

Christianity and Social Work

*Readings on the Integration of
Christian Faith and
Social Work Practice*

THIRD EDITION

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Editors



CHAPTER 4

INTEGRATING CHRISTIAN FAITH AND SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE: STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE JOURNEY

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Perhaps you remember family vacations that included road trips across the country; trips that started with the unfolding of a map on the dining room table or an internet search for driving directions. You found your current location on the map; then found your destination on the map and only then began the exploration of various routes to get there. The journey really started before the map was secured or the computer was booted up. It very likely started as you considered your destination and the purpose of your trip. Once you knew where you were going, your focus could move to the “how to” of getting there.

In this chapter we will share several student views of one of the most challenging journeys for Christians in social work: the journey toward integration of faith and social work practice. We are a group of four social work faculty members at a Christian university, Baylor University in Waco, Texas. We spend a lot of time pondering this journey toward integration. We think about Christianity and social work very personally, in relation to ourselves and our callings, we talk about this often with other faculty members on retreats or in meetings. Most important, we explore this topic with students in advising, in classrooms, and most recently, in conducting a research project with our students. We have been intentional in our exploration of this topic because we have been deeply affected by our own responses to the question “Where am I on the journey toward integrating Christian faith and social work practice?”

Our purpose in writing this chapter is three-fold. First, we want to share with you the stories from Christian students at our university who have been on this journey toward becoming a social worker. We collected interviews from students and alumni during the year 2004-05. All participants were seeking or had completed one of three programs: Bachelor of Social Work (BSW), Master of Social Work (MSW), or in some cases, our dual-degree program, in which they sought the MSW from the School of Social Work and the Master of Divinity (M.Div.) from Baylor’s George W. Truett Theological Seminary. Our second purpose in writing is to comment on the various themes emerging from the students’ reflections as they shared stories of seeking God’s plan, dealing with obstacles, and seeking companionship for the journey. Finally, we will invite you to join with other Christian travelers as we figure out together various ways to integrate Christian faith and social work practice.

We are addressing our comments primarily to student readers, though we realize that faculty members, social work practitioners, and others may read this chapter. Our hope is that students and others who are introduced to the stories of our Baylor students will be prompted to reflect on their own journeys. We expect that for our readers, these conversations about calling have been and will continue to be a central part of the dialogue concerning Christians in social work: a dialogue involving other students, advisors, supervisors, teachers, families, and friends. One last caution: this chapter is not based on our data analysis and is not presented as research findings. We are beginning to report those findings in other publications (Singletary, Harris, Myers, & Scales, 2006). Instead, this is a more personal sharing of selected quotes from students and faculty that we hope will serve as information and inspiration as you consider your calling and your pilgrimage. We invite you to travel with us.

The Road Trip of a Lifetime

For the Christian student, the most compelling question of “Where am I going?” has been answered ultimately: “I am going to God, to eternity with my creator, to Heaven.” But if life is truly a journey leading us to our Home, it seems very important “how we get there.” It is frequently easier for Christian students to talk freely about their eternal destination while struggling significantly with determining the course of their life journeys. Which of the many career paths available shall we take? What is it we are to “do” with this life we have been given? We look at the “life map” of possibilities and consider our options while many voices, from parents to mentors to detractors, offer opinions. Shall we travel major highways with large loops that let us travel quickly and efficiently but that help us or make us skirt around the inner cities where the bustle of life and pain of others is almost palpable? Shall we travel the back roads of life where the pace is slower and the interactions more measured and deliberate? Will our travels take us through many small adventures or will this journey center on one or two defining highways.

For the Christian social worker, there is a real sense that we serve a Navigator who has charted our path, who created us with particular gifts and talents to accomplish the purposes of God’s creation. But getting the message and instructions of the Navigator that are specific to our journey is often the challenge. Has God called me to a specific work? And if so, how will I “hear” the call and know the path? We find ourselves asking, “What are the roads or pathways that will get me to the work and then through the work to which God is calling me?”

