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## Use of Supervision for Catholics Social Workers

Geoffrey Bornhoft

*St. Catherine University*

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## Use of Supervision for Catholics Social Workers

by

Geoffrey Bornhoft B.A; B.S.W

MSW Clinical Research Paper

Presented to the Faculty of the  
School of Social Work  
St. Catherine University and the University of St. Thomas  
St. Paul, Minnesota  
in Partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Social Work

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The Clinical Research Project is a graduation requirement for MSW students at St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas School of Social Work in St. Paul, Minnesota and is conducted within a nine-month time frame to demonstrate facility with basic social research methods. Students must independently conceptualize a research problem, formulate a research design that is approved by a research committee and the university Institutional Review Board, implement the project, and publicly present the findings of the study. This project is neither a Master's thesis nor a dissertation.

# USE OF SUPERVISION FOR CATHOLIC SOCIAL WORKERS

## **Abstract**

The importance of supervision for social workers is demonstrated in research and the importance of strong Catholic formation is crucial to the Church and her mission. This study aims to investigate Catholic social workers' perceptions on the use of Catholic supervision and social work supervision to work through ethical dilemmas. Five social workers and one marriage and family therapist were interviewed for this study. They were interviewed in regards to what Catholic supervision looks like, what does social work supervision look like, and how do they work through an ethical dilemma using both perspectives. The major themes from the study demonstrates that Catholic social workers approach the use of supervision in a variety of ways, and meeting informally with peers was the most meaningful avenue for the respondents. Respondents were more likely to first go to a member of the Catholic Church before going to their workplace supervisors. The findings of the study highlight the importance of both Catholic and social work supervision, whether formal or informal, to work through ethical dilemmas in the workplace.

# USE OF SUPERVISION FOR CATHOLIC SOCIAL WORKERS

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## Introduction

Pope Francis, in an interview with America magazine, talked about the importance of the Catholic Church being a field hospital for people of the world. Pope Francis wants a Church that is concerned about the poor, the marginalized and the outcast. In the interview he lays out his vision for the Catholic Church, stating,

*The structural and organizational reforms are secondary—that is, they come afterward. The first reform must be the attitude. The ministers of the Gospel must be people who can warm the hearts of the people, who walk through the dark night with them, who know how to dialogue and to descend themselves into their people's night, into the darkness, but without getting lost. The people of God want pastors, not clergy acting like bureaucrats or government officials.*  
(Spadaro, 2013 pp. 24)

This statement by Francis has been a source of much tension in the Catholic world. Many view this statement to mean the rules of the Church are not important as once considered. Others took his statement to mean that rules and structure are important, but they cannot be the total component of the Church, and, finally some thought his statement a source of confusion for those in the Church and viewed it as compromising the teachings of the Church in order to engage the world. All these views are nothing new. Ever since the Church has been formed there has been a constant debate about how to engage the world and be in the world, but still protect the teachings of the Church and not compromise them when reaching out to the world.

The Catholic Church during the first fifty years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was having this debate -- how the Church should engage the with world, but not comprise Church teachings. Many Catholics fought against having their charitable programs join with government institutions or other private institutions, and even fought against making Catholic Charities more centralized. A

book called The Poor Belong to Us, by William O'Connor of Catholic Charities of Chicago, stated, in regards to making Catholic Charities more centralized,

*“ A diocesan bureau may unwittingly develop charitable activity on some other than a parish basis and suddenly find it has lost both the interest and the support of the clergy and laity. It would be a sad day when the parish priest and their people cease to say ‘our prayer’ and speak rather of your cases.”* (Brown & McKeown, 1997 pp.193)

In a very similar fashion this was also the line of thought during the debate over the New Deal. Bishop Aloisius Joseph Muench of Fargo railed against the New Deal, stating the poor belonged to the Church and not to the government. (Brown & McKeown, 1997) Despite the many fights, Catholic organizations did become connected with non-Catholic organizations both private and public in the mid- 20<sup>th</sup> century. Still, the Church in many ways tried to separate itself from the rest of the pack. The Church had their own style of casework and philosophy of how to care for the poor, which was much different from other organizations. The Church, just like today, fought battles trying to protect their identity and values against a culture that was starting to embrace birth control, abortion, and divorce. This put the Church against many organizations, both private and public, and even against other Christian organizations. (Brown & McKeown 1997)

The past experiences of the Church are very similar to the experiences of the Church today. Many Catholics and Catholic Organizations are still trying to figure out how to be Catholic in a world that is ever changing. Many face tough challenges in trying to serve while keeping the teachings of the Church. In Illinois, Catholic Charities ended its adoptive sector after the state ruled they must work with gay parents. The archdiocese decided it was better to protect the teachings of the Church rather than engage in a practice that would go against Church teachings.

(Bracher 2011) Catholic schools often make teachers sign moral contracts in order to protect Church teachings. (Knight 2015)

The National Association of Catholic Social Workers on their website endorses the Catholic teaching on marriage (Catholic Social Workers National Association, n.d.), which is against the views of the National Association of Social Workers, which endorses gay marriage. (NASW 2004) This difference highlights the tension that a Catholic social worker can feel between the Church and lay social work organizations.

### **Archbishop Chaput and the modern social worker**

In 2011, Archbishop Charles Chaput of Philadelphia addressed the National Association of Catholic Social Workers. Archbishop Chaput is known in the Church as someone who pushes the conservative ideals of the Church. (Allen, 2014) In his address he lays out the importance of Catholic social workers and Catholic agencies being fully in line with the teachings of the Church. The Archbishop states,

*“Being faithful to Catholic teaching isn’t something optional for a Catholic social worker. It’s basic to his or her identity. We need to remember that Catholic belief is much more than a list of dos and don’ts. It involves much more than simply obeying a Catholic moral code — although it certainly includes that. Catholic teaching is part of a much larger view of the human person, human dignity and our eternal destiny. The content of this teaching comes from God through his son, Jesus Christ. It’s defined by the universal Church and then preached, taught and applied by the local bishop. The faith of the Church is constitutive of Catholic social ministry. It’s not a kind of humanitarian modeling clay we can shape to our*

*personal preferences; and the power and consistency of Catholic social witness collapse when we try to do that.” (Chaput, 2011)*

He encourages social work agencies to be fully inline with Church teachings. Every Catholic institution has an obligation to hire the best staff in order to better serve clients, but the staff and the institution must reflect the moral teachings of the Church.(Chaput, 2011) For Chaput the Church’s moral teaching must be at the center of all Catholic institutions and all staff must reflect the Church teachings. If not, then the institution and staff are not representing the Church.

Finally, in his speech the Archbishop encourages all Catholic agencies and social workers to fight the modern spirit of “Humanism without God.” (Chaput, 2011) Society is trying to understand human development without Christ, according to Chaput. Catholic social workers must have courage to speak for Catholic teachings alongside the more secular view of human development. If not, then it allows a false manner in which to see humans impact the work of the Church. (Chaput, 2011) Again this is a powerful statement from the Archbishop calling on Catholic social workers to rethink how Catholic social agencies are run and how they present themselves to the world, calling both social workers and agencies to be in line with Catholic teachings.

Many Catholic social workers do not have an opportunity to work for Catholic organizations, where it is easier to follow Church teaching and apply it to the workplace. Instead, they work for public institutions or private organizations that are non-Catholic, where the teachings of the Church are not the basis for rules. This may lead to dilemmas in which the organization says one thing and the Church says another.

