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### A Review of: "SHERR, MICHAEL E. (2010). On Becoming a Christian Educator in Social Work"

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## BOOK REVIEWS

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***SHERR, MICHAEL E. (2010). ON BECOMING A  
CHRISTIAN EDUCATOR IN SOCIAL WORK.  
BOTSFORD, CT: NORTH AMERICAN ASSOCIATION  
OF CHRISTIANS IN SOCIAL WORK (NACSW). 98 PAGES***

**DAVID SEDLACEK**

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This book is a refreshingly personal yet eminently professional look at what goes into making a Christian social work educator. Some would argue that the profession of social work itself, with its emphasis on service and social justice, is essentially Christian, and they would be correct in many ways. Others Christian social work educators go a step further by praying or having a devotional before class, and then teaching standard social work content. Michael Sherr, however, reframes Christian social work education, not as an add on, but as a committed passion to revealing Jesus Christ that permeates the entire life of the educator, and that flows from His person into every aspect of the educational process.

Dr. Sherr offers a candid look at his own journey of self-discovery, when as a new social work professor he was “unprepared and unqualified” to teach social work from a Christian perspective. When as a presenter at an North American Association of Christians in Social Work (NACSW) conference, a BSW student confronted the group of presenters with her pain of grieving the loss of a classmate 2 weeks earlier, and shared that her social work professors had totally missed the students’ needs: “The students no longer perceived the faculty as invested in helping them integrate faith and social work.” Shaken to his core, Sherr began a process of

personal introspection and professional investigation that resulted in the present work. He is honest about his personal struggles, his search for answers, and specific in his suggestions about a seamless integration of faith and learning (IFL). By emphasizing the word *becoming* in the book's title, the author highlights the reality that a Christian social work educator will always be in a process of growth in IFL just as there will be continual growth and transformation into the character of Jesus Christ. None will claim that they have arrived, but with humility will continue the walk with Christ that will season their lives and their instruction.

Having received a small research grant, Sherr and colleague George Hull conducted interviews with social work students at seven Christian schools purposively selected within a day's drive for either researcher. Data from this qualitative study were analyzed over a 2-year period resulting in the development of a seven-dimensional conceptual framework. The dimensions are:

- Developing and maintaining a thorough knowledge of Scripture;
- Living an active and consistent Christian life;
- Spending time and energy getting to know students;
- Supporting students while expecting academic excellence and challenging beliefs;
- Having expertise and experience in the curriculum areas of social work education I am responsible for;
- Providing specific integration of faith and learning (IFL) experiences with curriculum material; and
- Developing a classroom environment where students feel a sense of belonging and acceptance.

A chapter is devoted to each of these seven dimensions. In each chapter feedback from social work students who were surveyed is given along with Sherr's thoughts and attempts to integrate the suggestions into his life and educational effort.

As one who has sought to intentionally integrate faith and learning, I was humbled by this book. Michael Sherr has taken the concept and practice of IFL to an inspiring level. Not only are readers challenged to integrate faith into their students' learning, but to integrate faith into every aspect of their lives so that what is reflected in the classroom is a natural result of a life continually connected with Jesus Christ. I have learned much from this

book, and have been enriched by it. I would recommend it as required reading for all Christian social work educators. I believe that Christian educators from related disciplines would greatly benefit from its content as well.

**David Sedlacek**, PhD, LCSW, LMSW, is Professor of Social Work in the Department of Social Work, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.