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**“UNTO THE LEAST OF THESE”:
SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION’S CONTRIBUTION TO
SOCIAL MINISTRY IN THE ADVENTIST CHURCH**

By
René D. Drum

**673-09 Institute for Christian Teaching
12501 Old Columbia Pike
Silver Spring, MD 20904 USA**

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“Unto the Least of These”:**Social Work Education’s Contribution to Social Ministry in the Adventist Church*****A Biblical Mandate for Human Service***

Perhaps the most important Biblical text delineating Adventist social workers’ passion for our faith and profession centers in Matthew 25. This passage offers a command, a bottom line of expectation, if one is to be considered fit for the 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 of the nations will be gathered before Him and He will separate them one from another as the shepherd divides the sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on the 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...

Insomuch as you have done it unto the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me.” (Matthew 25:31-36, 40)

While some academic disciplines may struggle with finding a Biblical mandate for their reasons for 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. Embracing a global perspective, the social work profession strives to eliminate poverty, discrimination, and oppression” (CSWE, 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 their purposes.

Besides meeting Jesus' mandate to serve, how do Biblical principles fit with professional social work values? According to the National Association of Social Work's code of ethics, 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, 2008). The table below offers a few examples of Bible texts that support social work values.

The value of service is reinforced by the commission of Matthew 25, "unto the least of these" and the story of the Good Samaritan. In looking at social work's commitment to social justice, Micah 6:7-9 focuses on what the Lord requires of us which includes "doing justly." Isaiah 58 outlines the type of "fast" the Lord requires, such as undoing heavy burdens and letting the oppressed go free. Poe (2007), a Christian social work educator, posits that the concept of social justice is foundational to both Christianity and social work.

Isaiah 49 offers the analogy of a woman with a nursing baby representing the tender regard that the Father has for human beings, thus highlighting the dignity and worth of the person. Jesus pointed out the worth of the person in Matthew 10 through acknowledging His tender regard to even the sparrows and asks, "Are you not worth more than many sparrows?" There is a good fit between social work values and Biblical principles.

In Matthew 5, embedded in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus' commands His hearers to do whatever is necessary to make your human relationships right. Only then will God-worship be acceptable. Of the two greatest commandments, one is, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31). This verse implies that honoring other human beings is one of our greatest obligations.

The integrity and competence of the worker is illustrated by the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:13-30. These verses emphasize that it is not the gifts and natural talents one possesses that fits them for the Kingdom, but rather the competence and diligence of the worker that would receive commendation. In 2 Timothy 2:15, we see another commendation for “good” work, “a worker who does not need to be ashamed.” From these examples, you can see that social work values are adequately supported by Scripture.

Table 1. Social Work Values and Biblical Examples

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

Social work professionals are dedicated to fulfilling the commission of Matthew 25 and promoting other social work values whether they are Adventist, belong to another Christian group, or are atheist. What sets Adventist social workers apart from their counterparts is not that they serve, but rather their motives to serve. Adventist social workers are distinctive in that our motivation to alleviate human need springs from our desire to follow Jesus’ example and fulfill His expectations. We do not view meeting human needs as simply a profession, a vocation that is rewarding and challenging, but rather a calling to serve others in Jesus’ stead.

Individual versus Corporate Service Mandate

This calling to serve may be conceptualized on the individual or the corporate level. The question for Adventists is not whether we will engage in ministry to “the least of these” if we want to be saved in Christ’s Kingdom. This is a clear Biblical mandate. 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, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” Traditionally, this has been interpreted as wide-scale evangelism that leads people to baptism and becoming members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Thus, the Church addresses Matthew 28 corporately through professionally-trained evangelists and the pastorate. This contrasts with the individual approach to evangelism that happens when, for example, we “witness” to a fellow passenger on an airplane. Most people would agree that if the Adventist Church only engaged in individual evangelism, the goal of the gospel message (as currently interpreted) spreading throughout the entire world would slow considerably. However, it may be important to ask, “What does it mean to baptize in the ‘name of the Father’? Is immersion the focal point of this command? Instead, does it not mean that we are to teach people about God’s character, to reveal the truth about God’s love through tangible acts of compassion? Is not caring for the “least of these” an integral part of the Matthew 28 commission? Should not the Adventist Church engage in both commissions corporately, providing proportionate resources for each? Thus, tensions arise between those who envision Matthew 28 as the “primary” gospel commission and those who envision the two as complimentary and equally essential. The commitment to meeting physical, social, and emotional needs does not preclude the call to “teach and preach” (evangelize), but rather supports those aims (Maier, 1995). In *Welfare Ministry*,

Ellen White elaborates on the impact of social ministry and the importance to be motivated by kindness and genuine love rather than the need to add members to the Church:

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 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)

The question for people passionate about the commission of Matthew 25 is, then, “How shall the Adventist Church pursue the commission of Matthew 25 as a corporate entity?” That is, “How will we offer tangible service, resources, and caring in a professional, intentional, and corporate way to humankind?”