### **Research Question**

The Church calls on its members to be faithful to her teachings, and to spread the gospel. Social work calls on practitioners to be knowledgeable about the field and to follow the code of ethics. Catholic social workers can be put in an awkward position at times. So how does one go about dealing with the contradictory landscape when encountering situations that go against the teachings of the Church. This issue is personal to me, as a Catholic and soon to be M.S.W. I want to learn how other Catholic social workers work through these challenges. When an ethical dilemma presents itself, how does the person use spiritual supervision and formal social work supervision to work through the dilemma? This is my question. Both the Catholic Church and social work rely heavily on the use of supervision for its members. For the Church supervision comes from the Sacrament of Confession, spiritual direction, and the teachings of the Church. For social work supervision comes from formal supervision and the code of ethics to provide structure in dealing with dilemmas. Again the question centers on how a Catholic uses these avenues of supervision to work through an ethical dilemma.

### **Literature Review**

With the research question in hand it is important to look at the current research for spiritual supervision and formal social work supervision.

#### **Catholic Moral Teaching**

Catholic moral teaching is an important part of the Church and how the Church sees the world. The Church believes acting in a moral way is acting in accordance with the eternal law of God. (Stewart n.d.) The teachings of the Church come from scripture and the magisterium of the Church. (Catholic Church 2012)

The church's moral teachings provide an understanding and focus on the dignity of the person, fair treatment for workers, care for the poor, protection of life and the family. (Stewart n.d.) Catholic Moral teaching is defined by the United Conference of Catholic Bishops as acting in accordance with God's law given to his people by papal, conciliar, episcopal documents, scripture, and magisterium teachings. (USCCB, n.d.) An example of moral teaching is "life and dignity of the person." The USCCB defines this as everyone having a right to life from conception to natural death. In more detail, abortion, euthanasia, cloning, embryonic stem cell research, and the death penalty all go against the Catholic moral teaching on life and dignity of the human person, because they directly destroy the dignity of the human person. Therefore Catholics must not participate in these different areas in order to remain in good standing with the Catholic Church.

By using different facets of Catholic life a person can better form his/her conscience. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops states on their website that a person's conscience is the element that helps humans to decide what is good or bad. A good conscience is grounded in divine law and purses God's plan. Forming a good conscience takes an obligation to follow Christ and his Church by following the teachings of the church. (USCCB, n.d) In doing this a person forms a conscience that, when confronted with a moral choice, has the tools needed to make a proper decision in the eyes of the church.

### **Spiritual Supervision**

Spiritual direction is an important part of the Catholic faith. The use of spiritual direction is to create a path to holiness for those who use it by providing guidance in challenging and difficult circumstances.

One way for Catholics to seek spiritual supervision is through the Sacrament of confession. Confession is an act in which a person goes before a priest and asks for forgiveness for their sins. The act of confession is meant to heal the wounds that sin has left and to reconcile the person with the church. (Catholic Church, 2012) Confession is not only about the forgiveness of sins, it is also where Catholics can seek direction in their life. The priest, through confession, can help direct a person in a particular situation. The priest has the capacity to instruct those who are in danger or in the wrong in their conduct and can suggest ways to be in line with the Church. This is very important as no one person is a good judge in every situation and must seek out those who can provide the guidance on how to stay true to the Church. (Coppens, 1909).

Another form of spiritual direction for Catholics is more of a one-on-one relationship with a priest or lay member. Fr. Gene Barrette describes spiritual direction in an article written for *Journal of Psychology and Theology* (2002) as

*“guidance that a person seeks and another gives over a period of time in the process of growing in a loving relationship with God. This process unfolds under the continual impulse, inspiration, and action of the Holy Spirit. Spiritual direction, therefore involves three persons: the directee, the director and the Holy Spirit.”* (p290)

Fr. Barrette states that those seeking direction must disclose the main reason behind seeking out spiritual supervision. Is it for drawing closer to God? For dealing with a present crisis or a long term issue? Once this has been discussed it is then important to discuss where do they see God in their life and in the present issue? (Barrette, 2002) This allows the director to be more aware of what the person's needs are and what a person is looking for.

A person seeking out spiritual direction within the Catholic tradition must use resources other than just direct supervision. A person must seek out scripture, learn magisterium teachings, and spend time in prayer in order to seek out God. This allows those who are seeking out spiritual direction to have more resources to draw from when dealing with a particular situation. (Barrette, 2002)

When entering into spiritual direction the priest or the lay member must be able to keep everything confidential in order to create a safe space for people to share sensitive information. For example, priests are forbidden to speak of someone's confession, no matter what the circumstances. (Code of Canon Law, 1999)

### **Religion and Social Work**

Social work and Religion have a complicated history. As social work became more of a profession it quickly withdrew further away from religion. (Sheridan & Hemert, 1999) Terry B. Northcut, a clinical social worker, believes that many in his field have an ambivalent relationship with religion. (2004) Another article written by David Hodge notes the lack of religious references in documents written by social workers on the topic of social justice. In the article he noted doing a search in social work abstract with key words of religion/spirituality and social justice bring about major studies about religion and social justice. (2007)

Despite its complicated past with religion, the field of social work, according to some, has turned a new page. Sheridan and Herbert noted a resurgence of interest in religion within the field of social work, despite the early distancing from religion. (1999) Another article stated over the past two decades the field of social work has taken more of an interest in religion and how it affects people. (Furman, Benson, & Canda, 2011) Another article written in 1994 noted a call for social work curriculum to be more inclusive of religion. (Sheridan, Wilmer & Atcheson)

Little research has been done on supervision and religion. But there has been research done on similar areas in social work. In a study done by Sheridan and Herbert on graduate social work students' views about religion, they found that many students have a positive image of religion. They also found that when students were asked about clinical and educational training about religion, a majority of the students stated they were not satisfied about the training they had received on the subject of religion. (1999) Another study done by Sheridan, Wilmer, and Acheson on social educators found that a majority of them want to see more classes on the topic of religion and social work. (1994)

These studies, even though they are of a different nature, show there is more need for a better focus on training social workers about the use of religion and how it affects them out in the field.

### **Social work supervision**

The American Board of Examiners in Clinical Social Work describes the purpose of supervision as experienced and professional clinical social workers providing supervision to less skilled social workers in order to better form a clinical social work identity and to develop the knowledge and abilities for the supervisee to be a more effective social worker. (ABECSW 2004)

The National Association of Social Workers describes the purpose of supervision as the relationship between supervisor and supervisee where it is the responsibility of the supervisor to provide development of core competences, demeanor, and ethical practices to the supervisee. The supervisor is the point person for providing direction to the supervisee. The supervisor must have knowledge in social work theory, standardized knowledge, social work skills, competency,

and applicable ethical content in the social work setting. Both the supervisor and supervisee must share ownership of the supervision process. (NASW 2013)

An important part of supervision according to the NASW is for the supervisors to make sure the supervisee is providing ethical care to all clients. (NASW 2013) This means while in supervision the most important aspect is client care and service to clients. Other important qualities that are needed in the relationship are trust, confidentiality, support, feedback, respect, safety and self-care. These qualities allow for the relationship between the supervisor and supervisee to have a strong base in which everything relates back to the care and quality of service for clients. (NASW 2013)

The NASW lays out three uses of supervision: administrative, educational, and supportive. (NASW 2013) The administrative aspect is helping the supervisee understand company policies and organizational responsibility. The educational role of supervision is where the supervisee and supervisor look at concerns and important aspects of individual cases. The supervisor is able to provide guidance, assist the supervisee become with social work guidelines, and to provide knowledge that the supervisee does not have. The educational aspect of supervision is crucial. It provides an opportunity for the supervisee to seek out guidance and to seek out how social work looks at particular issue. Finally, the third part of supervision is supportive. This plays an important part in supervision, as the supervisor makes sure the supervisee feels supported in their role and can feel free to come to the supervisor for assistance. The supportive role is closely linked with the educational role, as the supervisor can provide guidance to the supervisee about how to handle the different challenges of their job. These three aspects are crucial to supervision in social work. (NASW 2013)

