them all a pair of new socks!”

Jesus’ life modeled humility in service. Besides his own example, Jesus told of another’s example of service with such high regard that the story’s protagonist has become synonymous with service—the Good Samaritan. When faced with an apparently unanswerable question about to whom we must minister, Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan. A man of a hated race reached out and tenderly cared for another person at his own expense and at the peril of his life. At the end of the story, to bring home the point, Jesus asked, “Who proved neighbor to him that fell among the robbers?” (Luke 10:36). Even then the listener would not answer Jesus’ question by a direct answer that required him to say the word “Samaritan.” Instead the questioner answered, “The man who had mercy on him” (Luke 10:36). Jesus’ example of whom we should help commended the Samaritan in a way that must have been scandalous at the time, but would remain throughout history an example to which to aspire.

While Jesus’ life centered in service, we have recorded at least one Biblical caution about serving in Luke 10, directly following the Good Samaritan story. This passage tells of Jesus being invited to Martha’s home for a feast. Martha welcomed Jesus into their home and began making all of the appropriate and expected arrangements. Luke mentions Martha’s sister (clearly Mary was the referent person here) who “sat at Jesus’ feet” (Luke 10:39). Luke begins the next

verse with the word “but.” “But Martha was distracted” (Luke 10:40). This indicates that there is something amiss, something needing correction. It was nice that Martha welcomed Jesus into her home, *but* she was distracted “*with much serving*” (Luke 10:40).

The story that precedes this vignette proclaims service to others as the cornerstone of a relationship with Jesus. By its placement, the Mary and Martha story offers a balancing theme. Jesus had just explained that service is to be central in the life of a Christian. At the same time, sitting at Jesus’ feet is crucial. It is our relationship with Jesus that fits us for service. Balance and priorities are important to Jesus. “But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:42). If either professionally-trained or untrained caregivers are to be fit servants for Jesus, they must take the time to sit at the feet of Jesus. This is the “good part.” Whatever are the pressing needs of those we serve, all caregivers need to take the time to sit at Jesus’ feet and there receive the refilling of our own, and often empty, cups of compassion.

Responding to the Biblical Mandate

Response for Adventist Individuals

This calling to serve the poor and marginalized may be conceptualized as an individual responsibility. From the founding of our Church, individual Adventists have “moved mountains” to make a difference in the lives of those who hurt. Passionate, caring individuals have made a selfless commitment and the world is better for it. While our accountability will be personal (we’re either sheep or goats), our efforts can be improved when we partner with others and co-opt corporate leadership, vision, and resources into social action programming.

Response for Corporate Adventism

The question for Adventists in general is not whether we will engage in ministry to “the least of these” if we want to be saved into Christ’s everlasting kingdom. That’s clear! What is less known or agreed upon is whether this commission is simply an individual one or a corporate commission as well. For example, the Adventist Church has corporately addressed the commission of Matthew 28, “to teach all nations” primarily through trained evangelists and the pastorate. At the same time, this commission is fulfilled individually when we witness to a fellow passenger on an airplane. Most people would agree that if we only engaged in informal individual evangelism, the goal of the gospel message spreading throughout the entire world would slow considerably. Is not the same true for caring for the “least of these”? The question for people passionate about the commission of Matthew 25 is then: “How shall the Adventist Church (corporately and formally) more aggressively pursue the commission of Matthew 25?” That is, “How will we offer helping services and needed resources in a caring, intentional, and corporate way to all hurting humankind?” Our corporate commitment to social justice does not need to preclude our call to evangelize, but to support it.

Maier (1995) suggests that evangelism and social responsibility go hand in hand. He suggests that there are three valid relationships that could work between these two goals. The first suggests that social action can be a consequence of evangelism. That is, evangelism is the means by which God brings people to new birth, and their new life manifests itself in service to others. The second scenario suggests that social ministry can be a bridge to evangelism. It can break down prejudices and suspicion, open closed doors, and gain a hearing for the whole gospel. Jesus sometimes performed works of mercy before he proclaimed the Good News of the Kingdom. Finally, social ministry can co-opt evangelism as its partner. Social action not only

follows evangelism as its consequence and aim, but it can be door-opening and an integrative partner in a holistic approach to share God's love.

The most significant underpinning value to be addressed in the design of social work ministries for the world Church is to be sure that we offer our love in action with disinterested motivations. Ellen White elaborates on this motivational concern in her book *Welfare Ministry*.

There is a work to be accomplished for many to whom it would not be of the least good for you to tell the truth, for they could not comprehend it. But you can reach them through disinterested acts of benevolence. There are outcasts, men [and women] who have lost the similitude of God, who must first be cared for, fed, washed, and decently clothed. Let these perishing souls feel that all you have done for them was done because of your love for their souls (p.244).