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 fulfilling the gospel commission of Matthew 25 corporately. Professionally-trained Adventist social workers have the skills to move the Church towards corporate outreach in professional social ministry. Professional social ministry is defined as a comprehensive system of social service offered by professionally-trained social workers to carry out social ministry in the Church, the community, and around the globe. Instead, social service in the Adventist Church, in general, is not conducted by professionally-trained social workers, is distributed unevenly, is often congregationally dependent, and is offered outside the official auspices of the Adventist Church. For example, the Dorcas Society, now more commonly known as Community Services, generally offers extremely limited services primarily by untrained

volunteers. In addition, Adventist Development and Relief Agency, a well-known entity of the Adventist Church, focuses its services on third-world countries and offers disaster relief outside the United States. These services are not offered routinely by professionally-trained social workers and in most cases not even Adventist employees.

What are the barriers to having Adventist-educated social workers bringing a strong voice and leadership in helping the Church with the Matthew 25 commission? There are many possible explanations for Adventist social workers' lack of full engagement in corporate service. For example, social work educators must focus on preparing students to meet professional practice standards. To mentor students towards taking on leadership roles in the Church would require social work educators to add to their mandated work loads. In spite of this overload, research indicates that Christian social work students have definite ideas about and support the integration of faith and learning (Sherr, Huff, & Curran, 2006). In addition, because social work has not been involved in corporate social ministry, there is a perception that there is not a place for social work in the Church. Considering that perception, there may be a sense of apathy, a lack of motivation to move the Church towards corporate professional social service. Finally, a perceived lack of resources may be a reason for lagging engagement, even though research demonstrates that funding for such service is available (Cnaan & Boddie, 2002).

Another type of perception that may be a barrier comes from those in and outside the social work profession. Within social work education, there has been a recognized distancing of the profession from organized religion. Historically, however, this was not the case and that trend seems to have turned (Cnaan, Boddie, & Danzig, 2005). For those outside the social work profession, they sometimes hold the opinion that social workers are secularists and on the fringes of Adventism. In contrast, Christian social work educators note that our most deeply held beliefs

and values will inform and shape how Christian social workers practice social work (Chamiec-Case, 2007).

What might be at the heart of these barriers is Adventist social work education's lack of integrating the Adventist faith strongly in the curriculum. While other Christian social work educators have dialoged extensively about this issue (Brandsen & Hugen, 2007) there is not a record of Adventist social work educators engaging in this discussion. This paper will focus on ways to integrate Biblical faith and Christian values with an eye toward moving Adventist social work education in the direction of service leadership in the Church.

Jesus, the Social Worker

The life and teachings of Christ illustrate social work at its best. How did Jesus go about “doing” or laying the foundation for social work? The section which follows takes an in-depth look at Jesus and social work and offers examples of how Jesus' life and teachings can define social work practice.

Why did Jesus Serve?

Jesus' life and teachings aptly illustrate the 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 without drawing attention to Himself.

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. In *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, Ellen White notes, "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 lives.

Jesus and the "Untouchables"

To whom did Jesus minister? During His time of active ministry, Jesus was known for associating with the undesirables. Jesus was not afraid to touch the "untouchables." Similarly, social workers must be willing to work with people whom the rest of society rejects. Social workers serve the poor, homeless people, older adults, prisoners, persons living with AIDS, domestic violence abusers and victims, sexual assault victims and people who commit sexual assault, drug addicts, and alcoholics to only name 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 rejected woman came to get water at the most unlikely time of day, Jesus did not hesitate to engage her. The Samaritans represented an entire cultural group that was off-limits to respectable Jewish people.

Similarly, the occupational group of tax collectors, or publicans, was off-limits. Jesus chose a publican as one of His trusted disciples. One of the things that may have made that more tolerable for his critics was that Matthew left his occupation. However, Jesus took His outreach a

bit further. Jesus invited Himself to the chief publican's home for a feast. Zacchaeus was actively involved in his occupation and to dine at a publican's home was simply not done. Yet, Jesus did.

