

Considerations for Greater Spiritual Inclusion in ACA Literature

ACA Spiritual Inclusion Working Group (October 2019 – August 2022)

Adult Children of Alcoholics & Dysfunctional Families: AdultChildren.org

ACA World Services Organization: ACAWSO.org

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Background

The ACA Solution states that we are a “spiritual program based on action coming from love.” But what does this mean - to be a spiritual program? And how are spiritual principles, concepts, and ideas in ACA literature communicated and received in our fellowship?

It has become increasingly clear that aspects of spiritual language in ACA literature are problematic for some newcomers and program members – that some suffering adult children who might benefit from ACA participation turn away from the program because they don’t see a viable spiritual path in what they read. So, in October of 2019, the ACA Literature Committee convened a **Spiritual Inclusion Working Group** (“working group”) to address these issues directly with the following purpose: *“To provide recommendations to the ACA-WSO Literature Committee on ways that ACA’s literature can become more spiritually inclusive.”* This document represents over two years’ worth of work and offers recommendations toward a more spiritually inclusive body of literature for the ever-expanding global ACA fellowship.

The working group’s all-volunteer membership shifted over the two-plus years of in-depth work. It included atheists, agnostics, believers (Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, and Wiccan), spiritual but not religious individuals, and those who are neither spiritual nor religious. The group developed a Safety Statement to support our inner children and adopted a conflict resolution tool to “provide a safe, respectful, and inclusive workgroup space for all participants” (Appendix A).

The working group examined ACA literature as a whole but placed a primary focus on our program fellowship text, the *Big Red Book (BRB)*. The group’s process included a 12 Step and 12 Traditions-oriented spiritual inventory of our program, based on the reparenting principles of gentleness, love, and respect, and rooted in the healing power and truth of individual member experience, strength, and hope. What many members discovered through their working group participation was transformation, growth, and a greater sense of love, respect, and compassion for the spiritual paths of all adult children. The working group hopes to bring a call for “action coming from love” to the ACA-WSO Literature Committee and the greater ACA fellowship.

No Perfect Words

One truth quickly became apparent to members of the working group: Resolution towards greater spiritual inclusivity wasn't going to be as simple as using the "right words" in our literature and avoiding the use of "wrong words." A term or phrase that might perfectly address a spiritual matter for one person can be highly triggering and feel distancing to another. Furthermore, vocabulary that feels "right" to someone today may feel "wrong" to that same person tomorrow as they grow and heal in self-love-focused recovery. Additionally, the context in which words are used can affect how they are perceived and received.

Healing from the effects of childhood trauma requires working with triggers, including those that can arise as we read our literature. And yet, specific terms, phrases, and the ways they are used in spiritual contexts seem consistently problematic for some in the program. Therefore, the working group has sought to identify implicit "assumptions" in our literature that may lead to unintentional spiritual bias, and to provide descriptive guiding principles for greater inclusivity in ACA literature rather than specific prescriptive remedies.

ACA's History of Inclusion

Perhaps more than any other 12 Step program, ACA has embraced a path toward greater inclusivity in its literature. One clear example of efforts towards spiritual inclusion can be seen in the ACA 12 Steps and 12 Traditions, which differ from the originals in that they are genderneutral. This revision was undoubtedly a revolutionary decision at the time – to modify text that was foundational and universal to 12 Step programs.

The truth driving this effort was that members of ACA range across the gender spectrum, as do our perceptions of powers greater than ourselves. Thus, ascribing recovery to a single-gendered being was a limiting barrier to inclusion for many. The use of male pronoun bias in the literature was not intentional - it naturally arose, at least partly because those who originally wrote and used the 12 Steps were all male. Nevertheless, ACA members recognized and acknowledged this bias and courageously found ways to revise the language toward greater inclusion. The changes they made didn't take anything away from those who understood their higher power to be male – they simply opened doors more widely for those who did not.

Spirituality in ACA Literature Works Well for Some Adult Children

An inventory of 12 Step program history uncovers the close ties between the [creation of Alcoholics Anonymous and the Oxford group](#). The basic tenants of the Christian-based Oxford Group were to practice "a formula of self-inventory, admitting wrongs, making amends, using

prayer and meditation, and carrying the message to others.” The dominance of these religious perspectives and the cultural preeminence of Christian religious influence in the 1900s in the United States has dramatically shaped the spiritual tendencies of 12 Step programs, including ACA and its literature.

For those of us in the ACA program who align spiritually with these perspectives, current ACA literature often looks and feels inclusive. Members of the working group who experience spiritual alignment with ACA literature in this way illuminated this truth. For example, *Big Red Book* Chapter 5 (“ACA is a Spiritual Not Religious Program”) states that “ACA is not aligned with any sect or denomination . . .” Therefore, regardless of the type of Christianity some of us in the program identify with, be it Anglican, Baptist, Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, etc., ACA welcomes our spiritual beliefs. We might refer to this type of inclusion as “Christian inclusivity.”

