

# Spiritual Wellbeing

## Position Statement

### Position

Baptist Care Australia defines spiritual well-being as an indication of a person's experience of personal integration, meaning, purpose and peace. It encompasses a person's life-giving relationship with others, their own culture, the arts, the environment, and God, the significant or the sacred.

All Baptist Care Australia agencies seek to provide care in a spiritually sensitive way. Spiritual needs are part of the whole picture of caring for people and all staff play a role in addressing people's spiritual needs. Some care workers specialise in spiritual care, but Baptist Care Australia agencies support all staff members to care about spirituality. A staff member may not be a physiotherapist, yet they can be aware of and helpful with people's posture and mobility. Staff can similarly be aware, respectful and helpful regarding a person's spiritual needs.

The organisations that are members of Baptist Care Australia emphasise the links between person-centred care, holistic care and spirituality. They proactively train and develop employees so that they are able to understand and support the spiritual wellbeing of the people they care for.

### Background

This policy sets out a clear framework and principles of spiritual wellbeing for all Baptist Care Australia members. Individual members will apply these principles in their own organisations according to local workforce and organisational needs, and available resources.

People throughout history have shown a strong tendency to identify with, or relate to a reality greater than themselves – often a spiritual Being or reality. People express this through religion, culture, the arts, relationship to the environment and in other ways. Such practices continue to be significant for people and enhance the quality of their lives – by praying for their needs, finding peace of mind, reconciling relationships or addressing other issues of human existence, connection and meaning.

The World Health Organization, recognising this tendency and its effects in people's lives, says, "... spirituality ... should be more routinely addressed in assessment of quality of life ...".<sup>1</sup> Other researchers in the field regard spirituality as not merely one component of health and wellbeing but

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<sup>1</sup>) WHOQOLSRPB Group. A cross-cultural study of spirituality, religion, and personal beliefs as components of quality of life. Soc Sci Med. 2006 Mar; 62(6):1486-97. Epub 2005 Sep 13

(WHOQOLSRPB Group is the World Health Organization Spirituality, Religion and Personal Beliefs group who do research on the WHO's Quality Of Life instrument-WHOQOL)

as the envelope containing all the components of wellbeing – the biological, psychological and social dimensions of life, for example, are all embraced by a person’s spirituality.

The definition of spiritual wellbeing used by Baptist Care Australia includes the following concepts.

- *“Personal integration”* - all aspects of a person are important individually for well-being. Furthermore, harmony among all the aspects is significant for the person’s greater good.
- *“Meaning”* - acknowledges firstly that a simple act of service can carry a particular meaning for a person, and secondly that people contemplate the ultimate meaning in life – why am I here? What is the point of my life?
- *“Peace”* – this term also embraces a range of meaning from, firstly, the simple ability to take physical rest (peace) to secondly, relationships of care, justice and mercy with others and the environment, to thirdly, peace with God/the significant/the sacred and with self.
- *“The person’s life-giving relationship with ...”* – this expression is used to indicate that connectedness to self, others, the environment and the sacred are important to a person’s spiritual wellbeing in times of joy and pain. Both positive and negative experiences can contribute to one’s growth and development.

The above description contains much that will be shared by people of various faiths or of no faith. While the details of religious expression vary greatly, the core understandings of what constitutes human well-being - particularly spiritual well-being - have considerable material in common.

People of all faiths and of no faith are warmly welcomed by Baptist Care Australia agencies. People may come to programs and facilities with questions about spiritual topics, whether they be questions about the Baptist name or something else.

Baptists comprise approximately 3% of the Australian population, and are part of the mainstream of Christian believers world-wide. Their beliefs and practices are not well-known in Australia and therefore can sometimes be misrepresented.

Less well understood is the Baptist principle of Individual Liberty (the principle as experienced personally) or Toleration (the same principle when exercised toward people other than myself). It is a Baptist principle to hold one’s beliefs strongly and recommend them to others *while at the same time* strongly defending the right of others to hold their own beliefs as long as they do not harm others.

This organisational culture of respecting individual liberty frees carers to engage, attend to and dialogue with clients, appreciate their personal experiences and viewpoints, and understand that various people may give quite varied meanings to the same experience even when shared at the same time and place.

Some examples of experiences having diverse meanings for people are outlined in the below table.

