



President's Perspective

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Amen: Youth Work & Spirituality

We work with children, youth and families who live on the margins! Spirituality can be an important part of the healing process. While youth work does not endorse any one denomination or faith tradition, we often receive powerful support from faith-based communities.

Just Google "youth work" and you'll find youth workers practicing in a full range of faith-based organizations. Examples run from the Salvation Army- caring for homeless youth and families, to the Jewish Board in urban communities and Catholic Charities, both of which have specialized in meeting the needs of immigrants getting started in a new life. Buddhist traditions of intentionality and meditation have also been infused into some of the latest trauma-informed care approaches.

Among the leaders in the youth work field is Holy Family Institute (HFI) in the Pittsburgh region. HFI utilizes both the Sanctuary Community approach and the Boys Town model. For more than 100 years, the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth have championed the needs of families. Once an old orphanage, today the campus has students from China preparing to enter college, a high school especially supporting African-American teens who want a career in business, deaf youth facing mental health challenges, and immigrant children who have walked all the way from Latin America to the United States.

To serve such complex constituencies, Holy Family needs to be at the top of its child and youth work (CYC) game. To do that, the campus has strongly

supported certification. Holy Family was one of the first to pioneer certification testing for youth workers. Holy Family is also a CYC pioneer in having many youth work leaders on the HFI Board, both past and present, like Karen Vander Ven, Martha Mattingly, Keino Fitzpatrick, Sheila Carter-Jones, Tyra Good and others.

One of the nation's top advocates for training and professional development is Sister Madeleine Rybicki, of the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth. She serves on the Association for Child and Youth Care Practice (ACYCP) board and the Certification Board (CYCCB). A role model who is mentoring many youth workers to become certified, Sister Madeleine is an expert trainer in more than sixty different CYC topics. She will travel with numerous ACYCP members to Vienna, Austria for the FICE (Federation International of Communities Educative) 2016 world conference. Sister Madeleine will present strategies on how to prevent suicidality among youth who desperately need our care.

Always representing the best of what we do, Sister Madeleine recently traveled to Philadelphia, where she saw His Holiness Pope Francis twice during the special activities and events designed to grow and sustain healthy families for our country and the world. Sister Madeleine thought it was very important that the Pope focused on the care of the young and the elderly, in many of his presentations and visits to the community.

The Pope says that there are two great evils; the way we isolate and distance ourselves from the elderly; and the lack of employment for our young people. He often asks us "to pray for me and if you don't pray send good wishes." I hope that society sends prayers and best wishes to all youth workers and the young in our care! Amen.