Another type of exclusion was 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 or to be touched by her and later in a public setting be seen allowing her to anoint His head with costly perfume and wipe His feet 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, He would not allow this to happen. Yet, Jesus did.

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 of God. The Bible records several examples of Jesus healing people with leprosy. Anyone even casually touching a person inflicted with leprosy became unclean. Not Jesus.

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

Jesus' Way of Meeting Human Needs

In what types of service did Jesus engage? How did He "go about doing good?" Jesus sets the example for social work by meeting people's material, physical, and emotional needs as His initial approach in ministering to people. Jesus' first miracle was performed during the wedding feast at Cana. Jesus' mother played 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 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 others felt-needs.

Along the same lines, after a long day of teaching on a mountainside, Jesus challenged His disciples to feed the crowd that had gathered to listen—5,000 men besides 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 scanty 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 workers to follow. 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 the need.

Much of Jesus’ ministry, 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 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 emotional and social rather than physical healing; however, the principle of reaching out to heal hurting people remains the same.

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 social worker. At least two lessons may be learned through this important act of Jesus. The first lesson focuses on humility. There is no room for pride in social work or the person engaging in social ministry. 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 fill it.

Second, Jesus' act of washing the disciples' feet was a work of reconciliation. Prior to washing their feet, the disciples were arguing about who would be greatest in the new kingdom. The disciples felt jealous and angry about James' and John's request to sit at Jesus' right and left sides. By washing the disciples' feet, Jesus demonstrated the principle of servant leadership and paved the way for the disciples to be reconciled to each other and to Jesus.

Jesus' Praise of Service

As the examples above attest, Jesus' life was dedicated to serving humanity. In addition to giving us 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 the 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?" 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 one who had mercy on him." 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 as an example to which to aspire.

Jesus' Caution about Service

While Jesus' life centered in service, He did have one caution about service. This caution is recorded in Luke 10 and directly follows 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 who "sat at Jesus' feet." Luke begins the next verse with the word "but." "But, Martha was distracted..." 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."

The story that precedes this vignette proclaims service to others as the cornerstone of a relationship with Jesus. The Mary and Martha story by its placement, 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."

If social workers 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 the pressing needs of others may be, social workers need to take the time to sit at Jesus' feet.

Adventist Social Work Education

In this section I will discuss the professional social work curriculum and note how Biblical principles illustrate and inform varying parts of the curriculum. Given Jesus' example of service and His command to follow this example, what should be the emphases that will

characterize an Adventist social work program? First, the concept of social work as social ministry to corporately fulfill the commission of Matthew 25 must be central to the mission of Adventist social work education. Besides educating students for service wherever they find themselves after graduation, Adventist social work educators must prepare and challenge students to be active in leading service endeavors in their churches and for the world Church. For this challenge to become reality, it would necessitate Adventist social work educators to become actively involved themselves in service leadership roles within the Church. Faculty and students committing their talents to the Adventist Church in social ministry should be a distinguishing feature of Adventist social work education.

Another primary distinguishing feature of Adventist social work education should be how the curriculum highlights Biblical truths. This section offers some practical ideas on how the basic social work curriculum can incorporate teachings of the Bible that will anchor students in their later practice of Adventist social work. These ideas are not exhaustive or complete; indeed, it would take an entire book to knit together a comprehensive curriculum guide integrating Bible truths with the social work curriculum. Instead, what follows are some examples of Bible teachings and Bible stories that can inform different parts of the social work curriculum.

The social work curriculum in the United States primarily contains seven areas of study: social work practice, human behavior, social policy, research, field study, diversity, and social justice. For each area of study, I will note at least one Biblical approach to the curricular area.

Social Work Practice

Curriculum components dealing with social work practice center on a process of helping. This process includes the following steps: engagement, data collection, assessment, intervention, evaluation, and termination. To illustrate how social work educators can use Biblical examples

when discussing social work practice concepts, we will look at the first step, engagement. The engagement phase of the helping relationship asks, “How do we connect with people to initiate the relationship?” Social work traditionally starts a relationship “where the client is.” The Bible is full of illustrations of God reaching out and reaching down to connect with humanity in a variety of ways. Veiling Himself in the form of a burning bush, God spoke to Moses about His plan to deliver Israel (Exodus 3). Later in Israel’s history the Lord initiated a conversation with a small boy in his sleep. This child was called to become a powerful judge of Israel (1 Samuel 3) and reform a corrupt priesthood. Besides taking on different forms to reach humanity, He used different ways to get our attention. When Elijah was tired and discouraged, the Lord came to him in a cave and spoke in a still, small voice (1 Kings 19: 12). Just as the Lord allowed no barrier between Himself and humanity, so the social worker must do whatever is within his or her power to reach out and connect in the helping relationship. When teaching about engagement skills, educators may effectively use these examples to help students integrate their faith and learning.

