

UDC 364:2-587

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To cite this article: Maciaszek, P. (2026). The spiritual dimension of social work – a forgotten element or the cornerstone of effective support? *Vvichlyvist. Humanitas*, 1, 169–178, doi: <https://doi.org/10.32782/humanitas/2026.1.21>

THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSION OF SOCIAL WORK – A FORGOTTEN ELEMENT OR THE CORNERSTONE OF EFFECTIVE SUPPORT?

Research objective: This article explores the spiritual dimension of social work, focusing on the question of whether it constitutes a marginalised aspect of social work practice or an essential foundation determining the effectiveness of interventions. The aim of the study is to analyse the significance of spiritual values – including references to faith and the religious practices arising from it – in building a helping relationship and supporting clients in crisis situations. The article employs a theoretical and practical approach, combining a review of the relevant literature with reference to social work practice. The theoretical section comprises a review and synthesis of concepts concerning human spiritual life and the significance of Christian values in the helping process. The practical part, on the other hand, involves applying these principles to the realities of social work through the analysis of examples, professional experiences and possible applications in client work. This approach not only helps to organise theoretical knowledge but also demonstrates its usefulness and practical applicability in the field of social work. It has been shown that spirituality – understood as the sphere of seeking meaning, values, the purpose of life and a relationship with that which transcends the human person – can play a significant role in the process of coping with life's difficulties, strengthening psychological resilience and building relationships based on trust and respect. Particular importance is attached to Christian values such as human dignity, love for one's neighbour, solidarity and hope, which can support both clients and social workers in carrying out their support work. The conclusions drawn from the analysis indicate that spirituality cannot be treated as a marginal element. Its conscious and reflective consideration can contribute to increasing the effectiveness of support and deepening the quality of the helping relationship. The cognitive value of the article lies in organising and integrating the scattered approaches to spirituality in social work found in the literature, and in highlighting its significance in the context of contemporary social challenges. The article contributes to the development of interdisciplinary research by combining the perspective of social work with philosophical, psychological and theological reflection. Implications for social work practice include the need to develop staff competencies in recognising and adequately supporting clients' spiritual needs, as well as incorporating reflection on values into the process of education and professional development. Taking spirituality into account may foster a more integrated and effective approach to helping, one that responds to the full range of human needs.

Key words: social work, spirituality, social worker, client, Christian values, religious practices

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Бібліографічний опис статті: Мацяшек, П. (2026). Змістовий компонент формування правової компетентності в майбутніх фахівців соціальної роботи. *Ввічливість. Humanitas*, 1, 169–178, doi: <https://doi.org/10.32782/humanitas/2026.1.21>

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ДУХОВНИЙ ВИМІР СОЦІАЛЬНОЇ РОБОТИ – ЗАБУТИЙ ЕЛЕМЕНТ ЧИ ОСНОВА ЕФЕКТИВНОЇ ДОПОМОГИ

Мета дослідження: У статті розглядається проблематика духовного виміру соціальної роботи, при цьому основна увага приділяється питанню, чи є він маргіналізованим аспектом практики надання допомоги, чи, навпаки, її важливою основою, що визначає ефективність заходів. Метою дослідження є аналіз значення духовних цінностей, у тому числі з акцентом на віру та релігійні практики, що впливають з неї, у побудові відносин допомоги та підтримці клієнтів у кризових ситуаціях. У статті застосовано теоретично-практичний метод, що поєднує аналіз літератури з посиланням на практику соціальної роботи. Теоретична частина охопила огляд та синтез концепцій, що стосуються духовного життя людини, значення християнських цінностей у процесі надання допомоги. Практична частина, натомість, полягає у застосуванні цих положень до реалій соціальної допомоги через аналіз прикладів, професійного досвіду та можливих застосувань у роботі з клієнтом. Такий підхід дозволяє не лише впорядкувати теоретичні знання, а й продемонструвати їхню корисність та практичний характер у сфері надання допомоги.

