

Practitioner Interview Assignment

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For this assignment, I was given the opportunity to interview Freddy Baez. Freddy is the director of the clinical internship and pastoral care at Full Circle Health, and an ordained minister. He was a former adjunct professor at Alliance (Nyack) from 1997-2017, and also taught psychology and theology at The School of Counseling. Freddy grew up in a Christian household, but during his teenage years, he grew a passion for Marxism which he studied and was encouraged to join The Puerto Rican Socialist Party. At that young age, he became suicidal, and it was then when a family member came to his aide and prayed for him, and at that moment he gave his life to Christ.

Freddy always had a heart for helping people and sought out caseworker jobs. A person from church encouraged him to go to school for social work given that he had pastoral and caseworker experiences. Shortly after, he got job offers that prompted him to go to school because the job opportunities he looked for required an MSW. He then got his MSW from Fordham University and a master's degree in theology. In the 90s, Freddy attended a convention conducted by the National Association of Christian Social Workers which sparked a fire in his heart for the field of social work.

In addition, Freddy's understanding of the relationship between Christianity and social work is that the field of social work is an inheritance of Christianity because when looking at the history of the church, it is a social reform called to serve others, to have an anti-hate approach, anti-oppression, and give to those in poverty. He uses The Salvation Army as an example, an organization rooted in Christianity dedicated to helping the poor and oppressed meet and improve their spiritual and physical needs worldwide. Furthermore, when integrating his Christian faith into social work practice, Freddy gave an example of how The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous are very spiritual, psychological, and social and that it is a good

integration of Christianity because change cannot happen until those dealing with addiction come into amend that they need change.

Throughout the course of his career, Freddy has experienced ethical dilemmas. Freddy shared that during the 80s when he was a caseworker, drug programs would provide addicts with syringes and condoms, which was something difficult for him to accept because it was hard for him to walk down the streets of his community and see people injecting themselves. He then understood that the distribution of syringes and condoms was a necessary step to promote safety among drug addicts. Another ethical dilemma was telling a “white lie” to help a family get approved for an apartment in a safer neighborhood or working at an agency with battered women and teenage girls getting abortions, which felt like a sin. He then shifted his point of view and saw his work as a social worker, his kindness, and compassion at his workplace as paving the way to get those he serves a step closer to what God is doing in their lives.

When asked about a lesson that he has learned in his career as it relates to Christianity and social work, Freddy shared that he learned to work through being religious and moralistic and to not get stuck in the moralistic. He shared that his calling is to be a social worker and that his job is to clear the ground for individuals to be closer to the purpose God has for them and to their salvation. Freddy expressed that “I am one of the people that God will bring to an individual” which is an example of what a Christian social worker can be. Lastly, for new Christian social workers like me, his advice is to read the Bible to help integrate social work and Christianity, specifically the book of Proverbs which teaches about wisdom, the book of Job, Ecclesiastes, and Sons of Solomon which teaches about interpersonal relationships.