Students who understand that they have been “called” to social work describe that time of hearing the Navigator’s voice in a variety of ways. Becoming a social worker is a process, a journey that may begin from any place at any time. Some social workers can trace the beginning of their travels to childhood: parents who modeled for them the giving of self in service of others and encouraged the journey of helping. For some, the journey toward social work may have begun later in life, after several apparently false starts down roads that were blocked or just seemed to be the wrong direction. Eventually they realized

that the Navigator provided directional signs and clarity and that those initial forays were strength building that led to clarity and focus.

While all social work students may be on a journey, for Christian social workers, the paths toward life as a Christian and toward professional social work are often traveled simultaneously. Even a student who has been a Christian for many years may be walking a path of deepening faith. Therefore, Christian social work students explore questions such as these: "How does my journey as a Christian intersect with, compliment, replicate, or diverge from travel along my journey toward professional social work? Will I be confronted with the choice between two roads, one representing my faith journey and the other representing my professional journey? Or is there truth in the statement that social work and Christianity really are quite compatible with one another? Is it possible that we have been called by the Navigator to forge a new road that brings our path across the most vulnerable, the most wounded, those lost needing a guide to get back to the road?"

Why Social Work Education?

Our students' stories remind us that all journeys must begin somewhere, even though the map has not been secured or the destination is not in view. Some students are very comfortable with wandering. Some are taking a leisurely journey that may be spontaneous and filled with last-minute decisions about destinations and activities, a bit like buying a month-long rail pass and traveling around Europe. In some instances, students may enter social work to check it out, wander around, and decide along the way what is interesting. In contrast, other students are on a carefully defined path to a very specific destination. They have a particular vocational goal in mind and their social work education is a point on their map. One student described where she hopes to be in ten years:

I want to have started a non-profit [agency] for doing job training for women. For impoverished women-- that's what I would like to be doing in ten years. To get there, I think in two years I am going to be working at an agency doing very micro work.... I really need to have that perspective.¹

One can imagine this student viewing social work classes as particular points on a map that will lead to the ten-year goal.

In some cases, students found their way to social work after developing a commitment to a particular population. For example, one young woman found that she was gifted in working with children so she planned to pursue teaching in a school setting. In conversation with her own teachers she began to broaden her view of careers in which she might work with kids. Soon she was imagining social work as an option. In her own words:

I just easily attached to kids; they easily attached to me. And I was just a real good people person. People said it all the time,... [With social work] I would have more job options... and if I'm a

school teacher, then that's what I do with kids, I just teach them, but with social work I could do a whole bunch of different things and I liked that.

Another student began social work in order to work with children and adolescents, but, through experience in internships and classes, opened her mind to consider work with additional populations:

I always thought... I was going to work with children. And it's switched a lot. ... our society's changing as well, so Alzheimer's and caregivers are going to be big needs our population is going to have...I definitely could see myself in that kind of field...I have lots of options....

Another student's ultimate goal is ministry, but this student intentionally sought a social work education to gain particular skills and information. Encountering two other travelers with social work competencies motivated this student to walk with them.

I want to connect to people and really help them work through these issues that they've got. I thought that I could do that in seminary, and I think that you can, but when I got in there - that's where the catch was - when I started asking questions about wife beatings and children getting hit - those things. And when the only two people in the room that knew were social work students, that was what really did it for me. This is some information that I have always wanted to know. How do I get this information? And social work has that information with it.

While the student quoted above wanted to join the social workers (through Baylor's M.Div-MSW dual-degree program) to gain particular knowledge or skills, another student wanted to journey alongside social workers because she appreciated the value base of the profession.

The first draw that was in my mind was that I thought that social workers worked with the poor, that was the initial lead in. But also, helping the oppressed and the poor in justice issues from a biblical basis and seeing that as a value of the social work profession.....So social work values are definitely places that attracted me as a means of vocation or a job where I live out the values.

Where am I going?

In contrast to students who had a clear picture about why they chose social work education, other students were wandering, with or without a compass. One student was simply lost in the journey and stated bluntly "I have no direction on my future at this point." Another traveler expressed outwardly a feeling of confidence that she would find the way as she goes, but at the same time, admits an "uneasy feeling" as well.

