Teaching Spiritual Care of the Nonreligious

Part II of a conversation with Mary Martha Thiel

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SBNR even in *The New Yorker*

"I'm not religious—just anti-science."
Series of Webinars

Part 1: Spiritual Care of the Nonreligious (2/3/16)

Part 2: Teaching Spiritual Care of the Nonreligious

Part 3: Spiritual Care of the American “Jewish Not Religious” with Rabbi Sara Paasche-Orlow (3/2/16)
Focus on ourselves first

“You can only help another as far as you yourself have gone.”

- Randy Jones, ACPE Supervisor
Objectives and Outcomes

- Pastoral *Competence*
  - 309.4 to develop students’ awareness and understanding of how persons, social conditions, systems, and structures affect their lives and the lives of others and how to address effectively these issues through their ministry.
Objectives and Outcomes

• Pastoral *Formation*
  – 309.2 to develop students’ awareness of how their attitudes, values, assumptions, strengths, and weaknesses affect their pastoral care.
Objectives and Outcomes

• Pastoral *Reflection* 309.9 to develop students’ understanding and ability to apply the clinical method of learning.
We Supervisors also have learning to do in the areas of:

- Information about the nonreligious in our particular context (Pastoral Competence)
- Our own attitudes towards the nonreligious (Pastoral Formation)
- Skills and art of providing spiritual care to the nonreligious (Pastoral Reflection)
Why this is so complicated in practice

• Almost all CPE Supervisors and most CPE students are formed by a religious/spiritual tradition, and are invested in it.

• To see the integrity and challenges of a nonreligious worldview requires significant maturity in psychological and spiritual development.

• Fluency in code-switching may be a skill needing further development....
The spiritual care task is the same

- Spiritual Assessment:
  - Identify areas of spiritual strength
  - Identify areas of spiritual distress

- Make a Spiritual Care Plan
  - Building on spiritual strengths
    - To decrease spiritual distress
    - And increase spiritual well-being
  - Using pt’s language of meaning

- Evaluate your approach, adjust Plan as necessary
Can we help a student who experiences the sacred this way.....
learn to recognize it this way, too?
Can we help a staff chaplain who experiences sacred time this way....
Also come to recognize it in this format, too?
Some tools for exploring attitudes and assumptions
Can be frightening to enter a nonreligious worldview

• Bonhoeffer sought “Religionless Christianity”

• “… to be ‘non-religious’ is just a way of saying that the religious symbols of the past have lost their meaning. That does not mean the search for God is over; it means the quest for new and different symbols has been engaged.”
  - John Shelby Spong

• “If the command is to love God and neighbor, it helps to know the neighbor.”
  - Robin Meyers
Attitudes Exercise

• Brainstorm associations to the word “Religion”
• Brainstorm associations to the word “Spiritual”
• Brainstorm associations to the word “Atheist”
Experience of Religious/Spiritual Change Seminar

• Have students write an essay articulating their experience of changes in religious/spiritual beliefs/practices, and what led to these.

• Have each student read aloud their essay, allowing time for questions and comments.

• Encourage students to respond to peers whose experiences are most different from their own (practice for clinical work!).
Bridging worldviews

• Describe an aspect of your own tradition with which you are not comfortable. Give an example of when you experienced this discomfort.

• Describe a powerful or formative spiritual experience you have had outside your religious/spiritual tradition.

• Name something outside your tradition that you would include on your Somethings Greater than Myself list, that motivates who you are and hope to become?
Eavesdropping on our own internal conversations

• Explain the basics of Internal Family Systems.
• Ask each student to identify the part of them that responds positively to religion/spirituality.
• And the part that responds negatively to religion/spirituality.
• Write a verbatim between these parts
  – When offering spiritual care within a tradition
  – Across traditions
  – To someone who left your tradition
  – To someone with no tradition
Eavesdropping on our own internal conversations

• Each student reads conversation aloud
  – What was it like to eavesdrop on the part of you that feels positive about religion/spirituality?
  – What was it like to eavesdrop on the part of you that feels negative about religion/spirituality?
  – Did you discover any “hot button” issues that are difficult or costly for you in offering spiritual care?
  – What growing edges might you want to work on?
Some Tools for Teaching Skills
Explore your own context

• Read the Pew Study of Religion in America (2015).

• Explore in conversation
  – The demographics of your area
  – How are they changing, if they are?
  – The demographics of your institution
  – What might be the unique spiritual care needs of persons in your setting, and what skills might be needed to provide for them?
Treasure Hunt

• Make a list of the signs of secular spirituality you see in the institution in a given week.
• Share the lists and photos.
• What did you learn?
Treasure Hunt:
One of the most common SGTO’s
Treasure Hunt:
Another common SGTO
Treasure Hunt: Humor
Treasure Hunt:
Love
Treasure Hunt:
Meditative practices of the hands
Treasure Hunt:
Hospital’s PR and Marketing

The Shared Health Research Information Network (SHRINE) helps researchers overcome one of the greatest problems in population-based research: Compiling large groups of well-characterized patients. Eligible investigators may use the SHRINE web-based query tool to determine the aggregate total number of patients at participating hospitals who meet a given set of inclusion and exclusion criteria (currently demographics, diagnoses, medications, and selected laboratory values). Because counts are aggregate, patient privacy is protected.
Code Switch
your Spiritual Assessment Tool

For each theme:

• What might the theme sound like in religious/spiritual language?
• What might the theme sound like in secular language?
Practice “open-eyed prayer”

• Have students “translate” prayers from verbatims into secular open-eyed prayers
• Call on students to offer open-eyed prayers at the end of a session
• Have students translate beloved liturgical prayers into secular language
Invite a nonreligious speaker for conversation

• Ask person to share their spiritual journey
• Invite students to ask the person questions
• Wonder together how a sensitive chaplain might approach the guest if the guest were a patient
Verbatim as a Secular Spiritual Event

• Write a verbatim on an encounter with a person who expresses their spirituality in secular language.

• Identify the patient’s areas of
  – Spiritual distress
  – Spiritual strengths
  – Spiritual resources
  – And your spiritual care plan for this patient, using the patient’s own secular language
Verbatim as a Secular Spiritual Event

• What are your own theological reflections on the encounter?
• Working long-term with this person, might your own theology change, or not?
• How do you feel about your answer to the above question in terms of your own pastoral identity and authority?
• What is at stake theologically for you?
Can be frightening

 Jesús, I'm afraid I'm losing my faith!

 Sucks, don't it?
The Faith Styles Wheel (Mabry 2006)

- Ethical Humanists
- Religious Agnostics
- Fallen Believers
- Spiritual Eclectics
- Liberal Believers
- Traditional Believers
Discuss:

• Where are you on Mabry’s wheel?

• Did you start there, or have you shifted? What did the shift feel like?

• Providing spiritual care to which point on the wheel is the biggest challenge for you?

• What are your spiritual care temptations, given your location on the wheel?
Finding new language and metaphors

- Poetry
- Music
- Art
- Books of photographs
- Make a personal resources book
Possible assignments

• Plan a secular memorial service for a nonreligious person
• Plan a service for your institution following a trauma

• Present and discuss each service.
  – Challenges?
  – Depth of meaning, hope, comfort?
Summary

• Seek out contextualized Information
• Work at keeping an attitude of compassionate curiosity
• Keep developing skills over your career