

# Brian Ouellette: Canadian Pioneer Teacher on Spirituality in Social Work



By Christine Lwanga  
[xinelwanga@sasktel.net](mailto:xinelwanga@sasktel.net)

Ph.D. Student  
Faculty of Social Work,  
University of Manitoba, MB.

Presented at the Fifth North American  
Conference on Spirituality and Social  
Work held from June 17 – 19, 2010, in  
Calgary, Alberta at the University of  
Calgary



## **Abstract:**

Brian Ouellette practiced social work for exactly 30 years, 10 years as a mental health clinician followed by 20 years as a university professor, during which he was recognized as an exemplary clinician, teacher, mentor, and leader; and, for his contagious joy! This paper focuses on Ouellette's role in the re-emergence of *spirituality* in professional social work training and practice in Canada. Among other achievements, this paper highlights Ouellette's contribution to Social Work and *Spirituality* in three areas: the development of course content; demonstration of the connection between social work values and *spirituality*; and the practical teaching and practice methodology. Brian Ouellette is recognized as a pioneer social worker whose course content, skills and teaching methodology was studied and demonstrated as effective; highlighted herein as a practical model for incorporating spirituality in social work training in response to the increasingly diverse and complex social problems in times of the scare economic reality. Ouellette's contribution is considered foundational in the development of the Social Work profession at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **Biography:**

- Christine Lwanga is a first year Ph.D. Student in Social Work at the University of Manitoba. She also works as a Counselor, Human Rights and Community Development consultant based in Regina, Saskatchewan

# Background & Outline:



- Who is Brian Ouellette
- BO's philosophy on Spirituality & Social Work
- Social Work and Spirituality – BO's course content
- BO's disposition / methodology in teaching and key concepts
- BO's supporters in the spiritual journey
- The Legacy and Conclusion

# Who is Brian Ouellette



- Brian Ouellette practiced social work for exactly 30 years, 10 years as a mental healthy clinician followed by 20 years as a university professor, during which he was recognized as an exemplary clinician, teacher, mentor, and leader; and, for his contagious joy! Awards and recognitions....
- From 1994- 2004 he taught a course he had developed on SW & Spirituality at the School of Social Work, at St Thomas University, Fredericton - taught many other courses – this one stood out.
- BO's education

# BO's philosophy on Spirituality & Social Work



- BO grew-up in a Roman Catholic family, church and community; mother's death –early awareness of his spirituality- had deep faith
- **BO's disposition and personality ..**
- BO's Philosophy on Spirituality and SW
  - Liberal framework / multiple perspectives of spirituality;
  - The position of religion as a double edged sword
  - Transcendent
  - Transformational

# Social Work & Spirituality – BO's Course Content



- Historical & contemporary review of SW and spirituality including the influence of religious beliefs
- Diverse conceptual framework of spirituality
- Individual exploration of diverse Religions including Native Spirituality – functions and dysfunctions
- Exploration of spiritual development stages including students' personal reflections on their own spiritual development and how it impacts on their professional life
- Tools for integrating spirituality into Social Work
- Etc.

# BO's Methodology in teaching Social Work and Spirituality



- allowed “to explore different religions in a non-judgmental way, and to overcome biases;
- helped them to become open minded and over come misinformation, learn how to avoid indoctrinating others, and overcome judgmental views about other religions
- He was not ashamed to convey his beliefs and respectively allowed others to share theirs. He recognized that people do not have to hold the same belief, the key is to have meaning to life, he never attempted to convince others to change to his beliefs; the goal was not to have people develop the same faith or worldview..
- Recognized that SW values are closely connected to Spirituality taught them through course subject and content

# BO's close supporters in his Spiritual Journey



- Brian's mother, grandfather, father, brother ..a host of institutions , wife and family.. BO thrived in community
- Attended SSSW conferences / workshops ...hosted by Dr. Ed Canda at Kansas University
- Co-founded CSSSW – with Dr. John Coates; Dr. John Graham and Dr. R. Swartzentruber
- The students and Faculty of SW...community



# The Legacy and Conclusion



- BO work in SW and Spirituality recognized as foundational in the development of professional in light of the overwhelming complexity and increasing individual problems/ challenge, social decline and dwindling resources/ hard economic time
- **BO's disposition and approach to teaching Spirituality & SW** – with potential to transform the lives and skills of social work students, and to support the establishment of social work values in their lives and lives of their clients, families and society -- through the transformational process of *spirituality*- ***“Brian Ouellette’s Model on Teaching Spirituality and SW”***

# Legacy ...



- BO's Annual lectures at St Thomas University; Continuing annual conferences; played a key role in setting up the first joint Conferences (2006); increasing special programs and lectures at various universities- School of SW U of Calgary; Critical Social Work Journal – U of Windsor- etc.
- Played a role in -increasing recognition of the need to teach *spirituality* in social work- based on Sloan (2007) the Council for Social Work Education has already mandated teaching Spirituality as a course in social work schools in the United States..? (Audience)

# BO's concerns



- Despair a lot more needed to be done in Canada ...
- Classes have been mainly voluntary
- Reluctance to teach Spirituality resides with both the secular and religious based Schools of Social Work/ Universities