Another important aspect of supervision is confidentiality. Indeed social workers put a major emphasis on this issue. Not only must the supervisor protect the client's private information it must also protect the supervisee. The NASW makes known that all supervisors have an obligation to keep the supervision process confidential and only release information if needed. This creates a safe place for the supervisee to share sensitive information and not fear that the whole workplace will hear about it. (NASW 2008)

Priests, and lay members who provide spiritual direction, must have strong knowledge about faith. Social work supervisors too must be knowledgeable about ethical issues and be able to provide proper guidance for the supervisee. It is important for supervisors to know the Social Work Code of Ethics. The Code lays out strong guidelines for supervisors. The Code states that social workers who provide supervision must have the skills and knowledge to do so. It also states supervisors must set clear boundaries around sensitive areas. (NASW 2008)

Social work supervision is crucial in the development of a social worker. The profession lays out clear expectations for both the supervisor and supervisee in order that clients receive the best care.

### **Conceptual Framework**

To understand how I am looking at my question it is important to understand how social work and the Catholic Church view making ethical decisions. In clinical practice social workers will need to have a strong base in knowing how to make ethical decisions.

### **Social Work**

Federic Reamer (1999) lays out a systems approach to help create a base when dealing with ethical decisions. There are six principles that Reamer lays out. These six principles provide

structure in which the social worker can protect the client, allow for self-determination, follow different laws and agency policies, and acknowledge one's own personal views.

Lowenberg, Dolgoff, & Harrington, D. (2000) lay out an ethical approach called "Ethical Assessment Screen." The screening helps social workers to understand their values when faced with an ethical decision. The model helps to bring in plenty of different avenues in which the social worker can gain information and knowledge to best serve the client.

Reamer talks about the importance of social workers knowing themselves with the ability to understand their personal feeling when they arise from working with clients, and how their feelings come into an ethical situation. (2011)

General systems theory engages the practice of working with many different factions of society, such as families, groups, and the government. (Gaddis 2011) Through general systems the practitioner is required to evaluate problems from many perspectives and determine what change needs to be pursued by individuals, families, or a community. Gladdis talks about the importance of systems having a relationship with each other. (2011) Social workers, when faced with an ethical challenge, need to look beyond a single system and view all systems in relationship with each other.

### **Catholic Model**

As stated above Archbishop Chaput lays out in clear terms that social workers must not violate Church teachings while providing care for clients. (Chaput 2014)

The Conference of US Catholic Bishops states the importance of Catholic morality by making sure one does not violate the teachings of the church in order to please the legalism that the society calls for. One must act in a way that is in accordance with Christ and his Church. The

teachings of the church come from the Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, and past episcopal documents, which provide the foundation for Catholics to act in love and moral ways. To act in love without the moral direction of the Church can lead a person adrift and without direction in their life. (USCCB n.d.) This is an important statement as it speaks to being not only loving, but being loving through the Church. Catholic social workers must be able to see themselves as loving the client through the Church and her teachings.

As well the paper talks about the importance of Catholics forming a good conscience through a variety of methods -- prayer, scripture, formation by the church, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. (USSCB) These tools allow for Catholics to form a conscience that is grounded in God and the Catholic Faith.

## **Methods**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of the study was to examine the usage of social work and Catholic supervision for Catholic social workers to work through moral dilemmas. I addressed this topic by doing a qualitative study. Data was collected by interviews with social workers and mental health professionals who identified themselves as Catholic. I used grounded theory to examine the use of supervision. The research question for this study is: How do Catholic social workers use social work and Catholic supervision to work through moral dilemmas?

### **Participants**

The study used five Catholic social workers and one marriage and family therapist. To be in the study the participant must be Catholic and either a social worker or in the mental health

field. Participants were recruited through personal and professional contacts throughout the United States.

### **Protection of Human Subjects**

The study was approved by the University St. Thomas Institutional Review Board (IRB) before interviews were begun. A consent form was created off of the template provided by the University of St. Thomas. The consent form was shown to each participant before the interview and each participant had time to ask questions about the study if needed. Participants were notified of being recorded. The form was signed by each participant prior to the interview. Typed transcripts and written notes did not have any identifying information. Audio recordings were kept on a password protected phone. Audio recordings were deleted one week after the interview took place. Transcripts and written notes will be deleted once the project is turned in on 5/15/15.

### **Measurement**

The interviews were conducted in person, except for one participant who was interviewed by email. The interviews were based on ten questions that were approved by the clinical chair and by the St. Thomas Institutional Review Board (IRB). Questions were based on the participant's use and understanding of Catholic and social work supervision around moral dilemmas.

### **Analysis Technique**

Grounded theory, which allows themes to transpire from raw data, will be utilized to analyze transcribed data of the interviews (Monette, Sullivan, & DeJong, 2011). I read initially through the interview once and then read the interview sentence by sentence and labeled each sentence with a code. I then reread the interview and observed which codes appeared to be similar, and condensed the codes into a single code. I read the interview again and searched for the most common codes and labeled these as themes on the transcript.

## Finding

### Sense of service

A sense of service found in the Catholic faith was found to be a major theme in all six of the interviews. Specifically, the participants found their Catholic faith as important as to why they got involved in the social work field. Each participant noted that their faith is what gives strength to their work and is a source of their continuation in the field of social work. Some noted particular parts of the Catholic Faith in why they serve in the field of social work. The following quotes are respondents' answers to how their Catholic faith is their called to service in the social work field.

Respondent one describes their passion for their Catholic faith and how it lead them to a career in social work.

*“My faith is what drives my work. Without my faith there would be no work as this is the source of my energy and desire to serve professionally. My days must start with refilling myself with the Lord so that I may turn and serve his children. This refilling occurs through prayer and receiving the sacraments of the Catholic Church. When I am faced in this line of work with struggles, suffering, and trauma I look to the most bloodiest and sacrificial example of love we have in all of our human history - the crucifixion of God’s only Son. It is through this horrific traumatic act of love that you see the conjuring and glorification of the most evil of acts done. This helps me understand better the purpose of innocent or “de-served” human suffering. My faith brings meaning and understanding not just to social work, but to all things in my life. My life does not exist without my faith.”*

Respondent two talks about the importance of their faith in leading them to seek a career in social work.

*“My faith does play into how I work, how I treat every client with respect, and how I try to be warm and friendly, even when they are a burden ... and treating you not with respect, my faith allows me to still treat them with great respect and to see their worth and dignity. And that to me is living out my faith. For me, my faith is very important and ... it enhances my work and I feel blessed to be able to do a job that is very in line with the Scriptures that Christ taught us, like feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and so on. So it’s a blessing to do it.”*

Respondent three shares about how serving others is central to their Catholic faith and how that helped them go into marriage and family therapy.

*“I decided to look into marriage and family therapy and the essence and core was to be a servant to people. That whole idea of service to others is central to my faith and identify as a Catholic. To offer healing and hope and what keeps me in the field is that idea. “*

Respondent four describes the how their faith shaped them in wanting them to become a social worker.