Було зазначено, що духовність у розумінні сфери пошуку сенсу, цінностей, мети життя та відносин із тим, що виходить за межі людської особистості, може відігравати важливу роль у процесі подолання життєвих труднощів, зміцненні психічної стійкості та побудові відносин, заснованих на довірі та повазі. Особливе значення надається християнським цінностям, таким як гідність людини, любов до ближнього, партнерство чи надія, які можуть підтримувати як клієнтів, так і соціальних працівників під час надання допомоги. Висновки, зроблені на основі проведеного аналізу, вказують на те, що духовність не може розглядатися як другорядний елемент. Її усвідомлене та рефлексивне врахування може сприяти підвищенню як ефективності допомоги, так і її якості. В статті здійснено систематизацію та інтеграцію розрізнених у літературі підходів до духовності в соціальній роботі, висвітлено її значення в контексті сучасних соціальних викликів. Стаття робить внесок у розвиток міждисциплінарних досліджень, поєднуючи перспективу соціальної роботи з філософською, психологічною та теологічною рефлексією.

Перспективним для практики соціальної роботи є необхідність розвитку компетентностей соціальних працівників у сфері виявлення та адекватної підтримки духовних потреб клієнтів, а також включення рефлексії щодо цінностей у процес навчання та підвищення кваліфікації. Врахування духовності може сприяти більш цілісному та ефективному підходу до надання допомоги, що відповідає всім потребам людини.

Ключові слова: соціальна робота, духовність, соціальний працівник, клієнт, християнські цінності, релігійні практики

Contemporary social work operates within a context of dynamic social, cultural and economic change, which gives rise to increasingly complex problems faced by individuals and social groups. Existential crises, a sense of loss of meaning in life, loneliness or the experience of suffering transcend the material and psychological dimensions, revealing the need for a broader, holistic approach to the human person. In this context, the importance of the spiritual dimension of a person's life is increasingly emphasised; yet, despite its significance, this dimension is often marginalised in social work practice, which tends to focus primarily on instrumental and systemic interventions.

Spirituality – broadly understood as the sphere of seeking meaning, values, life's purpose and a relationship with that which transcends the individual (not necessarily in a religious sense) – constitutes a vital resource for both social work clients and the professionals themselves. It can serve as a factor supporting the process of coping in crisis situations, strengthen psychological resilience, and foster the development of a deeper helping relationship. At the same time, the presence of spirituality in social work raises questions

about the boundaries of professionalism, ideological neutrality, and staff competence in recognising and supporting clients' spiritual needs. In the Polish cultural context, particular significance is attached to the reference to Christian faith and values, which have historically and socially helped to shape the foundations of charitable work. Ideas such as love for one's neighbour, solidarity, human dignity and selfless help are reflected both in Christian teaching and in the ethics of social work. These values can serve as an important point of reference for clients for whom religion and faith are a significant source of meaning and support in difficult life situations. At the same time, their presence in the helping process requires the social worker to demonstrate sensitivity, respect for the client's autonomy, and the ability to maintain a balance between their own value system and professional neutrality.

The relevance of this topic stems from the growing interest in a holistic approach within the social sciences and the need to redefine the scope of social work's impact in the face of contemporary societal challenges. Although international literature notes an increase in the number of stud-

ies on spirituality in social work, it remains an area that is insufficiently recognised and implemented in practice, particularly in the Polish context, where the issue of integrating religious values and professionalism raises further debate.

The aim of this article is to analyse the significance of the spiritual dimension of social work and to attempt to answer the question of whether it constitutes merely a marginalised aspect of practice or the foundation of effective support. In particular, an attempt is made to highlight the role of spiritual values, including Christian values, in the process of supporting clients, and their impact on the quality of the helping relationship and the effectiveness of the social worker's actions.

