



# CSSSW NEWSLETTER

*The Canadian Society for Spirituality and Social Work - Spring 2023*

*And the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.*

— *Anaïs Nin*



## Welcome Spring!

Good day, CSSSW members. In this spring newsletter, you will find teasers of presentations in the upcoming Spirit 2023 conference at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, other events, a recorded meditation, and more!

## Conference News

Great news! Registration is now open for the **10th Annual International Conference on Spirituality and Social Work** to be held in Halifax, Nova Scotia from June 21–24, 2023.

This year's theme is "The Spirit in Social Work: Toward Ecospirituality, Holistic, and Sustainable Social Work Practice". The conference is being hosted at Dalhousie University and co-sponsored by the Dalhousie School of Social Work and the Society for Spirituality and Social Work (USA).

### *What's in this newsletter:*

#### CONFERENCE NEWS

- REGISTRATION IS NOW OPEN!

#### SPRING MEDITATION

#### DECOLONIZATION, SOCIAL WORK, AND SPIRITUALITY CONVERSATIONAL GROUP

- MEET THE FACILITATOR

#### CONFERENCE SUBMISSIONS SNEAK PEEKS

#### CSSSW VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

- SOCIAL MEDIA HELP NEEDED!

#### INTERSECTIONS OF SPIRITUALITY, SOCIAL JUSTICE, AND CLIMATE CHANGE

- WATCH THE RECORDING

## Spring Meditation

As the northern hemisphere tilts toward the sun, daylight hours increase and the sun sets later, with warmer temperatures. Spring is a time of transition, awakening, and growth, of birth and rebirth, and new beginnings.

Open your doors and windows, release the negative and stagnant energies, and let in fresh energy and air. Spring is a perfect time to clear out clutter, and to release the old, and perhaps, limiting beliefs and relationships that no longer serve your highest self, your growth, and your transcendence.

Spring is a time for re-creation, re-invention, and co-creation. Set new intentions, plant seeds in your garden of dreams for new initiatives, and discern what it is that you truly want to blossom. Focus on what needs nurturing to achieve your desires and how you can build your pathway forward over the next few months.

This is a chance to awaken and grow in harmony with everything around you. Open your heart to the process of regeneration and creation. Allow the energy of these thoughts to fill every part of your heart. Breathe in the possibility; now allow this energy to expand. Feel your spirit coming alive with hopeful and excited energy.

**Read** or **listen** to the full guided spring meditation, composed by Dr. Heather Boynton, CSSSW Vice President.

## Understanding Social Work Leadership in Canada Project

**Understanding Social Work Leadership in Canada** (USWLC) is a research project at McMaster University exploring historical and contemporary understanding of leadership with the profession.

This project has digitized and curated oral histories from the **CASW Oral History Project**, which was undertaken in 1983/84, and plans are to complete an additional 50 oral histories in order to create a contemporary library of social leadership stories from across Canada. These stories will be analyzed and used to create a model for social work leadership education and training, and help to preserve the history of social work in Canada.

Additionally, the project is seeking **nominations** of social workers who have distinguished themselves during their careers, are over the age of 65, and retired or retiring in the next 12 months.

The deadline for the second round of nominations is June 30, 2023.

The USWLC project has been approved by the McMaster Research Ethics Board. Questions or concerns can be directed to Dr. Tara La Rose, Associate Professor, at **larost1@mcmaster.ca** or John Blyskis, USWLC Research Assistant, at **blyskija@mcmaster.ca**.

## Members Welcome!

Do you know someone interested in becoming a CSSSW member?

Invite them to **join us** – it is still free!



# CSSSW Decolonization, Social Work, and Spirituality Conversational Group

The first meeting of the CSSSW Decolonization, Social Work, and Spirituality Conversational Group happened over Zoom on Thursday, February 16, at 7:00 PM EST. It was lovely to connect and begin sharing the why behind the importance of having such space for open dialogue on the topic of decolonization in social work, including at the intersections of social work and spirituality. We would like to continue to make and hold space for these conversations.

As host, Kim Sedore hopes to nurture a space that is warm, inviting, and respectful. She also hopes to engage and inspire through attention to relationships with colonialism and decolonization, from individual positions and locations.