*“My Catholic faith played a big role in my wanting to be a social worker. My relationship with God gave me a commitment to minister to His people and more important to minister to His people who are on the margins of society. I think I work with people not because they are of a particular faith, but because I am. And what I try to do is be the presence of the loving God as they sit with me. Thinking about how God sees them guides my work with them, even my own self-*

*reflection as I am engaging with clients. If somebody triggers something in me, I go back and say, "wow their triggering me I wonder what that is about, ok lets figure this out" because they themselves are the beloved of God. There is beauty in every human being and my faith brings me to that and when I can interact with people that way, out of that place it's because I sense the indwelling of God. And whether the client has that understanding is really immaterial, but it makes me a certain way when I am with clients."*

Respondent five talks about the importance of their faith in helping them go into the field of social work.

*"Wanting to be a social worker was very much a spiritual motivation. The concept of servant leadership, Sermon on the Mount, Catholic Social Teaching, and to follow in Christ and His calling to serve. Through Christ we are given the example of how to lead by serving and being humble. The Saints are a great strength to me because they did not start in a place of perfection like Christ -- they sinned but by following Christ through serving his people they found new life. St. Peter doubted, but became the Rock; Saul persecuted the early Christians, but got new life through Christ and became our teacher; St. Francis of Assisi had great wealth but gave it all away in order to follow Christ and give everyone he met new life through Jesus. So for me the Saints show me that you don't need to be perfect in order to follow Christ, but that you need to serve and be humble. And lately I have been inspired by Pope Francis and honestly he has given me more fire to be a better social worker because of his call to provide mercy to God's people."*

Respondent six shares about their reason for going into social work.

*“I first wanted to be a teacher, but I realized that it didn't really fit me that well in what my skills were and where my gifts lie. And I heard how social work looks at the whole person and as I heard more about the field of social work I realized that it had some overlapping parts with my Catholic faith and saw social work as a major where I could really use my skills and gifts to care for people and help them at some of their worst moments. Not just people in general but people who are in a real need of a voice”*

The respondents saw their Catholic Faith as major drive for them to be social workers. They saw their work as way to connect them with their Catholic Faith in very personal and unique ways that many other fields may not claim to have. The call to serve and serve their people on the margins is what has inspired the respondents to be a social worker.

### **Faith and workplace conflict**

An interesting theme that emerged is how the respondents considered the question if their Catholic faith and their work ever came into conflict. Some answered the question with a particular story and others just provided a general outline on how their faith and work can be in conflict. These quotes highlight what the respondents had in common and where they differed.

This first quote, by respondent one, in particular is unique as the respondent makes a very strong case that there can never be a conflict between their Catholic faith and their work.

*“No. It is impossible for these two to ever be in conflict or have tension between them. Humans who practice in the field of social work, psychology or other similar professions try to emphasize these so called “conflicts” and “tensions” but*

*they are grounded and founded in our own weakness, shortcomings, or misunderstandings about the truth. We humans try and complicate and tear the most simplest things apart because of a lack of understanding and a will to understand. However, the truth of the Catholic Church and service work are never separated despite what any person may think. 'The truth is like a lion. You do not need to defend it. Let it loose. It will defend itself.' St. Augustine of Hippo"*

Respondent one goes on to talk about the importance of supervision which accompanies both spiritual aspects and professional goals:

*"It goes back to the premise that the human life and the spiritual life are one in the same. We are both body and spirit. We cannot compartmentalize despite our best efforts. I find that when I am giving supervision the staff's professional life is connect with their personal life and how they are doing internally. To receive and give the best supervision you cannot do one without the other. We are persons and we must address the full and whole person. The same with providing services. We use in the social work field the multi-dimensional perspective - bio, social, psycho, and spiritual. We use this perspective because it is address the WHOLE person. If I have an ethical dilemma it affects and causes my whole person to respond to it - body and soul. When we make our decision we use our values, beliefs, and the knowledge we have gained to inform us as to the best decision. Our values and beliefs are formed by how we care for and nourish our spiritual life. "*

In the next two quotes the respondents provide a specific example on how their Catholic faith and their work brought about moral conflicts.

Respondent two shares about an example of a dilemma they have faced in their place of work.

*“The only situation that I really see as an issue is they have free birth control. So I just tell my clients that I am not comfortable handing it to them, so in my job that’s where I kind of have power to protect my faith and morals. Other staff hand it out so I am not denying anyone from getting it but again I just don’t feel comfortable doing it. So I am just very up front with that. And it’s not a requirement to hand it out. And if my co-workers do it then that’s their deal.”*

Respondent four goes on to share that she believes in general her Catholic faith and her work do not come into conflict that often. Yet her reasons are different from respondent one.

*“I working as a chaplain at the time in a school that encompassed many different denominations and I had a student come to me who was considering having an abortion. In the guidelines of my job and as a human I felt that I could not lay a big burden on her and tell her what to do and yet at the same she decided to get the abortion and she asked me to go with her. I had to tell her no.”*

*“Normally I don’t feel that tension and I will tell you why. The reason for that is because when I am working with people as a social worker, I am there to help them be determined, and articulate and live out of their own world view and I am not there to provide them with a world view. So that’s why there isn’t a lot of tension.”*

Respondent three shares more in general the tension that is present at their job.

*“O yeah plenty of times, Absolutely, I think anytime you’re in relationships with people and that is in the nature of what we do, you are going to come across issues of conflict. People have -- don’t know how to say it -- I guess commitments to faith community, to understanding who God is, who people are, and who people are in relation to one another. And if you have a solid belief system anytime someone sort of diverts from that its going to come into conflict. Whether that’s working with a client or another staff person. And you find out in your place of work and in my case where you are the minority in terms of the way I might think or the way I view the world or believe what the world is, and that conflict definitely emerges, and sometimes that conflict is avert, but most of the time it is covert and sometimes I am left to not have to agree, but more be quiet and choose to focus on more of our commonalities rather than focus on those differences. Because I think sometimes, depending on the issues, there can be some real marginalization and you can be really pushed to the side. And I feel like there are certain things that if talked about would not allow for promotion or different opportunities and certain places and would not have a chance to grow in your place based on the differences.”*

Respondent five talks about conflicts that can arise in their place of work.

*“Working at a Catholic organization there are your faith-based polices, and then you have your social work principles of ‘meet the client where they are at.’ I have no problem with that. Then there is being nonjudgmental, which I embrace, but can be a struggle sometimes because of the things I hear sometimes, but for me I*

*go back to that servant leadership to help me when I struggle with judging someone. So my faith values allow me to be able to not judge someone and meet them where they are at, is both a Catholic and social work value. So putting that into more of a real way. Policies that affect my work look like if I am talking to someone who is pregnant and wants to have all her options talked about, well being a part of a Catholic organization I cannot talk about one option in particular. So you can say there are three options, keep the child, give it up for adoption or an abortion. Well I can only talk to the client about two of those three. I can't even make referral to abortion providers. So for me the ethical dilemma can't happen because of the policies in place. This for me works. Personally I feel protected because of the policies. But now the challenge is how do I best serve the client without talking about all three choices. So again I go back to servant leadership and provide them with all the resources I can and be the best therapist that I can be. Now just to be clear, I never shame anyone who asks about abortion, nor do I ever share my personal view about abortion. If they ask I state the policy and say this is something that I cannot help you with here, but I can help you with your other options. Same thing with contraception. I cannot talk about but I do not shame clients. So conflicts do not happen as much as maybe they could if I was at a different place because of the faith based policy we have here. For me this works and I thrive in it because I don't need to be worried about conflicts as much."*

Respondent six was a social work major but is not currently in the field. The respondent works as a Catholic missionary with young adults. She noted a challenge for her was trying to figure how to serve without speaking directly about God.

