

Acceptance Speech

CSWE Significant Lifetime Achievement in Social Work Education Award 2013

By Edward R. Canda, University of Kansas

Delivered at the Opening Ceremony

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‘Global Social Work – The World is Here’

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**Award Presentation by
Dr. Barbara W. Shank
Chair, CSWE Board of Directors**

I sincerely thank the Council on Social Work Education for this great honor. Thanks also to my Dean, Mary Ellen Kondrat, of the University of Kansas School of Social Welfare, for nominating me and for her steadfast support. This award is very meaningful to me-- not only because it recognizes my work, but especially because it shows increased recognition of the importance for education to prepare social workers to address spirituality, in its diverse religious and nonreligious forms. That is truly amazing as it shows that I, and our profession, have come a long way since I began this work. I want to share briefly about my journey, in order to offer thanks to people who've been crucial along the way and to share about the development of spiritually sensitive social work, in case some are not familiar with that.

When I started exploring ways to connect spiritual diversity to social work in the early 1980s, spirituality was very little addressed. This puzzled me because the profession espoused a holistic and culturally sensitive perspective. From a personal vantage, my parents' Catholic faith infused all aspects of our family life. Beyond that, during youth, I began exploring many philosophies and religions, each of which conveyed ideas about the reasons for human suffering and ways to overcome it. My academic studies of anthropology and comparative religions showed that all cultures form worldviews, symbols, rituals, and systems of healing and helping that are often imbued with deep significance or a sense of the sacred. It struck me that for the profession to become truly holistic and culturally sensitive, it needed to pay more attention to these spiritual matters. Indeed, I was inspired by a small number of social work scholars who advocated for a way to address spirituality that respects diversity. So I decided to focus my career on working out how we can reach out to people of every spiritual perspective including those who say they are not spiritual at all.



In the past 15 years, momentum for spiritually sensitive social work has grown significantly. Our profession and allied fields are paying more attention to spiritual matters, such as the importance of people's quest for a sense of meaning, purpose, and profound connection; the role of spirituality and religions in resilience, recovery, mutual support, and empowerment; and, on the other hand, to the existential hazards of crisis, meaninglessness, banality, and confused moral compass; and to the ways that religious beliefs and institutions all too often cause harm by blaming, shaming, excluding, and oppressing. Although the topics of religion and spirituality remain controversial and inadequately addressed in many quarters of social work, the trend of our profession's opening to spirituality is now evident in this country and in many countries. It is deeply gratifying to receive the judgment of my peers that my work has contributed to this trend.

But my work could not have been fruitful without the wonderful network of family, friends, colleagues, and students around the world who I've been blessed with and who I am so grateful for. For example, I met my wife, Hwi-Ja, during studies in Korea in 1976-77 and she has been my loving companion, supporter, and partner in professional activities ever since. I met my mentor in East Asian philosophy, Dr. Yi Dong-Jun, of Sungkyunkwan University, at that time too. He has helped me to understand how to connect spiritual development with a life of scholarly service. My longtime mentor in social work, Dr. Daniel Booduck Lee, encouraged me

to pursue my interests in spirituality and transcultural relations during my MSW and PhD studies when he was at the Ohio State University in the early 1980s and ever since then. He and Professor Virginia Richardson, my dissertation chair, were willing to take a risk on supporting me even when some others were saying my subject was destined for a dead end. Over the many years since then, colleagues and friends in the USA and around the world have collaborated with me and inspired me. Though I don't have time to mention all these people by name, I want any of you out there in the audience to know that I have been thinking fondly and gratefully of you, especially my colleagues and students at the University of Kansas which has been my home for many years, and those who were at the University of Iowa where I got my start as a professor. I extend my special appreciation to people who've been active in the US and Canadian based Societies for Spirituality and Social Work, the CSWE Religion and Spirituality Clearinghouse, and the international network that I host on my website.

I am grateful to the social work profession for giving me a niche to flourish more than I could have hoped for. I am proud of this profession for our collective commitment to promote wellbeing and social justice. I hope that it continues to ever more widely benefit all people, every kind of person, and all beings everywhere. Thank you.



**Ed with Wife, Hwi-Ja
At Conclusion of Award Ceremony**