



SPIRITUALITY HELPS PEOPLE THRIVE

IN DIFFICULT TIMES, RESEARCHER FINDS

The lotus flower is a perfect metaphor for the human condition, Ed Canda believes. “The lotus grows out of water that is murky and dirty. Its roots rise through the water and its leaves grow as pads resting on the surface, open to the sky. Then, a beautiful flower blooms,” says Canda, MSW, Ph.D., professor at the University of Kansas School of Social Welfare and director of the Spiritual Diversity and Social Work Initiative. “Even though the human condition involves suffering, out of that we can blossom.”

As a scholar and researcher focused on cross-cultural and international social work and spiritual and religious diversity, Canda has widely explored how people’s spiritual beliefs and practices help them build resilience, achieve recovery, and grow to reach their fullest potential by approaching adversity and challenges as opportunities to develop insight and deeper satisfaction.

On Nov. 4, Canda shared about his work during a School of Social Welfare Impact Talk, “Growth and Transformation Through Crisis, Illness, and Disability.” Spirituality, he says, relates to a person’s source of life meaning, purpose, and hope. (recording of the Impact Talk available on the KU School of Social Welfare website)

Early in his career, Canda and physician colleagues did research that sparked his interest in the role of spirituality in health resilience and profoundly influenced his work at KU. The study surveyed 402 people with cystic fibrosis (CF), including interviews with 16 participants, to see if they engaged in non-medical treatments in dealing with chronic illness. This was an innovative early



*CANDA, WHO JOINED THE
FACULTY OF THE SCHOOL
OF SOCIAL WELFARE IN
1989, WILL RETIRE AT THE
END OF 2019*

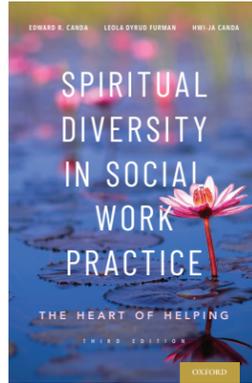


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study in the field of spirituality and health. Canda's personal experience as someone who has CF piqued his curiosity about how others coped with the ongoing challenges of the chronic illness.

The studies found that about 60 percent of people reported using practices related to spirituality. Interviewees commonly said that even though chronic illness is difficult, it offers positive spiritual possibilities: It made them more empathetic, increased their desire to help others, spurred them to examine their meaning and purpose in life, and helped them experience personal growth, even if they approached death.

Canda has used the insights gained in all his research to help social welfare students cultivate the knowledge, values, and skills they need to help people incorporate their spiritual beliefs and practices, whether religious or non-religious, into the helping process, when appropriate.



At KU in the 1990s, Canda established one of the country's first social work masters courses on spiritual diversity. His co-authored book, "Spiritual Diversity in Social Work Practice," is the most widely used text on this subject. Next May, the national Society for Spirituality and Social Work, which Canda established at KU in 1990, will honor his career contributions.

"Many social workers did not feel comfortable using spirituality in their work," Canda shares. "But for our clients, spirituality is often a key component of their lives."

Thanks to Canda's work, social workers include this essential component in their practice more often, allowing more people to harness the power of their own spiritual beliefs to draw strength and bloom despite adversity, much like a lotus.

COLLABORATIONS SPARKS

INTERNATIONAL FOCUS ON SPIRITUALITY

Ed Canda is a student of the world, and of the world's religions and philosophies, in particular. He believes that understanding the spiritual perspectives and practices of people around the world can enhance the work of social welfare professionals.

Canda has welcomed many international students and visiting scholars to the School of Social Welfare to collaborate on scholarship and research. He also travels the globe to meet with scholars who share his academic interests. He most frequently served as a visiting teacher or researcher at universities in South Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, and the Czech Republic.

"My goal has been to plant seeds with friends and colleagues in various countries, and encourage that to develop into whatever makes sense in that country's context," he explains. "I have learned a tremendous amount that way."



EQUIPPING KANSAS

MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

Ed Canda knows that mental health professionals are often not comfortable incorporating a client's spiritual beliefs into their recovery plan, even though his research shows many clients view spirituality as an important source of support.

So Canda has worked to equip mental health providers with the training and tools they need to do so, when appropriate. He helped create a free resource for mental health professionals in Kansas and elsewhere that includes the principles of strengths-based and spiritually-sensitive mental health work and provides simple guidelines to follow.

It is available to download at:

[BIT.LY/STRENGTHS-MENTALHEALTH-TOOL](https://bit.ly/strengths-mentalhealth-tool)



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