She suggests that we should be motivated only by kindness and genuine love, not out of a need to baptize people for meeting institutionally determined quantitative quotas.

Response for Adventist Congregations

Often SDA congregations spend time in serving their own organizational interests. When asking local church boards to review the minutes to their meetings, one of the authors rarely sees issues of community social outreach discussed. Typically, local Churches address issues related to intra-organizational management, and little time appears to be spent on planning and organizing social work outreach efforts. Budgets are set aside for traditional evangelism, but limited funds are available to care for the poor in our communities.

Congregational efforts directed toward social action typically result in positive difference-making. In a recent study by Garland (2005), she found that congregational spiritual engagement was positively correlated with the amount of time spent in community service activities. Of the families studied, those who did social work together also prayed more together. The entire faith-based initiatives promoted by the White House over the past 8 years suggest that congregations can positively impact their communities for social change in ways that other secular groups and government cannot. By meeting the growing needs of their communities, church groups can make a lasting difference. By providing both temporal and living water, communities that are barren and dry can become rich and vibrant. For congregations to engage actively in meeting felt needs, they need to be sure that they have conducted an assessment of the existing needs, planned their intervention, and, after implementing their helping intervention, sought feedback about how helpful their services were.

Response for Adventist Education

Just as Adventist Schools of Religion offer specialized training in preparing individuals to respond professionally to the commission of Matthew 28, Adventist social work education offers a unique contribution in the corporate fulfillment of the gospel commission of Matthew 25. Professionally-trained Adventist social workers have the skills to move the Church from an individual to a corporate engagement in service. Yet, in the history of Adventist social work this has not happened very effectively. And the situation today seems even more discouraging. In the past couple of years two North American based Adventist social work programs have closed.

What are the barriers to having Adventist-educated social workers be a strong voice and leaders in helping the church with the Matthew 25 commission? There are many possible

explanations for why Adventist social workers lack of full engagement in corporate and congregational social ministry service.

Because social work has not been involved to any degree in formal social ministry, there seems to be a perception that there is not a place for social work in our Church. Considering that perception, there may be a sense of apathy, a lack of motivation to move the Church towards corporate professional social service. Other progressive Christian denominations have created dual degree pastoral/social work education options that have wonderfully integrated the best of both careers. Yet it seems that SDA pastors and other Adventists leaders sometimes hold the opinion that social workers are secular humanists on the fringes of Adventism and therefore marginalize social work as a viable career for church-based ministries.

Maybe Adventist social work educators are also to blame. It could be that our lack of integrating the Adventist faith strongly in the curriculum has not been as deliberate or intentional as it should be. Social work curriculum, with its Biblical foundations is rich for the integration of faith into practice. Among the key areas where the Bible could better inform our teaching of social work practice are human behavior, social policy, research, diversity, social justice and internships.

Human Behavior

It is very likely that an entire volume could be dedicated to the many intersections in the curriculum area of human behavior. The human behavior sequence includes human development along the lifespan as well as theories about human systems of various sizes and how they operate. Scripture is replete with the full range of human experience, and there are many opportunities to match scripture with appropriate human behavior concepts. For example, taking the beginning of human life and the importance of prenatal care, we have the examples of

Samson and John the Baptist. In both cases, the parents were given detailed instructions on how to prepare for the coming birth. Thus, social work students are reminded that great care should be taken during the prenatal phase of life and educate their clients accordingly.

Then, from the life of Jesus we have an example of Jesus' own childhood. "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:52). This one verse illustrates several key components and areas of study. First, Jesus increased in wisdom. This demonstrates cognitive development and can lead into a discussion about Piaget and his related theories. Jesus also increased in stature, signifying physical development. This naturally opens up an area of study in developmental stages and how children mature. Another area covered in this verse is spiritual development. Jesus developed in favor with God. Spiritual development is an area of study that is being more attended to over the past ten years in social work education. This discussion could lead to spiritual assessment and assisting individuals with their spiritual needs. Finally, this verse addresses social development. Jesus developed in favor with God *and* man. In other words, Jesus experienced social development.