Similarly, those of us who are Jewish may feel ACA literature looks and feels welcoming to our spiritual perspectives, regardless of whether we are Reform, Conservative, or Orthodox. As Muslims, we too may feel spiritually included in ACA, whether Sunni or Shia. The working group referred to this type of inclusion as “monotheistic inclusivity.”

To those of us in ACA raised in monotheistic traditions but who don’t formally align with any religion today, ACA literature may still look and feel familiar, welcoming, and inclusive. The ACA 12 Steps, for example, state that we get to choose “God as we understand God,” which can feel like an enormous sense of freedom for those of us who were raised in, but broke away from, rigidly religious households.

Clearly, 12 Step founders had inclusivity in mind when they developed the program and its literature. Going forward, it is vitally important for those of us who align with monotheistic, Judeo-Christian traditions to continue to feel a sense of spiritual connectedness with ACA even as the program explores ways to make our literature more spiritually inclusive for more members.

Spirituality in ACA Literature Does Not Work Well for Some Adult Children

The working group discovered a common assertion in our literature that the only way to recover in ACA is through a reliance on a capital-G “God.” This assertion is painful for many of us in the program who do not align with this perspective. In contrast to the title of *Big Red Book* Chapter 5 – “ACA is a Spiritual Not Religious Program,” God seems to be required in ACA:

- “Finding a God of our understanding is essential for long-term recovery and real, inner change. We cannot shrink from the task of seeking God earnestly . . .”,
- “At some point the adult child realizes that he or she* must seek a Higher Power with all earnestness. The meetings and prayer have been necessary, but the person must seek God with urgency and intent.”
- “We cannot stop ourselves from seeking contact with a Higher Power. It is part of being an adult child, and we must accept this great fact. We are called to God and cannot resist.”

Those of us in ACA who do not resonate with how spirituality is presented in our program literature can feel re-traumatized each time we bump up against words, phrases, and perspectives that scratch at our deepest spiritual wounding or contradict our spiritual truths. Additionally, some of us experienced childhood wounding where religious language and behavior were some of the weapons used against us. For us, childhood abuse in the name of a “God” had been swift and severe, and the frequent use of this word and phrasing in our program today can repeatedly trigger the pain from this most fundamental betrayal. For those of us in the working group who struggle with how spirituality is presented in ACA literature, this project was more than an intellectual exercise – it was an opportunity to be seen and heard . . . and to heal.

In the working group’s exploratory process, all members individually read through the *Big Red Book* to identify what we believed to be “spiritually problematic phrases.” Then, we each shared our findings with all team members at our working group meetings and witnessed the feelings, memories, and other reactions that came up for us as we read them. For some in the group, this was an incredibly painful process. Yet, in time, we came to deeply trust one another as we shared about our spiritual wounding in childhood as well as the agony and frustration of continuing to feel excluded as we tried to openly navigate these issues in the ACA program today.

Those who have struggled with what we perceive as religious language in ACA shared how our Laundry List Traits can become activated around these issues. For example, we may fear being criticized by those we see as authority figures in the program when we share our spiritual perspectives (LL Traits 1 & 3). We may fawn for others’ approval on spiritual matters through our compliant, approval-seeking behaviors (LL Trait 2). We may come to stuff our authentic spiritual feelings, or shrink from honestly sharing that we aren’t experiencing any sense of spirituality (LL Trait 10). We may lose our spiritual identity as we struggle to mold ourselves into the spiritual norms of the program (LL Trait 2), or get guilt feelings when we stand up for our spiritual truths (LL Trait 7). We may fall into the victim role states of our helpless, wounded inner child who fears abandonment through spiritual rejection (LL Trait 12), or become angry

and go on the attack when our protective, rebellious inner teenager feels spiritually threatened or condemned.

The working group also recognized how the Other Laundry List Traits can arise around spiritual issues in ACA. For example, some of us may attempt to enforce the current spiritual norms in the program as we *tragically become the very authority figures who frighten others and cause them to withdraw* (OLL Trait 1), or by *making others feel guilty when they attempt to assert themselves* on spiritual matters (OLL Trait 7).

Some working group members shared how they felt shame, frustration, or anger when their requests to modify (or simply discuss) making our program's language more spiritually inclusive were dismissed. Group members said they encountered reactions that felt like the rigid, critic-driven attitudes they grew up with: "If you don't find 'God,' you won't find recovery," "It's in the *Big Red Book*, so that's the language we use," "Our group doesn't need to use different words, no one else minds," "The Steps say, 'God of your understanding' . . . isn't that enough?," "It's not a problem for the rest of us - take what you like and leave the rest," "Why can't you just use the word 'God' and stop making such a big deal about it," "You're being too sensitive about this - just let it go." Some members said that instead of a genuine willingness to listen and understand, they encountered responses that seemed like "fixing" reactions - for example, "Just substitute Good Orderly Direction for GOD, that works for everyone else."