To me, at this point, there's still just—it's all very unclear. I'm pushing around things right now, but I'm learning that there are so many options out there and that I have to just kind of give it time to know things will develop, and I'll find it as I go. So I'm doing my education to help give me some more options and some more places, but I can't see down the line right now. And it's kind of an uneasy feeling, not knowing which direction or any of the options that are available—in either direction.

This inability to see around the corner is both the joy and the challenge of traveling free and easy, wherever the wind may take us. We may know that good things can happen along the way and that the path will be there when we need it. But, the uneasiness described above leads to a natural question for students; will we really like what we find along the way? And, perhaps a more troubling question, when we arrive at our destination, will the satisfaction we find be worth the time and effort we have invested?

Sometimes it is easier to see where we are on the path by looking behind us, at where we have been. This student reflects on the calling to social work as a process; looking back, she can see that there were signposts of confirmation points on her journey.

I don't think it was one instance, like one minute, all of a sudden, I was like, "I'm called to social work." I think it was a process...the constant affirmation. I believe when people are walking with God, and in His word every day, and are really seeking Him, then He'll lead you in a certain direction, and so as I've been seeking Him throughout college, my college experience and life, I've felt confirmed over and over again to continue in the path of social work. And more so every day, even today, more so than yesterday.

Am I on the Right Road?

One of the lessons we learned from the students we interviewed was that entering and staying on the path to a vocation in social work can be an uncertain and complicated task. Their experiences made us more aware of the unexpected turns, intersections, and detours that accompany most who travel this way. These honest, onsite reports of the terrain will alert you to the possibility that you may encounter obstacles in the pathway--you or others in your life may question the direction you are going, the accuracy of your map, and the worth of your destination. You will discover that others have traveled the path that you are now on or that you are thinking of entering. They have much to say about the challenges you face and about how God keeps them on the path and helps them make sense of the journey.

Some students told us that, in the beginning, they didn't want to be on the path toward a career in social work. It seems that God's plan for their life's journey was very different from the life map envisioned by the student. This reflection illustrates how God's plans may not be our plans:

I remember a point where I sat there and I said, "I don't want to go this direction." I remember praying and saying, "God, you got something confused here. You got the wrong plan for the wrong girl." There was a point where I really remember just about screaming my head off going, "God; you're just off, here! I don't understand why you're doing this!"

Another student described the experience of misinterpreting God's plan:

"I think, for me, I misinterpret God, definitely because I am a selfish person and have my own agenda and my own plans that aren't necessarily in conjunction with His, so I do get a little confused and can't see the line-- but I definitely know that from my experience, He's used other people and you know, initially by just planting a seed in my heart, or maybe a desire or maybe just a little interest.

It seems that once these students reluctantly entered the path of God's plan for their Christian vocation, confirmation that they were in the right place reassured the travelers. Students reported confirmation from a number of sources.

I really think, looking back, especially because of that factor, that it was nothing other than God saying, "We're going to have to take major steps to intervene on this girl's life, because she is not listening to anything I'm saying to her! I've put this desire in her heart, I've put this, like, internal factor in her that is driving her towards social work, and she is just abandoning it!" So, that's what I think that God definitely had a huge...part in that, for sure.

One student described the sense of peace that confirmed the chosen path:

I think it's completely natural for me to be in social work. And if I try to pursue other things, it really doesn't give me that sense of peace, it gives me more of a sense of like I don't belong there. That's really the role that social work plays and that's how I feel as far as my calling, when I know that when I'm doing something that God doesn't want me to do, I don't have that peace. And when God wants me to do something and that's where I should be, and that's where I am, I have that sense of peace and I'm fine with it even if it makes me uncomfortable, but I feel just natural to be there."

Encountering Obstacles

After overcoming their resistance, and then heading out on to the social work path, some students reported that they encountered unanticipated obstacles along the way. Some of these challenges, such as the family members who questioned their choices and the public perception of social work, affected

their decisions to begin the journey while others, such as a loss of professional destination created a temporary disorientation.