This conversational group is open to all undergraduate and graduate students, practitioners, advocates, and faculty. To express interest in joining the group, please contact the CSSSW at [info@spiritualityandsocialwork.com](mailto:info@spiritualityandsocialwork.com).

## About Kim Sedore

Kim Sedore (she/they) is a queer-identified settler living in T'karonto, Williams Treaties (1923) territory. She is a registered social worker who works in private practice and with a multi-disciplinary family health team in the downtown core. Her interest in spirituality and faith stems from her childhood. In both her undergraduate and graduate studies, she focused on philosophy and comparative religion. Her research interests include identity in seasonal communities, north-south relations and colonialism in Canada, the perception and experience of ritual in secular settings, and quest/retreat patterns in eco-tourism. As a mental health practitioner, Kim is acutely aware of the importance of belonging and values reciprocity in care and well-being. Decolonialism is a life-long journey for Kim, through healing, learning, unlearning, and re-connection.

## CSSSW Volunteer Opportunities

We are seeking volunteers to join our social media committee! Please use the [CSSSW Social Media Volunteer Form](#) to sign up.

*I sit before flowers hoping  
they will train me in the art  
of opening up.  
— Shane Koyczan*



# Conference Submissions Sneak Peeks

Curious about everything you can learn at the **10th Annual International Conference on Spirituality and Social Work**? Here are some teasers to whet your appetite!

## Exploring Social Workers Spiritual Meaning Reconstruction Processes After the Unanticipated Death of a Client

*Stefani Kolochuk and Dr. Indrani Margolin*

Kolochuk and Dr. Margolin's interpretive qualitative inquiry explores the spiritual meaning reconstruction processes of social workers after the unanticipated death of a client. Identifying existing social networks and using snowball sampling, ten social workers in British Columbia were recruited for this research. From a socially constructed and spiritual perspective, the researchers examine this process in collaboration with the ten participants. Through semi-structured interviews, the social work participants provided deep and rich personal stories reflecting on the experience of having a client unexpectedly die. Through a process of thematic analysis, four main themes and subthemes emerged from the data. Results revealed social workers often experience multiple client deaths that can be traumatic and have long-lasting impacts, and that making sense of this experience is generally complex, unique to each individual, and may be tied to systemic issues. Further, the results demonstrated participants' use of spirituality in the workplace, importance of personal spirituality, formal and informal supports in the workplace, and gaps in mental health support for social workers.

## Contemplating God's Grandeur: An Introduction to Biblical Meditation

*Eric W. Crowther*

Through "The Grandeur of God" workshop, Crowther invites individuals to an hour-and-a-half of quiet contemplation and celebration of nature through the long-lost art of Biblical Meditation. We all have had the sense of losing control – a loss of agency – during the pandemic. This experiential workshop will help participants regain their sense of agency and of peace through the contemplation of nature as "The world is charged with the grandeur of God". Participants will be introduced to and guided through a particular type of Christian meditation – Biblical Meditation – that involves the digesting of the 'word of Christ'. As the pastor and theologian Eugene Peterson (2006, p. 15) states: The Christian Scriptures are the primary text for Christian spirituality. Christian spirituality is, in its entirety, rooted in and shaped by scriptural text. We don't form our personal spiritual lives out of a random assemblage of favorite texts in combination with individual circumstances; we are formed by the Holy Spirit following the text of Holy Scripture. God does not put us in charge of forming our personal spiritualities; we grow in accordance with the revealed Word implanted in us by the Spirit. Participants will be asked to choose one of two biblical passages (Matthew 6: 26–27, Luke 12:27) to meditate on, "consider" their chosen passage through thoughtful reflection, and then move into "soliloquy" (talking to oneself in God's presence) (Baxter, 1649; Parker, 2006).

Be sure to follow us on **social media** for conference updates!