Familiar spiritual term and words	Various ways of living the concept
Faith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• positive expectation</li> <li>• face adversity with confidence</li> <li>• belief/trust in God or a higher power</li> </ul>
Hope	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• believe in life after death</li> <li>• believe that good can overcome bad</li> </ul>
Love	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• unconditionally seek the best for others</li> <li>• believe love can overcome hate</li> <li>• be accepting of another</li> </ul>
Peace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• inner calm under stress</li> <li>• live in a positive relationship with God, the sacred or the significant and/or the environment</li> <li>• live justly toward and with others</li> </ul>
Forgiveness, Confession	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• release myself and/or others from my expectation, resentment or pay-back</li> <li>• at peace with God or universe</li> </ul>
Worship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• express love for God, the sacred (e.g. nature) or the significant</li> <li>• be contemplative and receive or manifest ideas, inspiration, aspiration, inner peace</li> </ul>
Involvement with a religious community or attending public worship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• keeping company with positive and/or like-minded inspiring people</li> <li>• serving</li> <li>• volunteering</li> </ul>
Spiritual growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• development in personal prayer and other spiritual practices e.g. Bible study</li> <li>• grow in ability to be interested in others</li> <li>• show kindness</li> <li>• meditation</li> <li>• self-awareness and humility</li> </ul>
Pastoral care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• speak with professional or friend re personal development or life-attitudes</li> <li>• interest in the whole person</li> <li>• attend to spiritual needs/ worship</li> </ul>
Counselling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being listened-to, companioned and/or de-briefed from a stressful state</li> <li>• Receive professional guidance for life issues</li> </ul>
Receive personal ministry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• being prayed for, laying on of hands, or receiving communion</li> <li>• attended to by a compassionate person who is “there for you”</li> <li>• receive counselling and support</li> </ul>
Intrinsic spirituality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• spiritual practice for inner growth</li> <li>• everyone has a right to express his/her own spirituality</li> </ul>
At peace re ultimate questions (Who am I? Am I valued? Do I belong? Where am I going?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• self-awareness and acceptance</li> <li>• positive self-image</li> <li>• personal development</li> <li>• finding meaning, purpose and belonging</li> </ul>

Spiritual strength	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• faith as a way of life</li> <li>• treat suffering as an offering to God or a character strengthener</li> <li>• belief in 'a greater purpose'</li> <li>• appeal to a higher power, higher purpose,</li> <li>• trust, believe good can overcome evil</li> <li>• resilience in the face of struggle and pain</li> </ul>
Prayer support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• supported by the prayers of others</li> <li>• supported by others' presence in times of distress (emotional or psychological)</li> </ul>
Heaven, Hell, after-life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• alternate belief systems</li> <li>• beliefs about grief, dying, death, life after death</li> </ul>
Reconciled or come to peace about non-reconciliation with family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• one-ness of all</li> <li>• common humanity a powerful motivation in relationships and conflict.</li> </ul>
Grow in ability to be interested in others, show kindness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• positive energy</li> <li>• compassion</li> <li>• selflessness and altruism</li> </ul>

## Guidelines

Here are some suggestions about how to apply this policy in practice in a professional caring environment.

- It's always about the person – ask, "What is your need?" "What would be helpful to you right now?"
- Respect a person's need for silence. Conversation is not always what people look for.
- Be sensitive to the person's state of energy or tiredness, health or illness.
- Be aware that there can be varied cultural needs. Enquire politely in this regard and respect and value people's unique cultural beliefs and practices.
- It's not about you. If someone shares a story from his/her life, resist the desire to tell your similar story.
- Let people know you are listening TO THEM by reflecting back the emotion you think they are communicating e.g. "You must have been very afraid", "Seems like you felt angry", "You seem sad.", "That must have made you very happy"... and *stay with their story*.
- Ask, "Would you like to talk to a Spiritual Carer?" and arrange the chaplain to visit.
- Ask, "Would you like to talk to a person/leader of your faith group?" and arrange the visit.

## Why we care

Baptist Care Australia is a passionate, innovative, Christian association of Baptist organisations around Australia. Our members bring life-enriching care to their clients and residents, their families and communities. Our care for people arises from our belief that God desires wholeness in all

aspects of life. Our collective mission is to express Christ's love as we serve people and includes addressing their physical, emotional and spiritual needs.

We contribute substantially to the economic, physical and spiritual well-being of our community. We are a substantial employer with around 9,000 employees nationally. Our annual turn-over is in excess of \$700 million. We deliver services direct to tens of thousands of individuals each year.

Our services include:

- aged care services in residential, home based and retirement community settings
- disability and mental health services
- services for people living in social housing
- services for refugees and asylum seekers
- out of home care for children and services for at-risk young people
- a wide range of community services focused on alleviating poverty, homelessness and disadvantage.