Some of us in the working group realized that our deepest spiritual wounding hadn't been fully witnessed, understood, or healed in ACA because we never felt safe enough to speak our full spiritual truths. Through our participation in the working group, we had finally found a space that effectively neutralized the spiritual bias implicit in our literature, allowing us to experience genuine spiritual comfort and safety, perhaps for the first time. It eventually became clear to all working group members from every spiritual perspective that, sadly, on matters of spirituality, the ACA program can embody the *don't talk, don't trust, and don't feel* rules of family dysfunction that adult children routinely encountered in our families of origin.

* The Spiritual Inclusion Working Group acknowledges that ACAs use more pronouns than "he or she" to describe themselves. However, we have not altered the use of "he or she" here (and elsewhere in this document) because these are direct quotes from the *Big Red Book*.

How Can We Address Spiritual Inclusion in ACA? Implicit Assumptions in Our Literature

Just as childhood trauma can affect people of every race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status, childhood trauma also affects those of every spiritual perspective.

Spiritual believers, religious believers, atheists, agnostics, non-faith believers, seekers, and questioners can all yearn for healing through the ACA Solution. The path towards greater spiritual inclusion for all of us requires that we break the *don't talk, don't trust, and don't feel* rules of family dysfunction as they relate to spirituality in ACA. We can each do this by courageously feeling, trusting, and speaking our truths, and by opening up to the truths of others. We can honor the courageous recovery paths of those who might seek sweeping spiritual changes in our program and those who may fear losing their current sense of spiritual safety and normalcy in ACA. Through our commitment to greater spiritual inclusivity, we can open new paths of healing for some and deepen spiritual journeys for others.

As part of a fellowship-wide group conscience, the Spiritual Inclusion Working Group invites ACA members to examine some of our most intimate blind spots – assumptions that represent potential spiritual biases in our program. We encourage all to thoughtfully inventory the spiritual nature of our program with gentleness, humor, love, and respect to better support all adult children in finding their personal path of recovery through the ACA Solution.

ASSUMPTION 1: ACA Literature assumes that the terms “God” and “Higher Power” (or “power greater than oneself”) are synonymous or interchangeable.

An ancient teaching wisely noted that a person's finger which points to the moon is not itself the moon. Instead, the pointing finger indicates that the moon is over *there* – it is simply a finger, not the moon itself. Similarly, we use terms in ACA literature to point to something that words often fail to capture . . . terms like “a higher power” or “a power greater than ourselves.” But, again, these terms are only pointers – they do not seek to name that to which the finger is pointing.

When the term “God” is used in ACA literature, it is always capitalized, denoting it as a proper noun. Thus, we know it is not being used as a pointer. In this context, “God” refers to what only *some of us* believe the finger is pointing to – a monotheistic, JudeoChristian deity. This nuanced distinction may become more apparent if, as an exercise, we swap “God” with names of other deities such as Allah, Krishna, Shiva, Thor, Athena, or Odin:

Original ACA text: “The adult child personality is a personality which doubts God . . . we must accept this great fact. We are called to God and cannot resist . . . The True Parent calls.”

Example deity substitution: “The adult child personality is a personality which doubts Allah . . . we must accept this great fact. We are called to Allah and cannot resist . . . The True Parent calls.”

Those who do not claim Allah as their higher power may feel some unease in having ACA text explicitly define their higher power for them in this way. Thus, spiritual inclusion involves consistent acknowledgment of the wide variety of things the finger might be pointing to – not just “God,” “Allah,” “Christ,” “Vishnu,” or “Buddha.” ACA can avoid being spiritually directive by allowing members to determine what the mystery being pointed to is. And because these pointer terms, like higher power, are not proper nouns, the working group recommends they not be capitalized.

Spiritual inclusion acknowledges there are no “perfect words” that can capture everyone’s spiritual truths. For example, the most common spiritual pointer term used in ACA literature, “higher power,” works well for some. But for some, such as those with nature-based or feminist spiritual perspectives, it can be problematically hierarchical, with higher denoting “good” (such as in heavenly, or that which is above being human, a heavenly father) and lower associated with “bad” (such as hell, mother earth, or the material world generally).