## Exploring the Role of Spirituality in Addressing Environmental Injustices: Teachings of the Indigenous Healers in the Philippines

*Dr. Rose Ann Torres*

The history of the social work profession focuses on the “logics of conquest, extraction, apprehension, management, and pacification”. How do we then address environmental injustices as social workers? How do we prevent environmental degradation while simultaneously tackling social injustices and the implication of the social work profession into these injustices? To address these questions, Torres was reminded of what she learned from Indigenous women healers in the Philippines. Through their teachings, one learns that what is done to others in turn will affect yourself and the environment, and therefore, it is important to look at the connection between humans and the environment. Further, it is imperative to be mindful that environmental and social injustices cannot be separated. Drawing from this study, Torres will provide a way of addressing environmental injustices, while reflecting on the epistemological and ontological spiritual practices of the Indigenous healers. Torres will discuss the intersectionality of anti-colonial, post-colonial, Indigenous feminist frameworks to help understand how Indigenous healers in the Philippines use spirituality in countering environmental injustices.

## Social Work for Land Back: Environmental Social Work, Decolonization, Reconciliation, and Indigenous Self-Determination

*Dani Sherwood*

Sherwood’s Master of Social Work thesis resulted in a research presentation exploring the following question: How can social workers in Canada interested in sustainability and the environment come to understand the repatriation of Indigenous lands as the most rational environmental policy for the climate crisis through social work education and practice? The project entails a sharing circle and semi-structured in-depth interviews with social work students, university educators, scholars, or practitioners based in Canada, who are focused on decolonizing social work’s efforts to engage in sustainable social work practices and mitigate climate change. The presentation explores the purpose of the project, reflections on the sharing circle, an analysis and discussion of the interviews, and aims to highlight the purpose and power of spirit, and how spirit can be embraced through research. Also included will be the student-author’s personal anecdotes woven throughout in relation to the inception, processes, and lasting impact of the project.

*An optimist is the human personification of spring.*  
— *Susan J. Bissonette*







## Intentional Community Living as an Education Model for Eco-Spiritual Training in Social Work

*Maureen Smith and Dean Nicolson*

Smith and Nicolson's presentation offers a model for social work training that highlights eco-spiritual practices to counter the current and rapidly expanding crises in ecology and human health. Utilizing the earth and holistic living as a platform for profound transformation, the Clear Sky Meditation and Retreat Center in rural British Columbia offers a viable alternative to the capitalist-consumer culture and the associated views based in greed and fear. Alongside and supporting other like-minded organizations and communities, Clear Sky supports and maximizes relationships with others, increasing connection, resilience, and adaptability. Clear Sky Center is an intentional spiritual community founded on a quadruple bottom line of being environmentally, socially, spiritually, and financially generative. Based on a Vajrayana Buddhist practice infused with Western wisdom and traditions, Clear Sky Center intertwines modern psychological and scientific understanding to provide support and service to others. Clear Sky offers a three-month intensive program which includes in-depth learning and practice of meditation, mindfulness, environmental awareness, communication, psychology, financial acumen, social, sexual, and racial diversity, and service beyond ego-based preference mind. The goal is to develop participants to their highest potential, which in spiritual traditions has been known as "awakening". Individuals within the program develop a deeper understanding of the necessity and application of incorporating climate health, spirituality, and social justice into their daily living and social interactions.

*The heart is like a garden. It can grow  
compassion or fear, resentment or love.*

*What seeds will you plant there?*

*— Jack Kornfield*





## Teaching Spiritually and Ecologically Sensitive Social Work: A Post-Master's Program Model

*Dr. Anthony Nicotera and Dr. Ed Canda*

Drs. Nicotera and Canda will provide an overview of the texts and tools used in their program (Canda, 2020; Dudley, 2016; Jaffe et al., 2020), and invite participants to engage in exercises and lessons they share with students. Participants will then engage in critical reflection about Drs. Nicotera and Canda's program structure and approach; participants will be invited to consider and create their own approach for teaching spiritually sensitive social work, inviting mutual learning and insight. The hope is that together presenters and participants will create new knowledge as they discern how to most ethically, effectively, and justly teach spiritually sensitive social work.

