Social Justice Action Plan

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**Life Meaning and Commitment**

When I explore the questions prompted by Lee (2007) in regard to What do I do and Why do I do it? The first thought that comes to my mind is I work as a counselor because God called me to the profession and ministry of counseling 21 years ago. At the age of 30, I was a banker in Puerto Rico and God used the passion he placed in my heart for people to call me to have a career change. God called me to resign at the bank I was working for and come to the United States to pursue a degree in counseling. Counseling has been my whole life since that calling, and I do it because I love it, because I love God and I want to be obedient to his call.

 I believe my clients are precious souls whom God brought to my office and gave me the responsibility to guide them through counseling in this stage in their lives. I believe my students are pursuing the same passion and call from God to be agents of change and healing through the counseling profession. God created me with the purpose of becoming a counselor to fulfill His plan to help others in crisis and in need. My gifts, skills, talents, and personality were purposefully placed in my life for Him to use me for His glory. The results of my efforts have been successful in God’s hands. I have seen people give testimony that my counseling services have changed their lives, have helped them and often times have served to inspire them to be agents of change to others.

 I am committed wholeheartedly to foster and support a society that is more enlightened, just, and humane through my life and work. Evidence of that is my whole life after I received God’s calling to counseling. I left my family of origin to come to a country that I had never been before, to a non-dominant language, to go back to school at the age of 30 and do a work I had never done before. I have devoted my life to the work and ministry of counseling for the love of the Lord and the love to others.

**Personal Privilege**

 This prompt was difficult for me, nonetheless enlightening because I do not come from a place of privilege. I am from Puerto Rico, the smallest island from the archipelago of the Greater Antilles in the Caribbean Sea. Puerto Rico is not even a state, it is a Commonwealth, a Free-Associated State. The town I come from is one of the smallest towns on the east side of the island. Although Puerto Rico’s school system teaches English, the common and first language is Spanish. My family is from low socio-economic status, my skin color is brown, and I am a single female.

All this explanation means that to be at the place and position I am today as a Ph.D. student, living in Texas, having a private practice for 13 years and holding a License in Professional Counseling has not come because I was privileged. It has come first, because God has given me his strength and favor; and second because I have worked non-stop as hard as I could since I was 14 years old. I have been at a disadvantage in many ways; however, I decided that I would not allow anything or anyone to limit what I could do for me and my family.

God has placed amazing people along my way to encourage and help me continue moving forward but it came as a result of my personal efforts. I had to prove myself, I had to prove that I could do it and that me being a woman of color in a White Land would not limit me. I had to face many difficulties and challenges, but I did not let that limit me or limit what God could do through me. I really believe that we hold will power and determination to rise above all challenges and injustices (with God’s help) to tell the society that we can create social justice for ourselves too.

**The Nature of Oppression**

When I think about the nature of oppression and myself, I do have to say that this section was difficult to me because I don’t like to look at the times where I have been mistreated and mildly oppressed. I was oppressed at my first job as a counselor in a community agency. My respectful attitude was mistaken by passivity and lack of assertiveness. I was the only counselor required to work weekends and at the shelter while other counselors were not required. I was the only counselor on call and my salary was less than the rest of the staff. I was the only bilingual counselor in the agency and I was the only one with a full case-load. I was not approved to take vacations and if I was sick, I still had to come and work. When I asked for my vacation time, the manager said that between my vacations and his, his were more important. I struggled to be assertive because I come from a culture where respect is first no matter what and more so if there is a power differential.

For a while, I contributed to the perpetuation of my oppression by not speaking up. At one point I was ready to resign when I decided to pray and with some self-reflection, I came to this thought, “If I quit now, I will always quit when something is difficult, and I refuse to be a quitter because of someone else’s oppression.” This was a turning point for me. After I prayed, I took courage and went to my manager and expressed my concerns, my rights, and my requests. Interestingly, the manager gained respect for me and demonstrated a fair treatment after that conversation. I do not think I have used personal or professional authority or power in unjust ways because I know what it is to be mistreated.

**Becoming Multiculturally Literate**

 I enjoyed exploring this area of multicultural literacy since I love cultures. The only cultural differences I experienced in Puerto Rico where the people from other islands living in our island and the “Americans” living on the island as well. When I first left Puerto Rico at the age of 30 to go to the seminary to study the masters, I was fascinated by all the different cultures. I made friends with people from Korea, the Philippines, Africa, Europe, and other countries. Living in the United States served me to explore my multicultural heart and passion for other countries. I love to travel nationally and internationally. I have been to Greece, Turkey, Italy, China, and Central and South America. Traveling and having friends from other cultures is my way of cultivating my multicultural literacy.

I love to look at newspapers from other countries even if I don’t understand the language and although I speak English and Spanish, I would love to learn another language such as Italian or French. In one of my trips to Italy I tried to speak Italian and unfortunately, the person did not understand a word I said. However, he was gracious enough to encourage me for trying to speak their language and then with a smile he said “English?” It was hilarious, but the experience was great to help me feel what others who do not speak English feel. I think I am adventurous and open to new cultural experiences; which helps me greatly when I am doing counseling with someone from a different culture.

**Establishing a Personal Social Justice Compass**

 In establishing a Personal Social Justice Compass to direct my commitment to social justice, I can think of three principles. The article mentions four major documents; nonetheless, my first document to serve as my primary guide for establishing my personal compass is the Bible. My first principle is one based on God’s righteousness and justice and the fact that he created us all equal in his image. The foundation for my first principle comes from Psalm 89:14 where it says ““Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; steadfast love and faithfulness go before you;” “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them;” (Genesis 1:27); and Galatians 3:28 “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

 The second principle comes from “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood” (United Nations, 1948). I think the principle we should live by is that we are all brothers and sisters and should treat each other with dignity and equality. The third principle is drawn from the three other major documents cited by Lee (2007). I call it the Multicultural Advocacy Social Justice principle; which is that because all men are created equal by God and should be treated with dignity and equality we are called to treat each other fairly regardless of color, culture, nationality, gender, or sexual preference.

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