Family concerns

Confusion or concern may be the response of parents and family members to students who choose social work as a career. Family members may want to understand the motivation and reasoning that underlie this sometimes controversial decision. These two quotes from students reflect the concerns that some family members may have about the choice of social work as a career:

No matter what I do, there is [from my parents] this, “ok what is your reasoning behind this?” I think that is a real big key thing, is to see where my motivation is coming from, and seeing, what makes me do this, to make sure I am doing it for the right reasons. Also, I think, part of it is for bragging rights, so that when people ask them, [parents] can say, “well, she’s doing it because she wants to dah, dah, dah.” I get a kick out of that - that that’s one of the things that they do.

Another student described a negative reaction to the career path from family:

Oh, well, they definitely have not influenced me to be called to — I mean, they are — my grandparents still are in denial that I am a social work major. I mean, no one in my family wanted me to be a social work major. So, they really have not done anything to encourage me to do that. But I think they just really wanted me to do business. But, I don’t know.

Public perception of social work

Professional prestige and societal recognition may affect career choice. This was not an often mentioned concern in these interviews but there were at least several references to this potential obstacle. One student described a narrow perception of social work when initially considering the profession, asking “Aren’t they just CPS [Child Protective Services] workers? That was my whole idea of social work.” Another student suggested that “social work, I guess widely speaking, isn’t that glamorous of a profession.” He described the questions others ask:

“...is social work a real profession?” ... people look down on social workers. They don’t think that that’s a real thing. In court, they don’t listen to their testimony, they don’t think its real, but that’s just how it was with Jesus.”

Obstacles as a path to new directions

Obstacles can detour the traveler in a direction that actually leads to God’s intention for the social work student. Consider this observation:

I wish I could say I was that trusting and that easy to influence on it, but one of the characteristics I have, and it usually has a negative connotation to it, but for me it's a good thing, is being stubborn. I am someone who's not very easy to move and be manipulated and I just don't, I tend to want to stay in the same spot because it's kind of, I don't like to move into the unknown very easily and so for me, it seems like it's one instance after another and I keep getting hit from different directions until I'm finally going, ok maybe this, maybe I'm being told something here. That includes some of the people that I know. I'm wanting to go on this path and I keep getting stumbling blocks that are really actually people who are kind of going, "you might want to consider doing this, you're fitted for this."

All of these social work students were seeking a path that would lead them to a place where they could ethically live into their vocation and their faith. The stories provide maps for travelers that aspire to the same destination. The pathway can be clearly marked with signs of confirmation and direction. We also have seen that, along the way, social work students who embrace Christian faith may encounter unanticipated obstacles that may disorient and even cause them to lose their way. Amazingly, the God who called them to the journey is also able to set their feet on the life-long path of service and Christian vocation. And, fortunately, Christian social workers do not ever have to walk alone.

Fellow travelers

Social workers know perhaps better than most that no one successfully journeys alone in this life. As you learn how to walk alongside the people you serve, you also may begin to wonder "Who will travel with me? Family, faculty, supervisors, student colleagues, God?" You may experience the presence of God calling in many ways; some direct and some indirect, but a part of God's calling is found in the voices of those who go with you on the journey.

Students in our program discussed their understanding of God's call through the influence of other people. We heard about direct and indirect influence of family members, co-workers, social workers, faculty, or others who helped students understand social work as an option for responding to God's call. Interpersonal relationships helped students discern God's call to the profession of social work and to know that there was someone on the journey with them. Here we highlight some of these relationships on the journey.

Who will guide my journey? God.

In trusting God's presence in our midst, we heard students describe the meaning of this for their journeys. One student said that God's "hand was there and just kept guiding me through." Another student offers, "the calling for me is just following what God wants me to do and where God is leading me to." And also, "With me, I feel like God really, strongly directed me towards this."

