

Spiritual Identity and Transformation
**Third Annual Canadian Conference
on Spirituality and Social Work**

June 1-3, 2004
University of Manitoba, Winnipeg

Abstracts of Presentations & Workshops

Wednesday, June 2, 2004 9:00 AM – 10:30 AM

“Social Work and Spirituality: WHY NOT?”

Eveline Milliken, PhD candidate, University of Manitoba, MB
N. Lee Prouten, BSW, University of Manitoba, MB

The ecological model that is a foundational theory of the social work curriculum at the University of Manitoba promotes a holistic approach to practice. What is taught in the classroom tends to differ, however, as discussions and foci are on the emotional, physical and intellectual aspects of people in their environments. The issue of spirituality, if addressed at all, is only done in a tangential way. Social Workers, who deal with a clientele that derives from diverse cultures, need opportunities to explore spirituality in its many extremely personal manifestations. For these reasons, the writers believe there is a need for an exploration of spirituality as it applies to social work practice and policy making. Students have been asking for a course on spirituality. The presenters will share results of focus group research that gained the views of students on this subject. Presentation invites feedback from participant about their experience with this dilemma.

“Two Years On: Our Spirituality and Our Practice”

Rosemary Clews, PhD, St. Thomas University, NB
Terri Girouard, BSW, Family and Community Services, NB
Joe Anne Hunter, BSW, Community Mental Health, NB

In this paper followed by a discussion, three social workers will share their challenges in forging congruence between their spirituality and their day-to-day practice during their first two years in new positions. Each of the presenters assumed new occupational roles in 2002. Two graduated from a BSW programme and became field social workers while the third moved from a role as a social work educator to become a university administrator. After providing their definition of spirituality, the presenters will explore nine concepts that are central to their spirituality and their practice: beginning, pain/grief, connecting, overload, forgiveness, humanity, meditation/reflection, hope, and ending. During this presentation they will draw from literature rooted in different spiritual traditions, social work ethics, and existential philosophy and psychology. They will illustrate their paper with brief narratives and vignettes from their practice.

“Islamic Spiritual Identity and Social Work”

Abdullahi Barise, PhD,
Zayed University, United Arab Emirates

Islam is Canada's fastest-growing religion, and Muslims are arguably Canada's second-largest religious group. Yet, very little is known about how Islamic spirituality might inform social work with Canadians with Islamic identity. Professional social work, as it is known in Canada, is new to the Canadian Muslim community. For centuries, Muslims used their indigenous methods to facilitate transformation and solve social problems. However, due to the increasing social impact of the rapid and profound changes brought about by the process of adaptation into the Canadian context, the need for systematic approaches to social work informed by Islamic

spirituality is being increasingly recognized. The purpose of this paper is to discuss ways in which Islamic spirituality might inform social work with Canadians with Islamic identity. Specifically, this paper consists of three main sections. In the first section, the socio-cultural context of the Canadian Muslim community will be described briefly. In the second section, fundamentals of Islamic worldview relevant to social work will be explained. In the last section, an original Islamic social work practice model will be proposed for the first time. Special attention will be given to the relationship between Islamic spirituality and anti-discriminatory social work throughout the paper.

“Islam and Social Services in Canada: Emerging Themes”

John R. Graham, PhD, University of Calgary, AB

Social work is only beginning to adapt knowledge and practice to the realities of a culturally diverse world. Within the social services, one of the most exciting multicultural initiatives is a localization movement that calls for a social work knowledge base that is fundamentally different one culture to the other. The present study is the first to consider Islam as a basis for localizing social work knowledge to the Canadian communities in which the profession may function. Based on research funded by the SSHRC and interview data with 20 practitioners in Calgary, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Ottawa, Toronto, and Montreal, the paper explores informants' views on what aspects of Muslim culture are not parts of the current social work knowledge base, what parts are, and how practitioners and communities make these distinctions. Findings can help gauge how much give and take there exists between current social work knowledge on the one hand, and Islam on the other; how and whether localized social work knowledge in Islamic contexts may be different, one person to the next;. Also, what are the common grounds and differences.

“Indigenous Spiritualities, Healing and Social Work Practice”

Michael Hart, PhD (candidate), University of Manitoba, MB

Spirituality is central to many traditional Indigenous worldviews. When Indigenous spiritual practices were misconstrued and oppressed because of their “savage nature,” the healing, helping and supporting aspect of our spiritual practices were also pushed underground. It is only recently that these practices have begun to emerge in a more open way. Despite this emergence, social work, as an Amer-European working concept, continues to miss many opportunities to build its relevancy to Indigenous peoples by not incorporating the understandings behind, and the practices of, Indigenous healing, helping, and supporting ways. To try to offset these missed opportunities, I have made one small step of acknowledging the need to incorporate Indigenous peoples' spiritualities in social work through the development of an Aboriginal approach to helping. My presentation will focus on Indigenous spirituality in relation to healing, helping, and supporting, as a key component to this particular Aboriginal approach. The process of how this approach was developed, and the present state of this process will be outlined. Through this outline, a connection between Indigenous spiritualities, healing, and social work practice will be made visible.

“Picking Up What Was Left By the Trail: The Spirit of Aboriginal Social Work Education”

Gord Bruyere, MSW, Nicola Valley Institute of Technology, BC

What makes social work education at an Aboriginal institute different than mainstream institutions? What is it that Aboriginal students seek when they attend an Aboriginal social work program? What are some of the tensions that exist between the non-Aboriginal theories and practices and re-emerging Aboriginal teachings that students explore at an Aboriginal institution? How does Aboriginal social work education connect to the spiritual renewal of Aboriginal communities in a decolonizing Canada? “Picking up what was left by the trail” is a metaphor that comes from the Anishnabe teaching of the Seven Fires and connotes the challenges living within these questions. This presentation will discuss these questions and challenges from the experience of one Aboriginal social work educator in light of his understanding of the Seven Fires teaching.

“Journey to Wholeness Through Forgiveness” WORKSHOP

Eric W. Crowther, MSW, Child and Family Therapist, ON

This workshop combines didactic and experiential elements. First, the concept of forgiveness is described through examination of

- the Hebrew and Christian conceptions of forgiveness as revealed in ancient writings
- the work of the philosopher and spiritual leader Jean Vanier
- the psychological model of forgiveness developed by Robert Enright and his colleagues.

Participants are then led through a series of exercises that help them reflect on what forgiveness means to them, the process of forgiveness, and the place that it occupies in our personal lives. The place of forgiveness as a therapeutic goal in counseling is then discussed.

“Seeking the Lost Spirit: Understanding Spirituality and Restoring it to the Workplace”

Rick Csiernik, PhD, Kings College, University of Western Ontario, ON

David Adams, MSW, RSW, CDE, CT, Professor Emeritus, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioural Neurosciences, McMaster University, ON

COMMENTATOR: John Coates

In occupational social work, practitioners are regularly confronted with the behaviours of people and systems that may challenge, excite, or demoralize. Within the context of a business and productivity minded organizational culture, human values, caring, and spiritual dimensions of the workplace may be readily overshadowed and temporarily or permanently lost. This presentation explores where spirituality fits into the contemporary workplace, its role in respect to the workplace challenges we encounter there, and its potential in helping us deal with the suffering created by dysfunctional and demoralizing work environments. The presenters suggest how organizations can restore spiritual health and wellness to the workplace and positively impact upon the spiritual health and wellness of employees using Percy's model of shuddering as a foundation. This importance of spirituality in the workplace is further highlighted through the review of a study of 154 helping professionals from seven different work environments employing five different measures to examine the impact of stress on spirituality and of spirituality on ameliorating workplace stress.