*“For me a personal conflict was how I serve the client’s work by only helping with the more material needs. In my junior and senior year I had an internship where I helped clients connect with resources and for me the conflict was I wanted to do more for them on a spiritual level. I was meeting their physical needs, but I wanted to go deeper. I wanted to provide them with that peace and love that God gives. But I could not. So for me the conflict was not oversharing about my relationship with God. Don’t get me wrong I didn’t want just to preach at them but I saw a lot of pain in the clients I worked with so I wanted to offer them something more, but I couldn’t. That’s why I wanted to be a missionary so my job could be more faith based and I can talk to people about Christ.”*

The respondents offered a variety of ways in which they saw conflicts in the workplace and in how they resolved them.

### **Informal Catholic Supervision**

The next theme I identify is the use of Catholic supervision, as more of an informal tool and not having regular times to meet. Many of the respondents when using a priest or lay member of the church did it in an informal way and not on a regular schedule.

Respondent three speaks of the complications that one can run into when seeking advice from a priest.

*“Yeah I would say so. So to be honest it kind of ebbs and flows and it depends on who it is. I think there is some people or priest who I really respect in their spiritual and faith journey. But I think a challenge is when you are in a position in the church all the time where you can live in a world that is a little bit more black and white. And I don't think this field supports black and white thinking and that creates a challenge. So some of my experiences when going to my priest or other lay members who work in the Catholic Church, they give perspective that doesn't really work well in the place that I am working and doesn't attend to the relationship but attends to more of the idea. So it's hard because I knew what the idea was before seeking out the guidance and was more looking for how to navigate it and figure it out. But I think the most successful times when I have gone to someone has been when they have been able to isolate my role and what my role is and can I perform that role and if can't perform that role than how can I still help in the situation and get someone to perform that role. So right now I have a couple of go-to people, one is a Catholic psychologist who I like to go to and he is very helpful. He is very orthodox and devoted guy. And I also have a friend who is a Catholic philosopher and I talk to him quite a bit.”*

Respondent three describes what type of relationship he has with his informal peer support.

*“With my Catholic psychologist and philosopher friends, I don't have like a regular thing with the two of them, but I would say there are plenty of times where I seek their opinion more than others, and I find relief in that and also challenge in that to be kind of like, ‘How am I going to do this’ and then I wrestle with what*

*they say. I feel like it's something I need to do. And in a different and same way I talk to my wife all the time, who is Catholic."*

Respondent two talks about the use of seeking out a priest for advice on how to handle an issue at their place of work.

*"I use a priest and Catholic friends to help me when I struggle at work. One time I remember talking with a priest about my job. At my job a lot of the clients are struggling with addictions and all sorts of other issues, and some clients seek help and others don't and they all have broken lives, and I think its really easy to become negative. And sometimes staff, not to client's faces, but more in the staff lounge, will say, 'Well that person is just a drug addict, or that person is a drunk,' and use bad words. And it's hard because if we're not in their corner who the heck is! So one time I went to confession. I never speak like that about clients but I don't stand up for them and I was confessing that to the priest. And how to handle that situation. And he was saying behavior like that is very juvenile so he was saying you don't even need to respond, but look at them and raise your eyebrows. I have used this and it really does work. But I don't do this on a regular basis more as things pop up at my job.*

Respondent two goes on to talk about other informal support they receives, but goes back to the importance of the priest in the use of direction in the workplace.

*"I talk with friends who are Catholic and get their ideas but again its pretty irregular as I don't have too many issues at my job between my faith and work. But if a serious situation did arise where my Catholic morals were in conflict with my job,*

*I would go to a priest before anyone else, whether its confession or just meeting with him one on one. To me that is the most important because I want to get a good picture of what the Church teaches so that I don't violate the teaching, and then I would use my other supervision outlets to get the whole picture and understanding."*

Respondent one stands out as the person who is more on par with a more regular basis of spiritual supervision.

*"The spiritual life is crucial to develop and continually deepen. It is important to seek out a person that can help you all ways in your spiritual life. When you are close to God he always provides clarity and shines a light on things that may be in darkness. When we are spiritually distant from God things become more hazy and we loose our vision and understanding of that which is simple. One thing to make sure is understood is that the spiritual life and our human life are not separated but are one in the same. When I speak of my spiritual life I mean my human life -- the tangible and visible. My spiritual life is something that is based in reality and can be touched. I use spiritual supervision monthly if not every three weeks in addition to creating habits which allow me to feed the hunger I have for a spiritual life. It is not something far away or stuck in this invisible 'place' inside of me. Like I said when my spiritual life is strong the ethical dilemmas are not daunting or dark in my understanding of how to address. So my spiritual supervision is not focused on ethical dilemmas but on making sure my spiritual/human life are close to God who is Truth. I have spiritual direction with a priest. I also am receiving spiritual guidance from my community that I am connected with --*

*filled with lay, religious, and consecrated. I also receive spiritual direction and guidance in the confessional. Due to the spiritual and human life being one in the same I am receiving this from all I interact with. However, I do set aside intentional time to make sure I receive it specific to me and my journey monthly as there are times when it can lack in normal conversation with my community”*

Respondent four stands out for the fact she does not seek out spiritual supervision.

*“ I don’t normally seek out spiritual supervision because I am a doctorate trained theologian so understanding where the church is on issues is not hard for me. However I use my consultation groups to bring up different issues whether it’s around my faith or not.”*

Respondent five talks about their process in engaging with their spiritual side.

*“For me spiritual supervision starts with my inner dialogue. In order to be a successful social worker we must know ourselves and wrestle with issues that are difficult for us. Then I take that dialogue and I go vertical with it. I pray about it and reflect in a spiritual way. Then I bring it outward. I have friends who are priests and will bring it to them; being at a Catholic agency I have Catholic colleagues who I can go to. My supervisor is a practicing Catholic so when I go for supervision I can talk about faith-based concerns. So I have variety of people I can go to talk about a concern or issue that I have. Then after all the feedback I go back to the inner dialogue and prayerful state. Because what it comes down to for me is me and God and how I can best be a servant leader in my job. I don’t use confession as a place to resolve conflicts at the workplace. For me the confessional is a place to make right with God and the church, so unless I committed a sin around*

*my workplace I don't feel the need to bring up challenges or tensions at my place of work in that type of setting. I will save those discussions for outside the confessional. To me it is very important that I seek out others' spiritual advice because we are dealing with serious issues and I need that guidance to be a better steward for God and his people. You find that the more you do seek out advice the smaller the gray area can be – it's still there for sure, but it's smaller then before and you can better navigate tricky situations better.”*

Respondent six spoke of her time as an undergrad and the use of spiritual supervision to help her with conflicts she had about the field of social work.

*“I also studied Catholic studies in college so after class or free time that I had I would seek out a Catholic studies professor, sometimes it was a priest or a lay person, but I would talk with them about things I was learning and about the challenges I had with them or how as a Catholic I am to interpret certain things we have learned. Or just more broadly how as a Catholic would I fit into a field that is more liberal. We always had positive conversations and how it is important for Catholics to serve and to serve with others who we may disagree with on important issues. So it was nice having supports I could go to when I was struggling with things in the social work field. I also had friends who were more conservative Catholics in my social work classes who I could do go and talk with about it.”*

### **Topic of Faith in Workplace Supervision**

This theme will explore how comfortable respondents are bringing up faith issues with their workplace supervisor. Respondents will indicate how often they meet with their supervisor(s).

Respondent one talks about their new role as a supervisor in a women's shelter and the importance of supervision in her new role.

*"I recently accepted a position as a supervisor of a women's shelter. Due to this being a new position and role for me I have chosen to meet weekly with my supervisor because I need more guidance and mentoring in this new role. I meet with the staff I supervise as needed but I try and meet with them at least quarterly. Luckily my direct supervision in my current position is also well seasoned in life and studying of God and how to remain close to him so I can speak freely about my spiritual life with him too. I meet weekly with this supervisor.*

Respondent one talks about how they view supervision in their place of work.

