

1-1-1964

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Ruth Wiederaenders

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

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Recommended Citation

Wiederaenders, Ruth (1964) "The Social Worker and the Pastor as a Team," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 35, Article 4.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol35/iss1/4>

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The Social Worker and the Pastor as a Team

RUTH WIEDERAENDERS

In approaching the topic of the teamwork of a pastor and a social worker in meeting a particular need of a Christian, we must first treat the concept of teamwork to determine the possibilities of any action being performed. Webster defines teamwork as "joint action by a group of people, in which each person subordinates his individual interests and opinions to the unity and efficiency of the group; coordinated effort." The group or the team is specified as "a group of people working or playing together, especially as one side in a contest." The transitive verb "to team" means "to harness or yoke together in a team"; while the intransitive form connotes "to join in cooperative activity"; and finally, the noun "teammate" is "a person on the same team."

Especially germane to our consideration are the words "joint action," "coordinated effort," "together," and "cooperative activity." These terms embodied in the noun teamwork seem to presuppose a single goal for those involved in the process. In our particular study we look at the team members, the pastor and the social worker, in an attempt to define the individual aspects of the two which may be combined in approaching their single goal. In this vein our scriptural basis is taken from 1 Cor. 12:4-8 (NEB): "There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are varieties of service, but the same Lord. There are many forms of work, but all of them, in all men, are the work of the same God.

In each of us the Spirit is manifested in one particular way, for some useful purpose."

According to one source pastoral care is help given by the minister through the process of direct interpersonal relationships with the individual and families of his congregation in a manner characterized by concern, respect, appreciation, and a sense of responsibility. Social casework may be defined as a professional service to people given by a trained social worker through the medium of controlled personal interviews with individuals and families in a manner characterized by knowledge and understanding of the person and his environment. The aims in both instances center in developing self-direction to enable the person to mobilize his capacities to work toward a better adjustment between the person and all or part of his environment.

To this point it would seem that both "helpers" are doing the same things, perhaps with a different constituency; however, when confronted with such a statement both would add to it immediately. The pastor would feel that his basic ministry is to the "spiritual" needs of his people through the Word of God, the Sacraments, and Christian counsel, and the caseworker would say that his service is aimed at the "biopsychosocial" needs of his clients.

Current rethinking of the totality of man tends to put these foci together into an

integrated framework and emphasizes a multi-disciplinary approach to meeting the total needs. Specialized training in professional schools gives each a distinct body of knowledge and a unique point of departure. The advocates of each approach tend to become defensive when called on to meet on a common ground, hesitant in communicating with the others involved, protective of their peculiar role, prone to develop esoteric jargon, and possessive of cases initially within their purview. This is being overcome in recent literature in which the stress seems to lie in discovery by each profession that there are needs which transcend their specialization, that the goal of meeting human need is basic to all helping professions, and that to be totally helpful each must assume the responsibility of assisting the individual in getting to each discipline which is able to meet some area of his need. We see a joint approach emerging, then, in the respectful blending into a unified whole of the specialties which the co-workers bring into the situation.

Specifically pastors have been reluctant to work together with social workers for a host of reasons including lack of confidence in the worth of social work's approach and method; a feeling that the caseworker will not deal with moral issues or will allow the person to continue to pursue his "sinful" ways; a desire to meet the needs of his parishioners without help from the outside; some experience where the social worker did not meet the need felt to be most pressing by the pastor and on and on. The caseworker, on the other hand, hesitates to work with the pastor because of a fear that authoritarian preaching is the only help offered; because of a

lack of confidence in the pastor's grasp of psychodynamics; because of some experience with people afraid of their pastor, et cetera. However, when the Christian social worker and the pastor meet in an atmosphere of Christ-like love to subordinate both their wills to their Lord and to their common task, their efforts in behalf of the welfare of their fellowmen should bear fruit.

In order to deepen the basis for this professional working relationship which is complete acceptance, Seward Hiltner has made several suggestions. There must be a continuation and expansion of practical work together without any profession becoming captive to another. Increased discussion to clarify the focus of one's function for another must be held. The two parties should discuss their common responsibility for the transcendent needs. To fulfill this both should encourage other disciplines to work in the areas neither can meet.

Some practical measures to insure the deepening of effectiveness include a sharp definition of one's function, acceptance of the other's definitions through positive and active encounter, the assimilation of the language of the other's field in order to pave the way for efficient communication, initial planning together for action and continued conferences on cases needing the efforts of both, the establishment of a policy concerning confidentiality, and the continual self-examination by each to assess his work as a teammate or as an obstruction. From this general discussion we turn to the efforts of the pastor and the social worker in a particular area of need in a congregation.