Human Behavior

It is very likely that an entire volume could be dedicated to the many intersections in the curricular 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, considering 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 someone with their spiritual needs. Theorists such as Kohlberg and Gilligan could be discussed here as well. Finally, this verse addresses social development. Jesus developed in favor with God *and* man. In other words, Jesus experienced social development. Discussions on positive social development could cover topics such as Erikson's developmental model.

Social Policy

The curricular area of social policy 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 very 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 rules and processes connected with the care and keeping of the tabernacle. These Scriptural references provide a jumping off point for discussions on a range of issues from societal infrastructure to human relations to dispute negotiation.

A New Testament illustration that focuses on models of service is one from the life of Christ. 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 of their scope of work and procedures for engaging in their work.

Research

Being a conscientious consumer of research, conducting systematic inquiry, and engaging in regular practice evaluation are expected of professional social workers. There is Biblical support for conducting research. The Bible tells us, “test everything, hold on to the good” (1 Thessalonians 5:20-22). Luke takes it upon himself to set forth a systematic history, recording the facts as he has researched them (Luke 1:1-3). There are cautions about research, however. One example of a caution against having a wrong purpose in conducting research is supplied by a story about David towards the end of his reign as king. David was interested in making himself look good by discovering how the number of fighting men in his kingdom had grown since he became king. Against the advice of trusted advisors, he remained steadfast in his resolve to answer the research question, “What has been the increase in fighting men since I took over as king from Saul?” After the numbering had taken place “David was conscience-stricken after he had counted the fighting men, and he said to the LORD, ‘I have sinned greatly in what I have done. Now, O Lord, I beg you, take away the guilt of your servant. I have done a very foolish thing’” (2 Samuel 24:10). David was severely punished for this action of pride and arrogance. To make ourselves look good is not a Bible-centered reason to engage in research. As social workers, research must be conducted for the good of those whose care we have been entrusted, never for our own aggrandizement.

Field Study

A key component to social work education is field study. Undergraduate students in their senior year spend at least 400 hours engaging in field experience. Graduate students can spend up to 700 hours in the field. Field study helps students gain social work experience under the mentorship of a professional social worker. Research indicates that students who spent their field service in faith-based settings experienced the full range of social work experience and found it very satisfying (Larson & Robertson, 2007).

Field experience examples are abundant in Scripture. From the Old Testament, we find Elijah ready to be translated and, under God's guidance, he called 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.

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. In the Old Testament, as the children of Israel were in the wilderness, Miriam and Aaron showed open prejudice against Zipporah. "Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife, for he had married a Cushite" (Numbers 12:1). As a result of this hurtful behavior, Miriam was sent outside camp and stricken with leprosy. While the Lord eventually restored Miriam to health and back to the camp, the judgment stands as a severe warning against such

behavior. As mentioned in a section above, on many occasions, Jesus offered examples of including and embracing hated cultural groups. Besides the Samaritans, Jesus ministered to the Canaanites (Matthew 15:25-27) and the people of Gadarenes (Mark 5), both races considered heathen, undeserving, and unclean. Social workers must work diligently to break down ignorance and prejudice wherever it is found. Christian researchers note that in addition to racial and ethnic prejudice, people of faith may have such diverse beliefs that biases develop unless those biases are examined (Cecil & Stoltzfus, 2007). Engaging in any type of discriminative practice would be unacceptable.

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). Another example is given in Ezekiel 34, “You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fatlings but you do not feed the flock. The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who are sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost; but with force and cruelty you have ruled them.” These behaviors are condemned in the passage that follows. A cornerstone of social work education must be to expose and denounce social injustice. Adventist social workers need to develop a strong voice calling both the Church and community towards a more humane and fair way of treating people. This objective may be enhanced through collaborative efforts with other social workers of the Christian faith (Staral, 2003).

Conclusions

Social work education holds abundant opportunities for the integration of faith and learning. Social work values and Biblical principles fit harmoniously together. Jesus' life offers the social work student a reason for serving, examples of whom to serve and how to serve, and cautions about service in absence of a relationship with God. Each area of study in social work education may be illustrated through Scriptural references and these provide a way for social work students to anchor their faith with their academic learning. Perhaps when Adventist social work educators become more intentional about the integration of Biblical and Christian principles into the social work curriculum, we will be preparing students for lifelong contributions to the corporate social ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

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