*The way I use workplace supervision is important me. Supervision is critical to working in the social work or human services field. Supervision provides a birdseye view to what a person may be looking at through a magnifying glass. It also is good to discuss ideas, thoughts, struggles, and joys with another person not only to put words to experiences but to bring this outside of yourself and get a second opinion of what you are working on. This can especially be good if there are ethical issues that you are encountering in your position. It can be a temptation to complicate issues if we remain in our own minds so by vocalizing this we may find the path that guides us to truth and love in that supervision. Loving other*

*human beings is simple however it is difficult to do. Supervision helps me navigate through the difficulties of loving professionally another human being while maintaining that understanding of the simplicity of it.”*

Respondent two describes what their workplace supervision looks like.

*“I have a licensed supervisor who I meet with; I know this person through a connection with the county and she works in adult mental health and I work in the homeless shelter which isn't connected exactly but they work close by. And then I go to my college and I have supervision group and we meet and share about what's going on. There are three other people in the group. And at my job I have two supervisors, a program director and executive director. I meet with my group and individual for licensure a total of 4 hours a month -- 2 hours a month in group and 2 hours in individual.*

Respondent two talks about being cautious when bringing up faith in supervision.

*It would be a challenge and bit harder then everyday social work stuff to talk about my faith and potential conflicts, because it entails a very personal aspect of your life, you're bringing your beliefs, values, and morals into the conversation and that is always a challenge when you bring them into a conversation that you don't know how people will respond or react to them. So for me I am not going to bring up my faith unless I really need to and think that's ok. If something major came up I would bring it up.”*

Respondent three:

*“I have supervision every other week and informal as well. I will step into her office if I need to ask her something or check with about an issue. I try not to talk about my faith too much in supervision, but I know she is person of faith as well, she is Jewish. And I have actually had some good talks with her, maybe not work related, but personal conversations that have been about a faithful nature and I have really enjoyed those conversations, but I would say it’s not complete openness. I would say here that I don’t have complete transparency with anyone. Part of that is in the nature of my role. As a supervisor, like you have sort of select peer group anyway and you just generally keep certain things more private, but there are some people here that I am more transparent with about the value of my faith, but not complete openness again.”*

Respondent four does not have a formal supervisor, instead he has two consultation groups and feels okay with bringing up items of faith in both groups. Respondent five, like respondent one, has a Catholic supervisor and is very comfortable bringing up personal faith items.

Respondent six spoke of talking with professors on matters of faith.

*“I tried talking to teachers about my personal faith and concerns that I had, but usually I would let my friend do the talking and I stood by in support. I don’t know why I struggled with it, but I guess I was worried about how I would be viewed. I remember one time we had a teacher tell us during class that we all should call our legislators and voice support for Planned Parenthood. This was very upsetting to me and my friend. I spoke with the professor about it, but even though I was very upset she did most of the talking and I just stood there with a*

*stern look. If or when I enter the social work field I hope I can bring up issues important to me around my faith and not be judged for them."*

### **Self-determination**

Another theme that emerged from some but not all of the respondents was the importance of never putting your faith onto the clients.

Respondent two describes the importance of keeping faith and his work separate

*"We do have Bible studies and church events, but clients are not forced to go and nothing happens if you don't and we really try to make that clear to the clients, that it is optional and voluntary and we make sure these events happen in an area that is off to the side and not in the main shelter area. For me, my faith is very important and like I have been saying it enhances my work and I feel blessed to be able to do a job that is very in line with the scriptures, like feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and so on. So it's a blessing to do it. But in the workplace it's not faith-based so my job isn't to convert but to help the clients live independently, to help them build skills, and my faith enhances me to do that better, but teaching faith isn't my job."*

Respondent five shares about allowing the client to lead when it comes to matters of faith.

*"I have the freedom to bring up Christ, especially being a part of a Catholic organization, but at the same time, I do meet the client where they are at and see if religion/spirituality is something they do want to talk about. I can tell if the client*

*will be interested talking about their faith from the personal history form we have them do before they start. Some of the questions are, do you have religious affiliation, how important is your spirituality, and do you want in the sessions. But even if they say their faith is important and they want in the session I still let them lead and I will not talk about faith until they do. Its important because the way we work is mental health counseling not spiritual counseling. Spirituality can be a part of the mental health sessions and our intake person knows that I am Catholic and will send clients to me who are more open about faith. The servant leadership model does not allow for preaching at the clients. So when addressing spiritual questions or concerns I need to come from a side that will benefit the client and will help them. It also means exploring, sharing, but no finger wagging.”*

Respondent five goes on to talk about the importance of clarification of faith when working with clients.

*”Another aspect that can come into play during talk of religion or spirituality is clarification. Some people can be disillusioned about certain things, sometimes they are told one thing by a priest or Protestant minister that is too strict and that has harmed them. Other times a person has left the church because of pain someone from their church has caused them, but now they are looking to go back and I help them by answering questions if they have them. I find that people are still hungry for a spiritual connection, even after a painful experience so I try my best to help them get connected to that connection. Sometimes I point them to a priest who I trust who can help them reconnect and validate the pain they went through.*

*But I don't provide that unless they ask and we will explore options. And there are always misconceptions. Sometimes clients come and they grew up in a very strict punitive Catholic home, so to them all they know of the faith is a very harsh reality so of course they don't view it in a positive way and they don't want to be around an environment like that. And I don't blame them. One of the ways we address that is Vatican II Principles. What has changed in the church since I and many of the clients has changed. Priests face the congregation and embrace them. Father 'last name' is now Father 'first name.' Pope Francis is calling priests to smell like their flock, to be humble and serve God's people with humility and mercy. Which is again the servant leadership model. In all of this I am letting the client lead and I am never putting things on them."*

Respondent four, like respondent five, talks about the importance of clarification and not using therapy sessions to evangelize clients.

*"I focus on the client and what are their needs, but I am aware that I am dealing with the real presence of Christ before me when I am dealing with a client. I am really focusing on where they are coming from, but I do have to admit as a theologian I will admit that when people raise specific theological issues in the clinical setting and in the Latino community it happens all the time. I will work with those issues with them and I will do it within the rubric of where they are coming from with their faith and if they tell me they are Catholic and say well I feel married but he beat me from before we got married to till now. And I will say something that like what does it feel like to be married in that setting, but then I will go back and say you know the Church does not require you to feel married in that*

*situation because for the Church marriage is this and I will explain a little about what the Church understands to be married and so I do that, but only when the client brings it into the session. For me unless your business card says Christian Therapist you should not be coming from a direct Christian standpoint.”*

### **Faith-Based vs Secular**

Another theme that came through was if it was important for the respondent to work in a faith-based organization or are they willing to work in a secular one.

Respondent three sees the benefit in being places with diverse thinking and feels called to be in that type of setting.

*“I enjoy where I am at for the moment and for one particular reason. I think there is value in being in the world and being in places with people of diverse opinions and diverse thinking, and I think that as Catholics we need to be in the world. So would I perhaps feel less tensions and less conflict and more at ease in different place of course, but at this point I just feel like its my call to be in this field among people who may think differently then me. And you are going to get people that value service for lots of different reasons and for some of those reasons we might share things in common and others we may not.”*

Respondent two appreciates where they are currently, but sees benefits to being in an Catholic organization.