Who will go with me? Family and friends

The most common travelers alongside students were their family and friends. Sometimes these loved ones question the turns we make on the journey. Sometimes, they aren't sure how to support us along the way. Looking back on years of family strife, a student reflected on her family's role in her journey saying, "I don't know if my family necessarily, in a positive way, influenced my decision for social work." Yet, other students had different experiences as families ventured forth with them: "I knew that by choosing a profession where I would be helping people," said one student, "I would be understood by my family and they would support that decision because that's what I wanted to do." Another student also voiced the encouragement of family traveling with them, "I think that there is an experience where your family, they are helping me through a lot of this. That's one thing I feel very blessed with, is that they have been very supportive."

Who will go with me? Social workers such as faculty, classmates, and field supervisors

Significant relationships are influential in helping you make your way down the road into professional social work practice. There are many others who travel alongside you in the adventure of becoming a professional and social work education offers students unique and practical experiences in developing strength for the journey. Students spend a great deal of time with classmates, faculty, and field supervisors, who are a part of their journeys of discernment. They often recognize right away the importance of these relationships.

One new student described one of her attractions to the program: "I knew the faculty was very friendly and very interested in their students succeeding." Students commented on the relationships faculty intentionally developed with students on this journey. "I think it's pretty much invaluable," said one student, "At least if it's set up properly, because you can draw on the experience of your professors, who have years of experience in the field, as well as the experience of the people who are even writing the textbooks." Professors are described as mentors in students' lives as they walk alongside them, "they really push to a high standard, but they're also there to, not hold your hand, but support you, encourage you, and I just got a really strong sense of community, and support."

Faculty understood the importance of engaging with students. After a weekend of discussions about our own vocational journeys, faculty in our program wrote about the role they envisioned for themselves in walking alongside students: "My assessment is that sharing about our journeys and aspirations enabled us to see and appreciate the complexity and richness of the fabric of our collective relationship," offered one professor. Another added her reflections, "My renewed awareness of my own calling and what has contributed to living it out has made me more aware of the potential significance of every interaction I have with students. I find myself asking my advisees and other students more open-ended questions about their purpose and urging them to see their inner promptings and long-held dreams."

As students, you also have supervisors guiding you while you learn, preparing you for the road ahead: “I talk to my supervisor constantly about what is going on with this client,” said one person we interviewed. “She lets me do the work, but she is there for advice and consultation. This is uncharted territory for me, but I am learning so much.” Students express appreciation for the learning that comes in supervision. One offers, “It was tremendously helpful to me that my supervisor went out on an assessment with me. I was able to discuss advanced practice with her and it was really good to have her feedback from the assessment.” And another echoes the support on the journey of learning: “In the middle of the crises of moving the clients I was on the phone with my supervisor. I wasn’t sure what to do, and she talked me through it. But she also let me do it on my own, for which I am now thankful. It was a great experience.”

Who will go with me? Clients

In social work education, you will have opportunities to reflect upon and then practice traveling with your clients, whether you are in generalist practice, direct practice, or practice with larger systems, you will be asking how to accompany your clients and how they will accompany you on this journey.

Our students may be aware of where they have stumbled along the way, but they are not sure that the people they serve understand the challenges of their journeys. “Sometimes, it’s harder to meet people’s needs because sometimes you have to convince them they have needs, or they don’t realize they have needs,” said one interviewee. What this suggests is that students are learning the reciprocal nature of walking alongside others. They walk with clients in hopes of making a difference in their journeys. One student said, “If you can intervene and somehow help them realize that they are worth something and they have true potential, I feel like it changes so many things.” After a similar experience with a client, another student said, “That made me feel good because I didn’t force anything on him, I just lived right and tried to treat him like I treat anybody else.”

As students on the journey into the profession walk with clients, they want to help them, but we know they also learn to “have the clients be the expert of their experience,” as one student put it. In this, the clients also walk with students. They help students move further along the journey.

Integration of Christian faith and social work practice.

Now we have come to the heart of what we learned from our interviews. If you are reading this book you probably have some interest in exploring the integration of Christian faith and social work. Maybe you are faculty members, like us, who have thought about this for years. Maybe you are a student, who is exploring various aspects of what it means to travel this road. Social work students who embrace Christian faith seek a path leading to places where they can integrate professional values and ethics with their religious beliefs. The journey down this path usually creates a unique set of opportunities, challenges and blessings..