In the Christian congregation in almost

any area of the country there is a significant proportion of persons over sixty years of age. In recent years attention has been devoted to the specific needs and problems of this segment in terms first of meeting the physical needs and now of meeting their specific personality and spiritual needs. Removal from their homes and surroundings was the original approach during the nation's institutional era, but today we see increasingly that a large number of the aging person's needs can be met in the context of his natural situation, and this includes continuing family and congregational relationships. Therefore we approach the problems of the aging members of one congregation through the teamwork of the pastor and the social worker.

Maves and Cedarleaf have studied the status of older people and the church in an extensive research project, and their conclusions will support much of what is cited as the church's responsibility and opportunity in this area. They state: "Science has added years to life. The church must assume its responsibility and give life and give it more abundantly to help people grow old in grace and in favor with God and man; to capture the potentialities of later maturity for the enrichment of their own lives and for service in the Kingdom of God."

The added years of life require adjustment to the physiological process of growing old. Decreased physical capacity, increased fatigability, less resilience in the face of illness, and deterioration of mental faculties perplex the aging person as well as his associates. Some results are industry's early retirement policy, which leads to loss of status in a society where productivity regulates one's position, loss of in-

come with attendant economic insecurity and financial dependence, and loss of ability to participate or function in roles to which older people have long been accustomed.

In the context of pastoral visiting the pastor becomes aware of these changes and hopefully watches their effects on the member and those around him. His role would be to help the person accept these changes as part of God's plan for man's life while seeing to it that able members of the congregation are alerted to doing what they can to lend aid. If it becomes felt that the person is no longer capable of self-maintenance or is experiencing undue anxiety over these changes, a referral with complete details should be made to a social worker so that arrangements may be made for financial aid or for congregational care and for individual counseling for working through his somatic anxieties. The pastor will remain a stabilizing link with the past, which is all-important to the aged, and continue to minister to the ongoing spiritual needs except perhaps in cases where removal from the community to a church-sponsored home seems the best solution.

There are emotional and social bases for anxiety also. Loneliness due to the death of the mate or lifelong companions results in a sense of isolation. Often tensions arise with relatives, especially adult children, and the older person is unwilling to accept the reversal of roles when he must become a dependent to his own children. In our culture with its emphasis on youth the aged person senses a loss of respect and attention even in church programs. Again the pastor has the opportunity of being aware firsthand of these problems of his

parishioners and he must minister to their special need for love. His sermons need to stimulate this loving atmosphere, and his own program of visiting must give special consideration to the needs for attention by the aging. However, when simple attention seems to be ineffective in solving these problems, the social worker with his understanding of social functioning and behavior dynamics may be of service in aiding the aged person to enhance his capacity for coping with his conflicts. The pastor can establish an atmosphere in which the social worker's help can be understood, sought for, and accepted. In turn, the social worker can point the person back to his church as a major source of ongoing companionship, support, and, above all, love.

The aged member presents spiritual needs to which the church must address itself. Sickness, pain, and death bring to him the realization that man is finite and needs a basis for hope for eternity. Maves and Cedarleaf state: "As they recognize that the end of life itself is drawing nearer, many older people naturally turn with renewed interest to the church, whose very gospel deals with ultimate meanings and ultimate values, and which holds out the promise of hope through life eternal." The pastor has been trained to meet this specific need in all of his members with the proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments, and his congregation includes the social worker, who thus also derives spiritual nourishment and a personal understanding of life and death. In action both can communicate this in the contacts they have with the aging in particular. The pastor perhaps deals with this more vividly at the bedside of the sick

and dying, but the social worker too in counseling must be able to speak to the anxieties expressed about death. Here also the social worker and the pastor may exchange a variety of ideas on improving their approaches to sickness and death.

Briefly we turn to the family constellation of the aged person and to a consideration of some of the unique problems which they present to the team. The financial dependence of the older member may be a burden for the entire family, especially if they are attempting to completely support two households or if the aged member is made to feel that his presence is causing difficulty in the family's budgeting. If deprivation results for any or all parties, the social worker may be called in to secure financial assistance or other living arrangements. In this process feelings of guilt may be aroused in the children at the supposed neglect of filial obligations and the Fourth Commandment. Moreover, a feeling of guilt toward the family has in it aspects of pride in outward appearances. This tends toward work righteousness and usually stands in the way of a willingness to admit absolute guilt before God. Taking into consideration the nature of the individual situation, the pastor and social worker will seek a resolution of the guilt in all parties and a restoration of the love relationship. One might counsel with the family and the other with the aged member, whichever seems more natural in terms of previous contacts or feelings involved. This is but one example of family old age problems, but one in which many needs are involved and one in which the pastor and the social worker must act jointly to seek environmental relief, interpersonal

harmony, and a renewal of a right relationship with God.