Social Policy

Adventist social work students must learn social policy. This content focuses on the rules under which organizations and governmental bodies operate. The primary concern highlights questions such as, "How are the rules of a society or organization determined and carried out?" and "What are models of service that lend themselves to optimal helping?" The Bible has several important illustrations for these concepts. First, there is a detailed description of societal rules and social order recorded in Deuteronomy with the children of Israel. Closely related to this is a whole subset of organizational policies and processes connected with the care and keeping of the tabernacle. These Scriptural references provide a basis for discussions on a range of issues from

societal infrastructure to human relations to dispute-negotiation. When Jesus sent out the disciples as missionaries, he gave them specific instructions on how to carry out their work. These “social policies” set the boundaries for their scope of work and procedures for engaging in their work. They are critical if students are to engage in social planning and policy development as part of their expression of faith-in-action.

Research

Professional social workers and our students are expected to be a conscientious consumers of research, conduct systematic inquiry, and engage in regular practice. There is Biblical support for conducting research. The Bible tells us, “Test everything. Hold on to the good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21). All Adventist educators need to train our professional students in frameworks of best practices. Biblical social work must be grounded in evidenced-based outcomes that can be documented qualitatively and/or quantitatively.

Diversity

The social work profession has a strong commitment to cultural sensitivity and cultural competence. There is Biblical support for honoring cultural, ethnic, and racial difference. Jesus offered examples of including and embracing marginalized cultural groups. Besides the Samaritans, Jesus ministered to the Canaanites (Matthew 15:25-27) and the people of Gadarenes (Mark 5), races and ethnic groups considered heathen and undeserving. Adventist social work educators must work diligently to break down ignorance and prejudice wherever it is found. Engaging in any type of discriminative practice would be unacceptable and un-Christ like.

Social Justice

The value of social justice focuses on intervening in oppressive systems. As mentioned above, Scripture amply supports the importance of combating social injustice. Micah asks,

“What does the Lord require of you but to do justly and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8). Likewise Isaiah asks, “Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: To loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?” (Isaiah 58:6). A cornerstone of social work education is to expose and denounce social injustice. Adventists in general, and especially SDA social work education must develop a strong voice calling both the Church and community towards a more humane and fair way of treating people.

Field Internships & Mentoring

A key component to social work education is field study. Undergraduate students in their senior year spend at least 400 hours engaged in field experience. Graduate students spend up to 700 additional hours in their advanced field experience. Field study helps students gain social work experience under the mentorship of a professional social worker. Field experience examples are abundant in Scripture. From the Old Testament, we find Elijah, who was ready to be translated, under God’s guidance calling Elisha to become the next prophet of Israel. Jesus’ own example of mentoring the disciples during the time of his ministry offers a wonderful endorsement of field study. Jesus’ disciples were with him daily for three years. From time to time, He sent them off on their own, always to return to talk over their experiences. After the time of Christ, we see the tradition being carried on by Paul’s mentoring of Timothy. It would be ideal if every social work student in an Adventist institution of higher learning could, for at least some part of their field experience, receive a placement with an Adventist social worker.

Blessings Unleashed

In conclusion, forget for a minute the eternal rewards of service of the ‘least of these’ and reflect on the Isaiah 58 blessings for living life today doing either personal and/or professional

social work. Years ago when Adventist social work educators began our spiritual exploration of the issues of faith and service, we felt the Church would be blessed with the Latter Rain, and with new spiritual birth the Church would be on-fire for serving those that hurt. Now, it seems like we may have had the dependent and independent variables reversed. The Church today, needs urgently to see the face of Jesus in the “least of these,” and by beholding His face in the poor and marginalized, we, both corporately and individually, will become like Him and will be blessed with the end-time outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Our church needs to build an aggressive backfire to control the post-modern self-centeredness that has numbed our membership into unmotivated apathy toward helping the poor. We urgently and corporately need to assimilate and promote an “all hands on deck” (individual and professional) call to Biblically-grounded social action--not so much because the poor need us, but because we need the blessings that await us when we serve! Isaiah 58 makes this duty/blessing ratio formula clear! The following duty/blessing algorithm of the if-then conditions demonstrates what awaits Christians who will tirelessly live the Isaiah 58 challenge and a life of self-less service.

Is this not the fast that I have chosen? To loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh? Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and He will say, ‘Here I am.’ If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, If

you extend your soul to the hungry And satisfy the afflicted soul, Then your light shall dawn in the darkness, And your darkness shall be as the noonday. The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought, and strengthen your bones; you shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail. Those from among you shall build the old waste places; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; And you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach, The Restorer of Streets to Dwell In. If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, And call the Sabbath a delight, The holy day of the LORD honorable, And shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, Nor finding your own pleasure, Nor speaking your own words, Then you shall delight yourself in the LORD; And I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, And feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the LORD has spoken (Verses 6-14).

The Lord has said it! That sounds like a Biblically grounded framework for social work that suggests a positive future for all of us!

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