Opportunities:

For some students, Christian faith adds an extra measure of compassion to their work. This student articulated how faith integration may allow the worker to understand the client more completely.

My faith shapes who I am—kind of like my thought processes.... as I'm in social work, I'm learning to evaluate situations and just know who I am and what my beliefs are, but then to see that person for who they are and to work with them in where they're at. So..... I think how I approach situations may be different. I may be a little more compassionate than somebody else would be.

Another student explored a similar theme, acknowledging that her own Christian values are a lens through which she sees the world, but this lens does not prevent her from valuing the different perspectives of her clients.

I'm at peace, I guess, as far as, I'm able to discuss with clients about their own views and their own wants and desires for whom--for who they are. Without imposing my own values. Because I realize that my values are, maybe, different from theirs. But that doesn't mean that I cannot help that person.

Perhaps most significantly, a number of students reported the important interplay between their faith and their professional identity and practice. This student described this as “accountability”:

Another great blessing I have had is that it [social work] has made me,--it has held me accountable to my faith. But it has made me more genuine in my faith. It has really made me examine what it means to be a Christian—what it means to minister. The word ministry to me just means doing good social work.....The profession has held me more accountable to my faith, and my faith has held me more accountable to my profession.

Challenges and Dilemmas For some of the students we interviewed, the potential dissonance between faith and practice created significant, but not overwhelming concerns along the way. For one student this blend was a “dangerous” idea:

“I think that calling and social work sometimes can be dangerous words to associate together for the social work profession because you don't want to minimize the professionalism of social work. And by classifying social work as a ministry, is very dangerous. I think that it does take out the element of professionalism that's there. But at the same time-- and I am still, I am definitely in the learning process of this - you need to know how to effectively balance faith and practice, because you are never going to be just a social worker....I am going to be going somewhere as a Christian, with the title social worker. And I think that's a wonderful and such an amazing blessing

to have that opportunity, but it can be very dangerous because you are representing two amazing things. . . . And I think that's why so many people are so afraid of having faith in practice, and those two words together are like an oxymoron to so many people. I think it's sad, but I think there is a delicate balance there.

Other interviewees, preparing for ministry roles, echoed the potential dissonance between the role of social worker and the role of minister.

"I like the fact that in social work, you know -- there are certain things you can do that you can't seem to do in ministry. And there's the other catch where there are certain things you can't do in social work that you can in ministry. For example, with a pastor, they can openly go in and say, this is what I believe and all of this. In social work, it's not really -- that's kind of frowned upon."

Students admitted that learning to do this integration was a process; one that sometimes involved some "hard knocks." One student, who described the process of integration as "a little confusing," told us about a learning experience.

For the most part, it's just a hard issue. You take it case by case. I had a hard experience this past semester in my agency where I did an intake and I asked my client if she ever prayed and it helped our conversation and I didn't regret doing it but my supervisor and I had to talk a long time about why that would have been a bad idea and it was hard. In the end I really saw where he was coming from. I just want to know what is best for the client. I just want to be led by the Holy Spirit and not necessarily by the [NASW] Code of Ethics. It's just really hard for me, but I am learning a lot and I am open to learning a lot more."

Some students reported that trying to reconcile the values of the social work profession with Christian values presented a major obstacle for them. One felt frustrated stating "I don't know that I have been able to integrate it [faith and social work] to the point that I feel that it works; I feel really torn." Another student described in more detail:

"I think that there are major conflicts with how I was raised and the element of faith in my life. And that was something I struggled with a lot in undergrad is kind of taking on my parents' values and the things that I learned in the church, you know things that I was supposed to do and how I was supposed to act, and my expectations on life, and what I needed to do I felt like conflict greatly with social work, and that troubled me."

These are the dilemmas that students mention as they embark on a journey that fully embraces the authentic integration of social work and Christian faith. While the struggles are significant and formative, there are also encounters with blessings and opportunities that mark the journey.