The article employs a theoretical – practical method, combining a review of the relevant literature with references to social work practice. The theoretical section will include a review and synthesis of concepts relating to the spiritual life of the individual and the significance of Christian values in the helping process. The practical part, on the other hand, will involve applying these principles to the realities of social work through the analysis of examples, professional experiences and possible applications in client work. This approach not only helps to organise theoretical knowledge but also demonstrates its usefulness and practical applicability in the helping profession. The search for answers to the question posed in the title will be carried out in three stages: – describing the current situation of insufficient use of spirituality (or its neglect) in social services, – identifying a model for the application of spiritual values in helping people, – demonstrating the benefits of developing the spiritual life of both the social worker and their client.

Description of the current situation. Social work as a profession has a history stretching back over a century, whilst the tradition of assistance provided by religious communities goes back much further. “One might even venture to say that all the centuries-old aid (charitable, benevolent) work carried out by the Churches was and is, to a large extent, such non-professional social work” (Kamiński, 2012, p. 303). Social work – understood as supporting people in difficult life situations, helping them to overcome helplessness, loneliness or the inability to meet their needs due to illness or disability – is virtually a daily occurrence in the Church's charitable activities. How-

ever, whilst professional support is provided primarily in specialist institutions (such as Social Welfare Centres, District Family Support Centres, Community Day Centres), informal social work takes place mainly within parishes. If we assume that social assistance stems precisely from religious communities, it should be based on their spirituality. However, the assistance provided by social workers to individuals and families often lacks spiritual elements. Furthermore, its recipients frequently do not know (or do not cultivate) the spiritual values through which an improvement in their daily lives might be achieved.

Marta Łuczyńska, in describing the characteristics of a helper, highlights the following areas: – knowledge and skills (so-called professional competence), – self-awareness, – sincerity, – empathy, – respect for the client. It should be noted that spirituality, including references to God and faith, is absent from the list of these qualities (Łuczyńska, 2013, p. 7).

In their daily work, social workers face ethical dilemmas related to their direct professional practice. Anna Weissbrot-Koziarska writes that such dilemmas concern, among other things, issues such as: “uncertainty regarding the correctness of the choices made, the necessity of choosing between effective action and action in accordance with regulations, or taking action contrary to the client's expectations and wishes. What should one be guided by: should one remain true to one's own conscience, comply with the regulations whilst remaining in conflict with oneself, or perhaps partially adapt one's own value system to the regulations, bending them to one's own conscience?” (Weissbrot-Koziarska, 2017, p. 177). The concept of conscience emerges here, which is closely linked to spirituality. So, to be a good social worker, must one have a sensitive conscience to guide one in making difficult decisions, and consequently be guided by spirituality?

Józefa Godecka argues that expectations of social workers are shaped by a specific vision of social policy – the views of those in power (politicians). Equally significant are the voices of councillors, local activists, the media and observers, which take the form of assessments and judgements of social work practices (Godecka, 2013, p. 117). Those in positions of state authority discuss (for instance in the Sejm) the nature of support for social workers. The programmes they

announce – such as: ‘Senior Support Corps’, ‘Care 75+’, ‘Neighbourhood Services’, ‘Respite Care’, ‘Overcoming Homelessness’ – as well as support for free legal protection for social workers and a proposal for pay rises for social care staff, are proof that politicians are not leaving this sphere of social life without support (Szwed, 2023).

However, the social sphere still lacks a voice on spirituality; if it is spoken of at all, it carries a negative connotation. When Barbara Nowacka – the Minister of Education – comments on religious education, stating that “school is for education, not religious indoctrination” (PAP/Compiled by MA, 2024), this attitude is also reflected in other institutions within the social sphere. It is not just about schools, although it is there that the process of eliminating elements of spirituality from people’s lives begins. At this point, it is worth recalling a statement by the politician Marek Sawicki, who – in his speech inaugurating the work of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland’s 10th term – argued for the indispensable role of the Church in carrying out charitable and welfare work. It can therefore be concluded that politicians’ vision of social assistance, when situated within the activities of religious communities, incorporates an element of spirituality (KAI, 2023). Religious education, as the foundation of every person’s inner formation and subsequent spiritual development (whether within communities or individually), can serve as a guarantee of effective social work.

