

## Community-Based Spiritual Life Supports

### A working definition

It is essential that there is some agreement across programs concerning community-based spiritual life supports. The following is a working definition:

Community-based spiritual life supports are those activities that support the spiritual life of a person with developmental disabilities and are provided in the context of the local congregation or worshiping community, except in the case of prayers and devotions that take place in the person's home and may be supported by family or staff.

As a general principle, the activity, program or environment that is the most inclusive and least restrictive is the one that is preferred, unless the person/family/guardian makes another choice. For example, an inclusive Bible class in the local congregation is the most inclusive and least restricted and should be pursued, unless the person or legally authorized representative makes a different choice.

Components of community-based spiritual life supports include:

1. Personal choice – Personal choice will be exercised in the practice of spiritual life in the local program. People will be consulted concerning their choices by use of the religious life assessment, its successor or another similar instrument.
2. Inclusion - Inclusion in the local congregation will be the norm. Where appropriate, people will be in a mainstream class for Bible study. People will go to worship with their friends and mentors, as they choose. People will be involved in fellowship and service opportunities. Congregation surveys will be completed with each congregation and updated annually. PMCs, Chaplains and other staff will provide training as resources, as appropriate, to ensure that inclusion and full participation of people with developmental disabilities is the norm for local congregations, while recognizing the personal choices of each person.
3. Worship - Worship will be a weekly experience for people who choose to go. Staff will support and encourage weekly worship attendance, for the spiritual well being of the person and for support of daily Christian living. Where there is a chaplain, worship will be offered at least on a weekly basis. This worship should not be seen as taking the place of worship at the congregation of the person's choice, so that persons don't attend worship in the local congregation, because they have gone to worship at the program during the week.
4. Bible Study - Where feasible, Bible study will be offered by the local congregation. Given the principle of most inclusive and least restricted, the first option is a class that includes people with developmental disabilities in an age-appropriate class. The second option is a class for people with special learning needs and is taught at the church. The third option is a class that is taught in the home of people with developmental disabilities. Where BLHS chaplains and chaplaincy representatives are available to teach Bible

classes, the classes should be taught at least on a weekly basis and should not normally take the place of classes taught by members of the local the local congregation.

5. Pastoral Care – Pastoral care will be provided by the pastor of the local congregation or the pastor's designee. Pastoral care includes visits to the person's home, visits to the person when ill or hospitalized, counsel and encouragement, presiding at any rites that signify passages in the person's life, including presiding at the person's funeral. Religious Life staff from BLHS may assist in pastoral care or may provide care in addition to that provided by the local congregation, but should not provide care to the exclusion of the local congregation. BLHS staff should communicate with the local congregation's pastor and staff much as they would with BLHS Religious Life staff, while keeping the Religious Life staff fully informed of such communications. Consent to communicate health and other information, if that information is helpful to pastoral care and involvement in the ministry of the congregations, should be secured and documented.

6. Devotions – Daily devotions will be led by staff and people living in the home. People living in the home will be encouraged to attend, but will exercise choice.

7. Staff – Staff will support individual spiritual life choices, regardless of personal preferences. Encouragement and support do not mean coercion. Encouragement does mean encouraging a positive response, when possible, just as one would encourage a person to go to work on Monday morning.

8. Volunteers – Chaplains, PMCs, management, and staff will seek volunteer support to assist in transportation, education, worship, and other spiritual life supports. State law must be followed in use of volunteers.

9. Church Membership – A person's church membership will be at the congregation, or at least the denomination, of the person's choice. If no choice is expressed by the individual, the first option for worship attendance will be a local Lutheran congregation. If the Lutheran congregation proves unsatisfactory for the person, another congregation will be sought. The nature and duration of concerns that prove unsatisfactory must be documented. Religious Life staff will facilitate the change in worship location in consultation with the person and management staff.

10. Lutheran Congregation relationships – Attachment to a local Lutheran congregation may prove beneficial if people in the home are from more than one congregation or denomination. Such attachment may be helpful in providing supports, encouragement and friendships to the people being supported at the program.

11. Transportation – Transportation will be provided to the Lutheran church, if one or more people attend the local Lutheran church. If none of the people attend a Lutheran church, transportation may be provided to another congregation. If a wheel chair accessible vehicle is needed for one or more people and there is a variety in church

affiliation other than Lutheran, transportation to one of the ministry sites through a mutually agreeable alternation in church attendance may be devised.

Earl H. Bleke

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