## Spirit and Self: A Holistic Approach to Afro-Caribbean Canadian Youth Mental Health Care

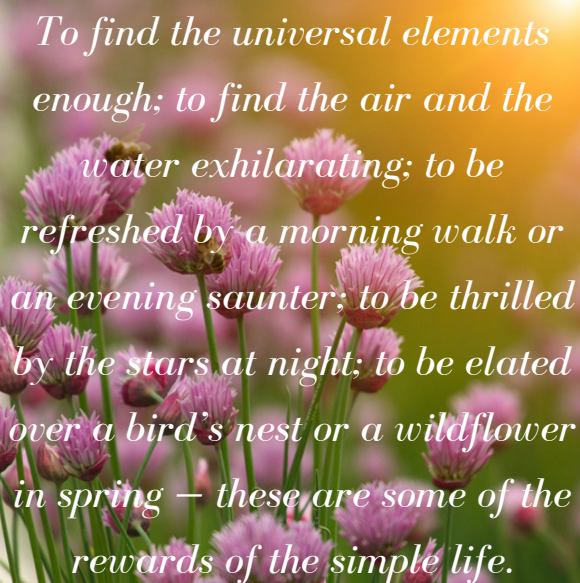
*Fiona Edwards-Akunesiobike*

There is a paucity of research examining the impact of spirituality and religiosity on the mental health experiences of children and youth. This is very limited for Black youth, especially those from the Afro-Caribbean background. Based on studies from Canada and the United States, Black youth encounter several challenges including anti-Black racism within established institutions that result in negative mental health outcomes. This paper will present data from a youth-centered phenomenological study with Afro-Caribbean Canadian youth between the ages of 16-18 in Canada. Sharing the perspectives of these youth, their parents, and faith-based leaders, this paper will address the ways in which spirituality and religiosity shape the mental health experiences of these youth. Recommendations for the use of spirituality and religious activities with Afro-Caribbean Canadian youth in clinical practice will be discussed, as well as the role the profession of social work can take to meet their needs.

## Exploring Wisakacihowin (Trauma) and Trauma-Informed Practices

*Amber Dion and Terri Cardinal*

This session will explore the connection of spirit to trauma-informed practices within the experiences of Indigenous peoples. The presenters discuss trauma-informed work, what it means to be trauma informed, and what it can look like in the lives of Indigenous peoples. This session creates space to explore wisakacihowin from an Indigenous lens that will honor Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. The dialogue creates opportunities to learn through stories and build on bundles to move through processes.



*To find the universal elements  
enough; to find the air and the  
water exhilarating; to be  
refreshed by a morning walk or  
an evening saunter; to be thrilled  
by the stars at night; to be elated  
over a bird's nest or a wildflower  
in spring — these are some of the  
rewards of the simple life.*

*— John Burroughs*

## RESEARCH CORNER

Have you recently published or read any current and relevant literature in the realm of spirituality and social work? Here, we feature recent articles (peer-reviewed or grey literature) of potential interest to CSSSW members. Please share with us using our [CSSSW Newsletter Submission Form](#)! Submissions for our summer quarterly newsletter are due May 31.

## Intersections of Spirituality, Social Justice, and Climate Change

Harvard Divinity School hosted a [reflection and panel discussion](#) on how and where spirituality, social justice, and climate change come together and intersect within faith traditions. As it relates to the upcoming Spirit 2023 conference and the effects of climate change continue to be rampant globally, it is crucial for this discussion to remain at the forefront of social work.

## WE ARE ON SOCIAL MEDIA!

Feel free to follow us on whichever social media sites you use and please invite your friends to do the same!



[facebook.com/CSSSW](https://facebook.com/CSSSW)



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## COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

Emma De Vynck and Heather Boynton were part of a meet-the-author series through the Transforming Field Education and Learning Project, and discussed their chapter, “[Supporting spiritual competencies in field education and practice](#)”, in the book *Transforming Social Work Field Education: New Insights from Practice Research and Scholarship*.

Do you know a practitioner, educator, or scholar doing interesting and innovative work and/or who can offer insight into the realm of spirituality and social work? For each quarterly newsletter, we aim to feature a community member doing great things in the profession of social work. Fill out our [CSSSW Community Spotlight Form](#) with a short write-up of the individual you are nominating, including their educational credentials, location, and their consent, and we will consider featuring them here in a future newsletter.

Let’s get to know each other!

### CSSSW Leadership Team

Cassandra Hanrahan (President)  
Heather M. Boynton (Vice President)  
John Coates (Co-founder, Treasurer, & Past President)  
Delaney Stewardson (Communications Coordinator)

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For more details regarding our team members, including our biographies, please visit the [governance section](#) of our website, which continues to be updated.