

PRACTICE CASE A: SOCIAL MISSION CONTEXT

Sam is a long-time employee at the Centre of Care. He is involved in providing several services at the centre. Part of his job includes stocking food bank shelves and helping clients choose their groceries for the week. Among his co-workers is Marnie. She used to be a client and has since become a volunteer at the centre.

Marnie has shared some of her story with Sam. She had been a small business owner of a sewing store. When her business went under, her partner left her and their three children. Marnie moved into a small apartment and looked for a new job, eventually finding part-time work that paid minimum wage. Even though her sewing skills meant she could clothe her children for less, she had to choose between paying the rent and buying food. Marnie found herself seeking assistance from the food bank. There, she was connected to other supports that helped her rebuild her self-confidence. She soon began volunteering in her spare time and became well-liked at the food bank. When a full-time position at the centre became available, Marnie applied and was hired.

At the end of the day, Sam and Marnie are responsible for cleaning up the food bank. They tidy the shelves and properly store any unclaimed perishable food. If there are food items that will spoil overnight, the centre's practice is to allow staff to take them home for personal consumption. Otherwise, the centre has a zero-tolerance policy for theft. Any employee or volunteer found to be stealing will be immediately dismissed.

Marnie always shows great interest in the perishables that are on their way out. Sam doesn't mind—although neither of them makes a whole lot, Marnie has kids and Sam only has himself to feed.

Lately, however, Sam has seen Marnie make some questionable judgments about which perishables are fit to stay in the centre's refrigerators. One night, he observes her stuffing a fresh head of lettuce into her backpack. Sam brushes it off, thinking she has perhaps noticed a rotten spot that he missed. Another night, Sam sees Marnie carry out a small bag of oranges that had been part of a donation received earlier that day. He had inspected the fruit himself and knew it would be good for many more days. It is not long before Marnie begins lifting a can of soup here and a bag of rice there.

Marnie's behaviour continues and, on an almost daily basis, Sam sees her skim a little off the top—never a lot, but always something. Sam starts to feel uncomfortable with the situation. Even if it's just a single item each day that Marnie is taking, the food is meant for clients of the centre. Sam wonders if Marnie realizes what she's doing is theft and if she is still finding it difficult to make ends meet. Sam also wonders if any of his fellow employees or volunteers have noticed Marnie's behaviour. In a way, he wishes they would. If it is a matter of money, Sam doesn't want to be the one to put Marnie and her family at greater risk by confronting her or reporting her actions.

What should Sam do?

Use the worksheets above to work through an ethical resolution to this issue.

PRACTICE CASE B: CORPS MISSION CONTEXT

Lieutenant Andrea is the corps officer of Greenbridge Corps. For a while, she had provided pastoral care to a man named Bill. The care relationship began when Bill separated from his wife, Elaine, who had left the corps many years prior. Bill also struggles with mental health issues. For this reason, Lieutenant Andrea made sure that Bill was also seeing a licensed therapist.

During a pastoral care meeting, Bill shared an experience he described as the breaking point in his marriage: an incident of physical abuse. He and Elaine were in a heated argument when Elaine shoved him hard against the wall before storming out of the house. Bill had been surprised by her strength. He was embarrassed that the shove had resulted in bruising. Lieutenant Andrea showed sympathy and asked Bill if he had disclosed this to his therapist, to which Bill replied that he had. Bill went on to explain that he wanted Lieutenant Andrea to know the full situation as Elaine's actions made him realize he could no longer stay married, as he felt the situation could only get worse. Lieutenant Andrea told Bill that she knew this must be uncomfortable for him and that she would continue to support him. After a few more thoughts were shared between them, Lieutenant Andrea prayed and the meeting ended.

Over time, the pastoral care meetings with Bill petered out. While Lieutenant Andrea made sure to greet him on Sunday mornings, it wasn't long before Bill stopped attending worship altogether. Bill remained loosely connected to the corps through family and friends. Lieutenant Andrea tried to reach out to Bill by email twice but received no response. On occasion, she would ask one of Bill's family members how Bill was doing. They reported he was fine and thanked Lieutenant Andrea for asking. About a year later, Lieutenant Andrea was part of a leadership team hosting a community event on the theme of healthy relationships, including friendships, parent-child relationships and marriages. One of the speakers was a social mission employee known for her expertise in helping marginalized women safely move out of abusive relationships.

The following Wednesday, Lieutenant Andrea received an email from Bill which read: "I heard about the talk you held, and I CAN'T BELIEVE how HYPOCRITICAL you are. You brought in someone to talk about spousal abuse. But when I told you I was abused, you did NOTHING."

Lieutenant Andrea is not sure how to respond. She thinks back to the meeting when Bill disclosed the abuse to her. She remembers she had made sure that the disclosure had already been made to the therapist. She had presumed that the therapist would have encouraged Bill to report the abuse or might even have reported it himself.

What should Lieutenant Andrea do?

Use the worksheets above to work through an ethical resolution to this issue.