The practice of social work today highlights the immense role of moral virtues in fulfilling life’s tasks. Marek Kluz emphasises that the practice of social work is, in fact, steeped in virtues. In his view, it is precisely for this reason that increasing attention is being paid to this issue in the professional training of social workers. “For virtue is an active and internal principle of human actions, enabling a person to do good persistently, effectively and with satisfaction. Moral virtues in social work influence the course of social intervention processes, the preferred solutions to problems, and the specific decisions taken by individual social workers. They constitute the driving force behind the daily work of social workers, setting specific requirements for them and defining standards of professional conduct” (Kluz, 2017, p. 96).

When social workers talk about their work, they emphasise the exceptional importance of

spiritual values. They work not only with clients, but also with their families. It is difficult to describe these people as empathetic or committed. They often want to shift their responsibilities – such as caring for their loved ones – onto social workers. When we inform them that their loved ones require care, it turns out they have no time to come and help. They do not even feel obliged to sort out the necessary paperwork for benefits. The saddest moment is when a person dies alone, and the family only comes forward later, hoping for an inheritance. It often happens that it is the staff of the institution who organise the funeral and ensure a dignified burial – they find clothes for the coffin, call a priest to say a prayer, and are the only people bidding farewell to the deceased (Grytz-Jurkowska, 2012). It is also significant that social workers deal with various types of clients; the majority are people facing difficult life circumstances due to age, illness, disability, unemployment, domestic violence or addiction. In turn, taking clients’ behaviour into account, they can be divided into: – withdrawn, – complaining, – aggressive, – ‘know-it-all’, – manipulative, – demanding, – or those who elicit pity.

Writing about the residents of care homes, Anna Zawada explains that “social support is particularly helpful in coping with stress, fostering positive emotions, letting go of negative feelings, emotional tension and anxiety, boosting self-esteem, maintaining self-control, a quicker recovery, as well as a longer life (...) instrumental, appreciative, emotional and spiritual support are particularly important” (Zawada, 2018, p. 84). Each such centre, if properly run, can therefore serve as a substitute for the family home, prevent loneliness and provide professional care that is often lacking in the local community.

When providing social care, it is worth paying attention to spiritual support. In the current situation, this is rarely mentioned. Maria Łuszczynska – describing the situation of older people – emphasises that providing them with a roof over their heads and food is not the only important issue. Spiritual needs definitely come to the fore at this stage of life, and anyone undertaking social work should be aware of them. These needs are often an area of development to which a person has not previously devoted their attention or effort. “Furthermore, spirituality becomes a vehicle to eternity for older people, which

is essential in the final stages of life to ensure a positive outcome. This is why it is so important to recognise the vital role of the clergy, who can introduce elements into the spiritual sphere that go beyond the existing perspective of the relationship between man and God” (Łuszczynska, 2018, p. 51).

In today’s world, unfortunately, constant care from a clergyman is not guaranteed everywhere. Nor do social workers always feel the need or have the opportunity to develop their spiritual lives (not necessarily linked to belief in God or religion). However, they should ensure this, if only for their own discernment of the moral dilemmas encountered at work, as well as for a better and more empathetic approach to clients’ needs. Marek Oktaba confirms these guidelines by describing the duties of social workers’ formation based on St Brother Albert’s programme. As his reflections suggest, there is vast scope for further reflection on the connection between social work and spirituality; “When the aim is to bring about maturity in the beneficiaries of aid, those who help them, and their entire social environment, all three methods of social work must be employed in parallel: case work, group work and community work” (Oktaba, 2017). There are many institutions in Poland operating in accordance with these principles, but there are still not enough of them; particular shortcomings can be observed in many public institutions. This is due to several factors, such as:

- The absence of regulations setting out standards for pastoral care. In Poland, there are no clear regulations stipulating the obligation to provide pastoral care in care homes. Although the Constitution of the Republic of Poland guarantees freedom of conscience and religion, as well as the right to religious ministry in healthcare facilities, there are no detailed regulations concerning such facilities. As a result, many of them do not provide access to chaplains or the organisation of religious services.

