



National Apostolate for
Inclusion Ministry

Envisioning a Catholic Church Where People with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities Are Welcomed for Their Gifts and Their Presence

Spiritual Supports: A Definition

By Charlotte Hawkins Shepard, Ph.D., Erik W. Carter, Ph.D. and the Reverend William C. Gaventa: May 2009

The term "Spiritual Supports" refers to various relationships, opportunities and types of assistance that allow people to participate in a faith community (or other spiritual activities and organizations) and to explore and express their faith in personally meaningful ways. Such supports might be instrumental in helping people to explore further this dimension of their lives, make connections with a community of faith, maintain their current level of involvement, or deepen and/or change their current involvement. The following are some examples of spiritual supports:

Supporting ways for a person to become a member in a congregation:

- Visiting with a pastor, clergy, priest or other person to talk about spiritual interests
- Visiting congregations in the community to find one that is welcoming and reflects one's spirituality
- Providing help finding and connecting with a new congregation
- Providing or arranging transportation to and from congregational activities
- Finding someone from the congregation with whom a person can sit and get to know
- Developing a circle of support within a congregation for a person
- Developing a support plan that can be used to foster inclusion during worship or other congregational activities
- Helping a person explore ways to serve during worship services or elsewhere through the congregation

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Supporting individual spiritual practices that reflect choice and tradition, such as prayer, religious holidays, grief rituals and other life-cycle rituals, and other practices.

Supporting opportunities to be involved in other forms of spiritual activities, including nature, service, music, retreats, or other activities, groups, or places that provide the chance to express spiritual interests:

- Attending a community class, workshop, or talk about religion or spiritual issues

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