Blessings. In spite of encountering challenges, the students we interviewed reported a wide array of blessings and opportunities associated with the blending of Christian faith and professional identity. At a deeply personal level, students indicated that their intentional efforts at integration resulted in “the feeling of inner harmony”, “freedom and flexibility”, and helping “me realize more of who I am and making me understand... what I want to do.” Sometimes the reward is a feeling of comfort and joy as reflected in this statement: “I prayed about it, and I feel great about it.”

One frequently mentioned outcome of the intentional integration of faith and practice was that faith was strengthened in the process. For example, “my social work education has shaped my faith and has made me-- its kind of really helped me be a better Christian.” These words echoed this same conclusion—“it [social work] has made me more genuine in my faith.” This kind of integration may also have the power to change important assumptions. One student described herself as “a Christian wearing the hat of a social worker,” with training that “is going to be shaping how I speak to people, even though it [professional education] may not have changed everything how I feel, but it has changed how I think.”

The process of blending faith and practice seemed to have beneficial consequences for interactions with clients. Consider this observation—“I think that’s my biggest thing that I’ve enjoyed ...it’s what pulled me into it is being able to identify a need and to be aware of needs more than probably the average person is. One student counted among her blessings: “I have gotten to work with people who I never would have ever talked to or met...” While there may be dilemmas and challenges related to an intentional quest to integrate Christian faith and social work practice, you may also find blessings and opportunities to discover and claim along the way. Whatever you encounter, please know that you do not have to travel alone. Christians have expressed this idea in the worship hymn “The Servant Song”

*We are travelers on a journey,
Fellow Pilgrims on the road
We are here to help each other
Walk the mile and bear the load*

Don’t Travel Alone

Engaging the dilemmas and claiming the blessings becomes more possible if you will allow others to travel alongside of you. Perhaps you may find mentors who are willing to walk with you and share the benefit of their own experiences on this journey. Find a Christian social worker or faculty member who cares about you and the integration of faith and practice. Form meaningful and trusting relationships with other social work students who are motivated by their Christian faith. Consider joining the North American Association of Christians in Social Work (NACSW) and take advantage of the opportunity to collaborate with a community of Christians in social work and to discover

resources that are available to help you as you celebrate and struggle with the integration of faith and practice.

It Really Is All About the Journey

The scripture is replete with journey metaphors that help us understand that our relationship with God and our response to God's call is about the day to day living out of our faith rather than rushing headlong toward a destination. Moses, called to deliver the people, died after a life of leadership with the discovery that his ministry was about the journey, not about the destination. Saul was out looking for donkeys when Samuel found him and communicated God's call for leadership. David was tending sheep when God called him to lead an army and eventually a nation. Jesus' ministry occurred from village to village as he traveled, preached, healed, and loved. He called to his disciples (who were not sure where he would take them), "Come follow me." He invited them to participate with him in ministry rather than to arrive at a particular destination.

We know from the life and ministry of Jesus that the journey is not always easy or without challenges. The words of our students confirmed that in spite of challenges, they found strength to continue, by faith, as followers of Jesus, to travel with him as he equips us and leads us to the hungry, the poor, the broken in body and spirit, the dying, the rejected and lonely, the least of these. Let us journey on together, bound by the call to be fellow travelers with the one who taught us best about the ministry of presence.

We end our chapter with a prayer offered up for social workers by our dean Dr. Diana Garland, long-time NACSW member and former president. It is our intercession on behalf of you who are joining us on the journey.

We are grateful, Lord God, that when you call us on this journey,
You don't call us to walk it alone.
We thank you for one another to share the journey,
To comfort and en-courage one another.
Hold us together, Lord; hold our hands and steady us on the way.
Show us just the next steps to take—
We don't need to see all the way, for we trust the destination to you.
Give us courage to go, step by step, with one another and with you.

REFERENCE

Singletary, J., Harris, H., Myers, D., and Scales, L (Spring 2006). Student Narratives on Social Work as a Calling. *Aretē*.30(1) 188-199.

NOTE

1. This and all other quotes are from interviews conducted in 2004-2005 with Baylor University students and alumni. To protect their anonymity, names will not be cited