- Limited financial resources. Public care homes often face financial difficulties, resulting in a lack of funds to employ chaplains or organise religious services. Many facilities do not have the necessary funds to provide residents with access to pastoral care.

- Lack of appropriate organisational structures. In some such centres, there is a lack of

appropriate organisational structures to facilitate the organisation of pastoral care. Not all facilities have chapels or suitable rooms for holding religious services, which makes it difficult to provide residents with access to religious services.

- Insufficient numbers of social workers. According to the regulations, there should be no more than 2,000 residents per social worker in a municipality. However, in many municipalities this figure is significantly higher, resulting in staff being overworked and lacking the time to organise additional services, such as pastoral care.

Reflections on the ideal state to strive for.

As the previous chapter has shown, the situation regarding the spiritual formation of both social workers and their clients does not inspire optimism. Despite the (few) efforts that have been made, there is still a lack of systemic solutions addressing these issues, and in particular a lack of adequate preparation for future staff. It would therefore be worthwhile to introduce regulations stipulating the possibility of pastoral care in social welfare institutions. This would involve introducing clear legal provisions imposing an obligation to ensure residents have access to pastoral care. It is therefore necessary to increase funding for these institutions, which would allow for the employment of chaplains and the organisation of regular religious services. Cooperation with religious organisations could certainly help to ensure residents have access to pastoral care – even in facilities that lack the necessary resources. The case for implementing the above recommendations is strengthened by the fact that when a social worker takes the time to gain a deeper understanding of their clients’ spiritual values, the clients feel better understood and are more willing to participate in the services and treatment plans offered. All those who undertake the task of helping others should be guided by the truth that a human being is a complex whole, comprising physical and spiritual, existential and religious, subjective and social dimensions. A social worker should constantly strive to motivate the client to take action. However, before doing so, they must reinforce the client’s sense of moral obligation regarding the necessity of taking action. They can do this by working with the client, on the assumption that “an invaluable quality of the human personality is openness to values. It is these that most effectively develop a person’s spirituality and are

the driving force behind their realistic actions” (Weissbrot-Koziarska, 2017, p. 177).

In 1995, the World Health Organisation identified ‘spirituality’ as a legitimate subject of research and a category of an individual’s personal resources. It was recognised that “health issues and overcoming illness are not merely about avoiding risks (smoking, alcohol consumption, stress), but that personal resources are also important here: life satisfaction, finding meaning in life, and various forms of overcoming illness, including those motivated by religion. The collective term ‘spirituality’ was chosen to describe these” (Surzykiewicz, 2015, p. 33).

Waldemar Woźniak, who, based on his own academic reflection, identifies three paths of social work, speaks of one that is pastoral in nature. He characterises it as linked to religion and often overlooked in academic discourse. He argues that faith in God influences social life and has a practical dimension. Thanks to it, one can put into practice attitudes of respect for one’s neighbour, loving them, showing mercy and forgiveness (as a consequence of experiencing mercy and forgiveness from God) (Woźniak, 2020, pp. 64, 76). She places the pastoral approach on a par with the psychological approach and that linked to social policy.

Marek Oktaba, mentioned above, an employee of the St Brother Albert Aid Society, identifies spiritual accompaniment as a method of social work. By this he means prioritising being present with the client and setting an example for them. For these attitudes speak more clearly and powerfully than words. The application of this method (its effectiveness) requires the following conditions to be met: – maintaining equality between both parties involved in the assistance, – having the ability to make use of failures and shortcomings, – being humble, – showing courage, – being persevering, – having a sense of humour. As for setting a good example, this should be demonstrated through diligent and conscientious work (Oktaba, 2017, p. 121).