*“I have never had the opportunity to work in a Catholic organization, so I would not know what that is like. I currently appreciate the challenges I experience at the homeless shelter, however there are sometimes I wish I could talk freely about Jesus and the Bible to enhance my practice.”*

Respondent one would like to work in a secular agency in order to provide a spiritual aspect in a secular setting.

*“It has always been my intent to work in a more secular environment because I believe if we are to be true providers that are inclusive, diverse and offer all options to our clients than we must first acknowledge the spiritual component that many of our clients have. If we are to serve a diverse population then we must include those who are religious and spiritual and not discriminate against them! It is good to have staff and service provider that can identify with our clientele. So often we see diversity in the staff based upon race and ethnicity but what about the diversity in religious and spiritual beliefs. Or diversity in thought. This has been under-represented in the secular work environment and it is detrimental to our clientele. I hope that someday I will be able to work in a secular environment to help decrease this lack of diversity and representation for the sake of the clients. It is important that we serve our clients and their needs and not the needs of the staff of any program or agency.”*

Respondent five sees the benefit in being a part of a Catholic organization where policies protect employees from engaging in practice that may violate Catholic moral teachings.

*“It’s hugely helpful to be in this environment. It’s very much a match for me and it would be a lot more challenging if I had to check my faith at the door. I know I*

*could make more money at a secular place, but again I love my environment and that stuff is priceless and its very hard to get into so since I have it it's hard to leave for another place. I worry at another place I might be a lot more drained and be more stifled because I would not be able to talk with clients about their faith. And again as I have talked about before I like being in place where the policies match with the teachings of my faith and I feel secure in that."*

Respondent six talks about the importance to them of being in a place where faith can be talked about.

*"I am not sure. I believe I can and I believe it would be beneficial, but working at a Catholic organization I find a lot of counsel in knowing I can talk to someone and share something spiritual and know that's ok, and be encouraged. So that's something I need to think about as I go forward with my career."*

The respondents offered a variety of different responses on how to work through ethical dilemmas and how they view supervision.

## **Discussion**

At the heart of this paper is the question of how social workers use social work supervision and Catholic supervision to work through ethical and moral dilemmas. This is a personal topic for me as I am Catholic and soon to be an M.S.W. graduate, who wants to be an excellent social worker, but also someone who does not want to go against the teachings of the Catholic Church. So in picking this topic I hoped to gained knowledge from other Catholic social workers on how they use supervision in order to work through challenges that arise in their place of work.

## **Challenges**

In doing this topic for my research project I encountered several challenges. One challenge is many of my participants were young in their careers and at the time of the interview have not encountered a major moral dilemma. This created more speculation from my participants in what they would do if they encountered a moral dilemma. It also limited talk about the use of supervision as they never had to go to their supervisor, in their place of work and Church, in order to discuss an ethical situation. Again the conversation was around what could a conversation look like and how they see themselves processing it.

Another challenge was research. This is a unique topic and not much research has been done on it. Of course there is plenty of research on the use of social work supervision and plenty of writings from the Catholic Church on spiritual direction and the importance of following the moral teachings of the Church. But put them together and there is not much written about how social workers can use both the Church and their workplace supervisor to work through ethical dilemmas.

### **Topics of Interest**

Topic of interests that came up in the interviews with the participants included working in a secular or Christian workplace, care of client, and the use of personal faith.

### **Secular vs Christian Organizations**

Working in a secular place or Christian place of work came up in a few of the conversations with the respondents. This would be an interesting topic to discuss more in depth and understand why some people prefer one place over another and how being in that environment affects them. Some people preferred to be in the secular agencies because they either felt personally called to be amongst people of different faiths, or others simply liked their job and it did not

matter if it was a place of faith or not. One person enjoyed working in a faith-based agency because of the policies that protected their faith and they knew that certain topics could not be discussed because of agency policies. This person felt freer to talk about things with clients because they knew they would not have to talk about things that went against the Catholic faith. One person who currently is not in a social work job discussed the fact that they could see themselves being at a secular agency, but would prefer a place of faith because of wanting to be in an environment that encouraged people to talk about their faith. To go more in depth with this topic would bring to light how agency rules and policies can affect Catholic social workers.

### **Catholic Peer Support vs Catholic Supervision**

Many of the respondents found peer support to be more beneficial than a hierarchical supervision. One respondent did not feel as if their priest could provide the proper support needed because of the priest's ability to be more in a black and white world. Other respondents preferred peer support because of the easy access and familiarity with their supports. Another aspect was having more variety of support in a less formal way. Many respondents talked about the fact they used many different people to talk about workplace issues, some used their spouse, friends in different fields, and Catholic social workers.

### **Proselytizing**

One topic much agreed upon was that it is crucial to support clients where they are at and never push the Catholic faith on them. Many spoke of letting their actions speak for them and to allow the clients to bring up items of faith. Literature notes that social workers who work for religious organizations must remember the importance of self-determination and avoid unethical situations by being up front with clients and colleagues. (Sherr, Singletary, & Rogers, 2009) Many

saw this as very important to their work because their work is centered on clients and not conversion of clients. Many of the participants spoke of how every human person is created in the image of God and has dignity, but the client does not need to acknowledge this fact, nor does the social worker need to bring it forward to the client.

### **Servant Leadership**

One participant spoke of servant leadership as an important theme in their work. When talking about this model the respondent spoke of Christ as the ultimate servant leader, but also spoke of saints who truly lived this out. St. Francis of Assisi, for example, the respondent spoke of being one of the true humans to live this out as he did nothing but serve others and lead so many to Christ and to freedom from oppression and sense of loss. The participant also spoke of Pope Francis as a man who is very much a servant leader and is calling the Catholic faithful to be servant leaders. The participant made sure to speak of both Pope Francis and St. Francis' quality of action and not needing to speak of God all the time, and that both of these men never judged and always met people where they were at. I had not heard the term servant leadership and did not discover it in the research prior to the interviews nor did any of the other participants use the term.

### **Personal Prayer**

An interesting topic that can be pursued further is the use of personal prayer and self-reflection when faced with a moral dilemma or in everyday practice. The Church views prayer as a crucial part of the faith and a way to better understand the world. (USCCB, n.d.) Many of the respondents spoke of first taking a dilemma to prayer and reflecting on the situation. The importance of doing this is that it allowed the respondent to be better in touch with what they are

feeling and why they are feeling it. To explore this further would provide a look at the importance of self-reflection in social work and the use of spiritual practices to enhance practitioners' work.

### **Clear use of supervision**

From what I gathered from the respondents it is clear that there is not one way a Catholic social worker used supervision. All spoke about the importance of supervision from both the Catholic and social work sides, but many differed on how to use it. One respondent did not seek out priestly supervision as they worried about the priest being too rigid and seeing things as black and white, and for the respondent this would not work. Whereas another respondent spoke of having conversations with priest friends as way to get a better understanding of church teachings and how to apply them at their place of work.

Respondents at places of faith very much enjoyed speaking about their personal faith and talking about faith with their workplace supervisor. Respondents at secular agencies were more hesitant to bring it forward and would only do so when the situation called for it.

Prayer and self-reflection was important to all the respondents. This included doing self-reflection and then bringing it into their prayer. The respondents found this helpful as it provided them a way to reflect and to seek out guidance from God. It also provided them a place to better understand why a situation is difficult for them and why they feel a certain way.

### **Catholic Framework**

Looking back at the conceptual framework and the answers the respondents gave it is clear that all of them followed the basic Catholic framework, which is to not personally violate Catholic teachings. Many stated that they were fortunate not to have a moral dilemma affect them, but stated very clearly that they would not violate Church teaching at their place of work.