Since we have begun to see that the needs resulting from old age and those found in human nature overlap and affect the total being, we also are aware that the work of the team members cannot be clearly delineated. In the context of the Christian congregation the pastor is generally in the front line and through his unique access to the homes of all of his parishioners more naturally serves as the central referring agent. In doing so he also knows the pattern of acceptance of help and is in a position to convey vital data to the helping person. His approach is conditioned by the knowledge that some needs transcend his competence. The social worker, on the other hand, may have opportunities to see the scope and effects of need more clearly by dint of concentration in a particular area. Each can bring resources into play that the other does not have. The pastor can call on other members of the congregation to care for the physical needs of an infirm member, and the social worker can proceed to muster financial aid or procure other living arrangements in the community. Therefore each must view the other as a specialist, not inferior or necessarily superior to himself but capable of different contributions to meet the overlapping needs. In an atmosphere of mutual respect for special knowledge each will want to make a referral whenever his partner's deeper understanding of an aspect of need is called for.

A final approach to the problem of the aged is through the congregation itself in a process which social workers call community organization. Until recently the churches have taken a passive attitude to-

ward the situation, being content to nominally support several denominational old people's homes and otherwise meeting the several emergencies only as individual members were affected. However, the welfare-minded leaders of today are stressing a more active role. This was the subject of the Second National Conference on the Church and Social Welfare in 1961. An increasing awareness of the scope of the problem in their midst is motivating the churches to become increasingly active with an inclusive response to the diversity of needs and opportunities in their midst and in the church-related agencies.

A fourfold program was proposed at that conference, and in the congregation, as envisioned in this study, the pastor and social worker team together to present and activate it. Briefly the program might be:

I. Education

- A. To change attitudes about aging
 1. Concentrate on people, not "older"
 2. Emphasize responsible participation in the congregation by all, including special talents of the aged
- B. To prepare members for going through the process of aging
- C. To acquaint the congregation with the church's institutions
 1. Accept and understand the agencies' services
 2. Financially support the agencies
- D. To establish non-residential services under congregational auspices
- E. To urge educational institutions of the church to prepare workers, especially its ministers in the sem-

inaries, for effectively serving the aging

II. Training

- A. To recruit and prepare volunteer service personnel to perform services for the aged and to conduct free-time activity programs
- B. To train aging members to take active roles in the church's program to make creative use of their leisure and talents
- C. To provide scholarships for social workers and chairs of social work in church-related colleges and seminaries to increase the number of trained personnel
- D. To establish and sponsor seminars where practitioners of various disciplines may improve their skills and understanding of aging

III. Communications

- A. To use various communication media of the church as vehicles for channeling information on the aging to the aging
- B. To urge the clergy to make use of insights through sermons and educational series
- C. To interpret social work to churches and churches to social workers

IV. Action

- A. Through counseling services, recreation, inclusion of the aging in all phases of the church's program, activity groups, etc.
- B. Through responsible Christian citizenship to bring about benefits through political action

C. Through continuation of current church programs and adequate financial support

As we read this outline for a total program it should be apparent that the pastor and the social worker are influentially involved and must cooperate to make it effective. The pastor is able to integrate this program into his congregation's schedule of activities and to set the atmosphere for receptivity. He will provide the theological background for the program and serve as a resource for specific needs of the aging in the parish. The social worker can supply information of a technical and practical nature on the specific problems of the aging and serve as consultant for the training programs for the lay leaders. The effectiveness of this program depends on the involvement of the members of the congregation, and the work must be carried through by them for the most part with the professionals in the background. After a thoroughly planned approach has been worked out by the team of pastor and social worker they may step back to serve as advisors to the activated laymen.

Throughout this paper the assumptions have been that this teamwork can readily become a reality and that the chief aim for both pastor and social worker is to communicate the love of Christ active in their lives to those around them in the Christian congregation so that they in turn love one another. Thus we have attempted to illustrate that the calling of a Christian prompts joint effort to serve as we see it outlined in 1 Peter 4:10-11 (NEB): "Whatever gift each of you may have received, use it in service to one another, like good stewards dispensing the grace of God in its varied forms. Are you a speaker? Speak

as if you uttered oracles of God. Do you give service? Give it as in the strength which God supplies. In all things so act that the glory may be God's through Jesus Christ; to him belong glory and power for ever and ever. Amen."

St. Louis, Mo.

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