The need for God’s presence in the help provided is confirmed by Rafał Porzeziński, a journalist and addiction therapy instructor. Referring to the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous, he points to the necessity of recognising love. In doing so, he refers to the third of these steps, which speaks of the decision to entrust one’s

will and life to God’s care, regardless of how He is understood. Improvement in life begins with recognising God’s love, without which one cannot move forward and bring about change. Any action that rejects Him, in the freedom of choice, distances one from a life devoted to Love and flourishing through It. This truth also holds true for other addicts: drug addicts, gamblers, and sex addicts (Miros, 2022). This argument regarding the need for God in the life of an addict is further supported by the fact that, in people affected by this illness, there is a deterioration not only of the physical and mental spheres, but also of the spiritual sphere, which manifests itself in the rejection of moral values in favour of satisfying one’s needs at any cost (Wojtarowska, 2018, p. 109). It must therefore be borne in mind that spiritual care is not justified by the right to religious freedom but by the needs of the individual and the quality of professional support, which is geared towards the client’s well-being. Such well-being thus encompasses psychological, social and spiritual aspects, meaning it is based on subjective quality of life. Hence, spiritual care is intended to support people in various life challenges. It constitutes an important source of support, both for the life of the individual and for society (Surzykiewicz, 2015, p. 57).

Faith should play a similar role in the lives of families with disabled children. Every day, their parents face not only the challenges of care, but also those of upbringing and education. They often experience social ostracism stemming from a lack of understanding within society. They therefore need a rich spiritual life – a faith that “introduces a metaphysical perspective into everyday life, allows spirituality to flourish and changes the way problems are perceived. A person of faith draws strength, peace and comfort from it. Religious practices, on the other hand, deepen the bond with God, give rhythm to family life, and build and strengthen social bonds” (Utnicka, 2021).

It is worth promoting the forms of spiritual support already in place, most commonly in care homes, which are based on the presence of chaplains within these facilities. It is often said that in such centres, the chaplain’s ministry is comparable to that of a psychologist. Tomasz Gwoździewicz argues that “residents of care homes are more likely to choose to speak to a chaplain than to a

psychologist, as they are convinced that it is the chaplain who will better understand their problems concerning moral issues, conscience or spirituality. This is not to disparage the work of a psychologist or the value of therapy, but to draw attention to the supernatural means offered by pastoral care in resolving the existential problems of residents” (Gwoździewicz, 2020, p. 118).

It is worth citing a few examples that can be emulated, demonstrating the positive impact of pastoral care on clients and the understanding and empathy of those working with them and meeting their spiritual expectations. At the Social Care Home of the Congregation of the Sisters Servants of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Łódź – alongside rehabilitation, music therapy, occupational therapy and bibliotherapy – spiritual therapy and Bible study sessions are conducted. In this home, the spiritual dimension is of great importance; the carers have come to believe that faith holds a special place in the lives of the sick, as it helps them to bear their suffering more easily. Hence, the residents take part in communal prayers every day, and Mass is celebrated by the chaplain twice a week in the home’s chapel. The residents take part in these celebrations – they read the Word of God and prayers, sing psalms, and the choir performs a prepared repertoire. Everyone – before receiving the Holy Sacrament (which is also brought to those lying in their rooms) – has the opportunity to go to confession (Terapia duchowa). Pastoral care has also been provided at the retirement home named ‘And in the Heart of May’, located in Wola Czolnowska. The following information is posted on the centre’s website: “For most elderly people, close contact with the Church is very important. At our centre, we fully understand this need, the fulfilment of which has a visible impact on the well-being of our residents. “To meet the needs of our elderly residents, we have established a regular partnership with a priest from a nearby parish, who visits our home every day” (Pastoral care). Pastoral care is also provided at the Social Care Home in Iwonicz Zdrój, run by the Fathers of St John of God. The home employs a chaplain who is available to residents around the clock. In the home chapel, morning Masses and afternoon devotions (appropriate to the liturgical season or month) are held daily. Any resident may always ask the chaplain for sacramental ministry (Opieka duszpasterska).

The rationale for the need to nurture the spiritual life of both the social worker and their client lies in the fact that it can serve as a source of support, hope, meaning in life and motivation for change. However, deriving spiritual benefits from this source – for both the helper and the beneficiary – depends on addressing the following challenges: – rebuilding identity and self-esteem, – reducing aggression and emotional tension, – finding motivation for change and setting goals, – taking on increasing moral responsibility, – building community and remembering one’s place in society.