However, it is clear that there are differences between the respondents on their definition of violating Catholic moral teachings. One respondent would not hand out birth control because they did not want to violate Catholic moral teaching; another respondent worked with a client seeking an abortion, but declined to go with the client to the abortion clinic.

All respondents talked about using all sorts of Catholic means when dealing with a moral dilemma at work. Some respondents talked about the use of confession, others personal conversations with priests or lay members of the church, the use of scriptures, and finally many spoke of the use of prayer.

One respondent in very clear terms stated that social work and Catholic teaching can never be in conflict because Church teachings are true and conflict only comes by our weakness. The respondent went on to say that tension is only created by our lack of understanding Catholic teachings. Many of the respondents, however, viewed conflict in a way that is caused by tension between the Catholic Church and social work.

### **Social Work Framework**

All respondents spoke of the importance of the client and their needs. All respondents spoke of putting the client at the front and letting the client lead. The respondents spoke of checking their personal views at the door and seeing the client as many different parts and not just a spiritual being. If they were a part of a secular agency the respondents respected the agency's policies and obeyed the rules and regulations in their place of work. If at a place of faith the respondents still stated that it was up to the client to talk about faith and never judged a client based on who they were.

All the respondents spoke about the importance of social work supervision in helping them make decisions. Respondents saw social work supervision as a chance to gain insight from

a person with more knowledge and talk about work challenges. However, some respondents spoke of bringing an ethical dilemma to someone within the Catholic Church first before speaking with their workplace supervisor. Many respondents stated that they did not feel fully comfortable in sharing their faith with their superiors.

From the answers respondents gave it is clear that bringing up their spirituality was something that did not happen often. From the research mentioned previously, studies have shown spirituality is a topic that is not talked about in classwork, nor or social trained in talking about spirituality. It is important going forward that supervisors are trained in working with their spiritually and how it affects them as clinicians.

## **Research**

This topic is one in which there is not a lot of previous research. For one it is a niche issue. Social work is a huge field and throughout its history has sought to establish its own identity. Different models for supervision have been created within the field and social worker supervision is viewed as essentially the sole way for social workers to solve issues within in the workplace.

For Catholics, supervision in the Church can take on many different forms. The Church also has its own moral code and views it as the sole way for Catholics to live their life. It also deals with more issues then just workplace dilemmas and it can be hard to directly apply teachings to particular situations in the social work world.

Social work and the Catholic Church are two major institutions in which there are major differences in how they view the world and operate in it. So trying to get a grasp on the use of supervision through both lenses can be difficult. I believe this research is important as many Catholics in the field of social work can feel stuck and do not know exactly how to work through

a particular situation, especially as they can be torn because of their allegiance to the Church and the field of social work.

Another important reason to continue research on this topic is that it can enhance both the Church and the field of social work. Both the Church and social work are looking for ways to better themselves. With more research agencies, companies, schools, and governments can create better policies that better serve their employees in the way supervision is used.

The field of social work could benefit by providing to more education and training for supervisors on how to talk about spiritual needs in supervision. As discussed in the paper many social workers do not have the opportunity to discuss spirituality in supervision and many supervisors were not trained in how to discuss it. Spirituality in social work is growing and it must have a place in supervision. Social workers need to have an opportunity to bring it forward in the workplace.

### **Conclusion**

In this research paper I have tried to better understand how Catholic social workers used both social work supervision and Catholic supervision to work through ethical dilemmas. By looking at the present research on the topic and interviewing six participants it is clear that there is not one way to use both in working through ethical dilemmas. Respondents spoke to many different ways in which they use both their social work supervision and Catholic supervision to see their way through a particular issue. Respondents both encompassed social work models of supervision and models of Catholic spiritual direction in discussing ways they approach an ethical

dilemma. Going forward it will be important to continue research on this topic to better understand how the Catholic social workers can use supervision to better themselves in order to better serve their clients.

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## Appendix A

# CONSENT FORM UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOM

[687908-1]

I am conducting a study about use of formal and pastoral supervision in the social work, medical and mental health fields. I invite you to participate in this research. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a Catholic who works in the medical, mental health, or social work field. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Geoffrey Bornhoft. Katherine Hill is the faculty supervisor.

### **Background Information:**

I am a University of St. Thomas student in the Master's of Social Work program. The purpose of this study is: to understand how Catholics in the medical, mental health, and social work field use spiritual and formal supervision to work through ethical dilemmas in the workplace.

Questions being asked to the participants:

1. What made you want to be a social worker?
2. How does your faith play into your work?
3. Does your faith and your work ever come into conflict?
4. How do you use supervision at the workplace to navigate through ethical dilemmas
5. How do you use spiritual supervision to navigate through ethical dilemmas
6. How often do you seek out spiritual supervision?
7. How often do you have supervision at your place work?
8. Do you feel comfortable in talking with your workplace supervisor about issues at your work that go against your religious values?
9. What does your spiritual supervision look like? Is it through the confessional? One on one with the priest? One on one with lay person in the church? Or a combination of different areas?
10. Do you feel its important to use both spiritual supervision and formal supervision when trying to figure out how to act in dealing with an ethical dilemma?

### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things: Partake in a one on one interview that will last no more than 45 minutes. The interview will take place via the phone, Skype, or in person in private area. The interview will be recorded on my iphone. I then will write up a transcript but no names or identifying information will be on the transcript. One week after the interview the recording will be deleted from my phone. I will be taking written notes during the interview but no names or identifying information will be on the notes. All transcripts and written notes will be destroyed once the study is turned in on 5/15/15

### **Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

This study has no risks.

There are no direct benefits you will receive for participating in this study.

**Compensation:**

You will not receive payment for participating in this study.

**Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept confidential. In any sort of report I publish, I will not include information that will make it possible to identify you in any way. The types of records I will create include consent forms, typed transcript, written notes, and audio recording. Typed transcripts and written notes will have no identifying information. Typed transcripts will be kept on password protect computer and written notes will be kept in locked file at my home. Consent form will be kept in a folder in a locked drawer at my home. Consent form will be kept for at least three years after the completion of my study. I will be the only person who will have access to the consent forms, audio recordings, transcripts, and written notes. Audio recordings will be kept on my password protected phone. Audio recordings will be deleted one week after the interview takes place. Transcripts and written notes will be deleted once the project is turned in on 5/15/15

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of St. Thomas. If you decide to participate and the interview is completed, you are free to withdraw from the study at any point, until April 15, 2015. Should you decide to withdraw data collected about you will not be used in the study. You are also free to skip any questions I may ask.

**Contacts and Questions**

My name is Geoffrey Bornhoft. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at (612) 619-3160. Katharine Hill, faculty advisor can be reached at(651) 962-5809 You may also contact the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at (651) 962-6038 with any questions or concerns.

**You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.**

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to participate in the study. I am at least 18 years of age. I agree to the audio recording of the interview.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Study Participant**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Print Name of Study Participant**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Researcher**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

## **Appendix B**

Questions being asked to the participants:

1. What made you want to be a social worker?
2. How does your faith play into your work?
3. Does your faith and your work ever come into conflict?
4. How do you use supervision at the workplace to navigate through ethical dilemmas
5. How do you use spiritual supervision to navigate through ethical dilemmas
6. How often do you seek out spiritual supervision?
7. How often do you have supervision at your place work?
8. Do you feel comfortable in talking with your workplace supervisor about issues at your work that go against your religious values?
9. What does your spiritual supervision look like? Is it through the confessional? One on one with the priest? One on one with lay person in the church? Or a combination of different areas?
10. Do you feel its important to use both spiritual supervision and formal supervision when trying to figure out how to act in dealing with an ethical dilemma?