



MSW Director's Welcome Remarks

Delivered – 9/27/2018

Welcome, new students: the class of MSW 2020 and the Advanced Standing class of 2019. Welcome back to the class of MSW 2019. As I welcome you to this academic year, I am very aware that we are here on a momentous day. I have been listening to and watching Dr. Christine Blasey Ford's testimony all morning; no doubt many of you did, too.

As difficult and sometimes heartbreaking it was to bear witness to her courageous testimony, it also reminded me why it matters that we do what we do as clinical social workers. It reminded me how being truly seen, and heard, and believed, is absolutely the crucial first step in the process of healing. As a clinical social worker who has worked with survivors of many different types of trauma that resulted in diminishing one's human dignity, I know and believe that there is tremendous power in bearing witness to and affirming one's truths, as often complicated as they are. Our community members often come to us clinical social workers with dehumanizing experiences –whether they were caused by interpersonal violence, intersecting structural oppression, ongoing displacement due to the effects of colonialism and settler colonialism, or (almost always) a combination of those factors. Through our work of being truly and authentically present, we honor and affirm those experiences so that not only their experiences are humanized but also our common human dignity is restored. Because our humanity is interdependent, we are partners in restoring human dignity and worth through the journey of healing. Clinical social workers are absolutely needed now, perhaps more than ever. Believe me; I would, someday, like us not to be needed because it is a just and equitable world. But right now, we are needed.

I am also reminded that the job of clinical social workers is not only to help and heal but also to challenge and change those forces of injustice. I know that it's sometimes hard not to feel demoralized when faced with so much ongoing injustice. However, I would like to remind you that we have power. Power is not always top-down or restricting. As Elaine Pinderhughes says, we have different types of power: power over, power to, power within, and power with. We have the capacity to use these powers to bring social change, together. We have power WITHIN us to speak truth to power to those who use their power to oppress and silence. We have power TO act and to organize so that we can bring power WITH all of us to have power OVER important decisions that affect all of our lives, and especially the lives of the most vulnerable among us. It is through our critical and reflective use of power, changes can happen and we can collectively make progress in our pursuit of social and economic justice; yes, even in the face of multiple and intersecting oppressions.

One of the ways to exercise our power is through political advocacy and voting, and this is why I am glad that the WA State NASW has joined us today to help folks register to vote. Some may say that one vote does not matter, but if you have seen the Senate hearing today, you know your vote matters in effecting change. So those of us who have the privilege of voting, we must use that power.

As I was thinking about what I wanted to tell you today while listening to Dr. Ford's testimony --- I actually had a whole another welcome remark that I had written a month ago, but I decide to set that aside--- I found myself starting to feel more hopeful for our capacity to effect change together. And I am grateful to be here, especially today, in this community of social workers, social work educators, social work students, and staff, who are striving to enact change with our collective unwavering attention to social justice. So, thank you. Let us learn and work together. Please talk to your community; strategize how we might work together and be there for one another, and to build resiliency together.

I welcome you to our community of powerful agents of change. Let's do this! Thank you.

Hye-Kyung Kang, MSW, PhD
Chair, Dept. of Social Work
Director and Associate Professor, MSW Program
Seattle University