In practice, this means first regaining the sense of being needed. A person who has led a marginalised life for years (for example, due to addiction, homelessness or criminality) regains a sense of self-worth through Christian values. This is made possible through discussions on spiritual matters with a social worker or a clergy member, by participating in retreats or joining a church community, and by undertaking spiritual exercises based on regular prayer. Such practices lead to acceptance of one’s past, regardless of what it was like. In the case of social welfare clients, their willingness to cooperate with a social worker, undertake therapy and change their lifestyle increases. The effectiveness of the work is therefore enhanced.

Regular attendance at Mass and religious services, as well as reading and reflecting on the Holy Scriptures, helps clients cope better with frustration and loneliness. There is a reduction in the number of conflicts with staff and other residents (for example, in care homes), and interpersonal relationships improve.

A person who finds new goals in spirituality (such as forgiving oneself, repairing relationships with family, serving others) begins to take steps to improve their own life. Such a person is more willing to engage in therapeutic activities, acquires new skills, and strives for social reintegration.

Through contact with spiritual values (such as goodness and truth, beauty and joy), the person begins to understand their past mistakes and strives to make amends. This leads to increased self-reflection and self-control, and there is a lower risk of reverting to pathological behaviour.

Participation in a religious group (set up in a care home or community centre), where people

pray together or celebrate holidays and special occasions, gives a person a sense of belonging and of being part of a community. This helps to break down isolation and fosters greater empathy and social skills, which make life more meaningful.

Social work students should therefore have courses on spirituality in the broadest sense included in their curriculum, which will help them understand the significance of their clients' spiritual needs, develop intercultural sensitivity, and acquire an ever-greater ability to conduct existential and supportive conversations. Such courses should not aim to evangelise or promote a specific religion, but rather to prepare students for a holistic approach to the human person.

Sample classes for students preparing to enter the field of social work could cover the following topics and issues: – an introduction to spirituality in social work (understanding the concepts of spirituality and religiosity, the role of spirituality in the helping process, and models for integrating spirituality into social work practice), – human spirituality in extreme situations (suffering, illness, old age, bereavement, addiction), – the spiritual needs of socially excluded people, – working with clients in an existential crisis, – the spiritual competencies of a social worker, – the significance of spirituality in rehabilitation and therapy, – ethical dilemmas concerning the boundaries of working with clients' spirituality, the role of spiritual values in the process of social reintegration, – conducting conversations about the meaning of life and death, forgiveness and hope.

The proposal for these sessions stems from the author's conviction that social work is based on a full understanding of the human person; it concerns not only their material circumstances, but also their non-material ones. In a person's life, acquired spiritual values, an understanding of the meaning of existence, and one's beliefs are important. Furthermore, spirituality is an essential element of many people's identity, and overlooking it will usually result in offering them incomplete, insufficient support. Many clients draw strength from their inner convictions and religious beliefs, which provide solace during difficult times such as illness, the loss of a loved one, poverty or addiction. An understanding of and commitment to spiritual values enables social workers to identify clients' individual needs more thoroughly and support them more effectively.

It is also important to remember that spirituality, in the broadest sense, is often linked to culture and value systems. Therefore, thorough education in this area would help to avoid prejudice and stereotypes, and to free oneself from unconsciously imposing one's own beliefs. All these behaviours are crucial when working with diverse social groups. Openness to the spiritual dimension of clients' lives strengthens the helping relationship; they place greater trust in professionals who respect their worldview and are able to discuss it without judgement. There is also no doubt that classes on spirituality would encourage students to reflect on their own values and the attitudes arising from them. This should increase their mental resilience and prevent burnout in the future.

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Дата першого надходження статті до видання: 16.02.2026

Дата прийняття статті до друку після рецензування: 13.03.2026

Дата публікації (оприлюднення) статті: 05.05.2026