

# **Spiritual Support Professional Certification**

## **AAIDD Religion and Spirituality Division**

### **Certification Process**

The certification process of the Religion and Spirituality Division of the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities seeks to ensure that individuals whose work focuses on providing and/or facilitating ministry with people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD) meet standards of competence as outlined in this document.

Certification is designed for those persons who promote spiritual support among persons with I/DD. This includes, but is not necessarily limited to lay ministers, clergy, rabbis, chaplains in various settings, and others whose work satisfies the criteria.

There are many qualified and dedicated religious workers in the field of I/DD who may not meet the certification requirements found in this document. It is not the intent of this certification process to diminish this work at all. Nor does this process, in itself, guarantee the performance of persons who are certified.

With the complexity of spiritual support both in residential and community-based services spiritual support professionals must demonstrate competencies in a variety of areas. These include:

1. religious and theological understanding and practice;
2. understanding of the philosophies, values and social issues within the field of I/DD;
3. the ability to
  - a) apply these understandings to ministry,
  - b) work with and within social and faith community systems,
  - c) relate to persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities and family members/support providers.

Certification is intended to indicate that the individual has demonstrated completion of the required education and training and has achieved the level of competence necessary for effective pastoral ministry with persons with I/DD.

1. In order to achieve full certification, the applicant must have completed two full years in work related to providing or facilitating pastoral ministry with persons with I/DD. A two-year Provisional Certification may be granted to applicants who have completed other requirements but who have not yet completed the two years of service.
2. Applicants may apply for “equivalency” evaluation of work, training, and experience to meet minimum requirements. Specific requests should be directed to the chair of the Certification Committee. The Committee will have full authority to grant or deny equivalencies.

3. Basic requirements for certification:

- a) Graduation with a baccalaureate degree from an accredited college/university, preferably with a degree related to human services or religious studies.

OR

- b) Graduation from an accredited seminary, or equivalent theological education.

OR

- c) Faith community authorization/ appointment to a position directly related to providing ministry to/with persons with I/DD.

OR

- d) At least one full year of advanced training in the field of I/DD. This training may be one of the following:
  - i. At least a year of graduate education in special education or a related field with demonstration of the ability to relate and integrate current emphases in I/DD to pastoral ministry.

- ii. A mentoring process with a certified member of the Religion and Spirituality Division. The mentoring process must be reviewed and approved by the Certification Committee as equivalent to a) or b) above. It is also expected that the equivalent of a year of specialized training would take two or three years or more in a mentoring process.
- iii. Any equivalent combination of (i), (ii), or (iii).

AND

4. Personal and professional characteristics:

- a) Demonstration of personal and pastoral identity.
- c) Theology that is consistent with professional spiritual support function.
- g) Ability to:
  - i. function with peers in joint ministry, administrators and professionals in other disciplines.
  - ii. facilitate the provision of ministry in the most normal manner possible including appropriate community focus.
  - iii. develop consultative relationships with clergy as well as professional and direct care staff.
  - iv. conduct educational programs for clergy, volunteers, students, and staff of agencies.
  - v. relate an understanding of ministry in a manner that demonstrates the candidate's evaluation of his/her own progress and development.

5. Understanding of:

- a) one's own dynamics as minister and one's relationships to others.
- b) the enabling and facilitating role of ministry with persons with I/DD.
- c) the limitation of that role.

6. Objectivity in assessing pastoral function and professional identity.

### **Application Content and Process**

The application reflects the education, training, experience, and work history of the applicant and includes the following, sent to the chair of the Certification Committee by April 1:

1. Application form
2. \$150 application fee (check or money order payable to the Religion and Spirituality Division/AAIDD)
3. Evidence of current AAIDD/R&SD membership or a completed membership application with membership fee.
4. A complete autobiographical statement, 8-12 pages in length (double spaced). This should be a reasonably full, yet concise, narrative of the applicant's life pilgrimage, noting family of origin, developmental themes and events, education, religious/spiritual formation, present family constellation, and employment history. In the narrative the applicant should emphasize how these factors have shaped him/her as a minister.
5. Documents giving evidence of completion of the education, training, and ecclesiastical requirements including evaluations of advanced or specialized training. **NOTE:** This will also include a brief qualitative evaluation of compliance with mission statement of AAIDD, which is expected to be available on-line.
6. Letters of reference from:
  - a) Immediate supervisor **or** the administrator of the facility or agency giving evidence of the applicant's professional competence
  - b) A local clergy person supporting the applicant's ability to relate ministry with persons with I/DD to clergy and lay persons in local faith communities.
  - c) If applicable, the appropriate ecclesiastical authority stating current endorsement and/or authorization/appointment to pastoral ministry in an assignment directly related to ministry with persons with I/DD.

7. The applicant will submit a written paper, 15-20 pages in length (double spaced), presenting his/her ministry and how that ministry relates to current best practices in work with individuals with I/DD, inclusive of acknowledgement of spirituality and faith for individuals with I/DD. The paper will include:
  - a) A detailed description of his/her ministry with persons with I/DD or their families that includes specific examples which illustrate incorporation of current state of the art in his/her work.
  - b) Perspectives on her/his theory of pastoral care and theological foundations for ministry with persons with I/DD.
  - c) Reference to the history and development of secular and religious approaches to services and supports for persons with I/DD.
  - d) Applicant's bibliography will reflect the depth and breadth of his/her knowledge base of this subject. A current bibliography of resources is available on the Religion and Spirituality Division website [www.aaidreligion.org](http://www.aaidreligion.org). It is highly recommended that applicants access this and acquaint themselves with pertinent resources. It is expected that the paper will reflect knowledge and information from those resources. Any additional noteworthy references would also be appreciated.
  - e) In summary the applicant's documents should reflect his/her pastoral and facilitation skills in three areas:
    - i. Pastoral Ministry with persons with I/DD.
    - ii. Pastoral relationships with families, staff, agency personnel, and community clergy.
    - iii. Linkage of applicant's pastoral program with the broader community.
8. Applicants will be expected to appear at their own expense before the committee in person or using video conferencing technology such as Skype. During this meeting they will present an extended discussion of one of the examples in their paper.

9. Applicants who are certified by another recognized pastoral care organization, such as the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education, the Association of Professional Chaplains, The National Association of Jewish Chaplains, or the National Association of Catholic Chaplains **are not required to appear**, provided they submit all pertinent evaluations and other relevant documents from a peer review that led to certification by April 1st.
  - a) If there are significant unresolved issues, the chair of the Certification Committee may require the applicant to appear before the full committee.
  - b) Otherwise, the committee will decide on certification by reviewing the applicant's written materials and evidence of certification by another organization.

### **Certification Committee**

The Certification Committee will meet once a year in conjunction with the Annual Conference of the AAIDD

Committee members include the immediate past president of the Religion and Spirituality Division and six members of the Division elected in the Division's annual business meeting. Each member will be elected for a three-year term. Two members will be elected each year. Elected members may serve no more than two consecutive terms (six years) on the committee. The committee will annually elect a chair and secretary from among its members. A quorum of three is required for the committee to convene and carry out its business including the certification of applicants.

### **Steps in the Certification Process**

1. The first step toward certification is a review of the applicant's materials by the chair of the Certification Committee or his/her designee, listed under Application Content and Process. They are to be submitted electronically to the chair of the Certification Committee by April 1.
2. The second step is the applicant meeting with the committee, if so required.

3. A brief qualitative evaluation of compliance with mission statement of AAIDD, which is expected to be available on-line.
4. Final decisions on certification will be made by the committee, which meets in conjunction with the AAIDD Annual Conference and the Religion and Spirituality Division business meeting.
5. The committee may provide full certification, a two-year provisional certification, or deny certification. Provisional certification or denial of certification will be accompanied with an explanation of the reasons for the committee's decision along with appropriate recommendation for training, study, and professional development.
6. Once certified, an individual maintains certification by ongoing active membership in the Religion and Spirituality Division of the AAIDD.