Another common ACA pointer phrase, “power greater than ourselves,” also works well for some. However, for some, it implies that “truth” is something to be sought outside ourselves, excluding the profound inner spiritual truths we might find within (such as with our inner loving parent or inner child). Therefore, the working group suggests using a variety of pointer terms throughout ACA literature to promote greater spiritual inclusion. This approach might include terms/phrases like:

- higher power / higher powers
- higher purpose
- greater purpose
- greater consciousness
- knowing presence
- ancestors
- resources beyond our awareness
- power/powers greater than ourselves
- something bigger than us
- inner truth
- mysteries of life
- greater loving powers

Stepping outside all-or-nothing thinking and opening to diverse spiritual perspectives lift the burden of trying to find a single perfect word or phrase to point to everyone’s spiritual truths.

ASSUMPTION 2: ACA Literature assumes that a higher power refers to a personified deity, and that belief in a deity is required for ACA recovery.

Some of us know deeply that our greater power is a personified being, an ever-present companion, an angel, guide, or deity we might choose to call God. ACA literature provides numerous references to a higher power doing human-like actions such as walking with us, hearing us, speaking to us, calling us, or having a will for us:

- “Discernment comes from inside and is the breath of God . . . We know what to do in a given situation when our breathing matches God’s breathing.”
- “. . . we can only be healed . . . by the hand of God called upon by the willing adult child.”
- “We connect with God . . . when we find stillness and listen for God’s footstep. Our True Self knows God’s call.”

These beautifully poetic phrases resonate deeply with some of us. Yet, for those of us who identify with a more global or featureless spiritual energy, personification can feel unwelcomed, forced, and distancing when presented as a universal spiritual experience in ACA.

The ACA Solution states, “Our actual parent is our Higher Power, whom some of us choose to call God.” Depicting a higher power as a “parent” is also personification, and it is presented in our literature as a universal truth:

- “God Exists: One of the results of a spiritual awakening involves the understanding that God is real . . . we move from theories about God to the belief that a Higher Power is accessible and hears our prayers . . . We have come to believe that God, as we understand God, is the Actual Parent.”

Some of us experience the “actual parent” claim as unwelcomed personification and even contradictory to the ACA Solution, which encourages us to become *our own* loving parent. A more resonant perspective for some adult children might be that we draw from resources beyond our awareness (the universe, life’s mysteries, the ACA program, our fellow travelers, etc.) to support us in becoming our own loving parent, with no personified deity required as part of the Solution.

ASSUMPTION 3: ACA Literature assumes that a higher power is singular, or that people have only one power in their lives that is greater than themselves.

Religion in western culture is predominantly monotheistic, believing in only one god, often referred to as simply “God.” And since ACA literature has been written primarily from a U.S. cultural perspective, it reflects this spiritual bias. For example, the word “God” appears 485 times in the *Big Red Book*, demonstrating its prominence in ACA literature. Additionally, other similar terms synonymous with a monotheistic understanding of “God” like “the Almighty” and “the Divine Creator” are also used in our literature.

However, of the six major world religions and philosophical frameworks, three are monotheistic (Christianity, Islam, and Judaism), and three are not (Buddhism, Confucianism, and Hinduism). Adult children from around the world align with many non-monotheistic religions and philosophical frameworks, such as Agnosticism, Atheism, Humanism, Paganism, Shamanism, Shinto, and Wicca. Yet, ACA literature consistently points to something bigger than us in the singular:

- “Came to believe that **a** power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.”
- “For our group purpose there is **but one** ultimate authority – **a** loving God as expressed in our group conscience.”
- “Our actual parent is **a** Higher Power whom some of us choose to call God.”

A singular higher power is familiar and works well for some of us. Yet some of us seek connection with multiple higher powers, or powers greater than ourselves, whether they be deities, directions, elements, archetypes, aspects, or spirits. Additionally, those of us who are monotheistic and believe in a single deity may have more than one higher power – a deity, as well as our homegroup, the ACA fellowship, the power of group conscience, nature, love, etc. that can all be welcomed into our understanding of powers greater than ourselves.

Finally, when we as a program communicate that our ACA group, the fellowship, or the program itself can be our higher power, but then list these resources *in addition to* “a higher power,” it implies that a TRUE higher power is something other than these program resources:

- “Gradually and slowly we are releasing our dysfunctional behaviors with the help of our ACA group **and** a Higher Power.”
- “We have our ACA group, the fellowship, **and** a Higher Power to rely upon.” ● “We are guided by the fellowship voice **and** a Higher Power.”

Greater spiritual inclusion in our literature would reflect the perspectives of a wider global fellowship, including those of us who may claim more than one power greater than ourselves.

ASSUMPTION 4: ACA Literature assumes that prayer and meditation are synonymous, and that prayer is required for ACA recovery.

Slowing down, quieting oneself, and “tuning in” to greater truth can be a powerful approach to healing old wounds and an effective antidote to dissociation. This type of practice, sometimes referred to as prayer, meditation, or mindfulness, can provide opportunities to live more consciously as an actor in one’s life rather than a reactor. Some of us in ACA understand prayer and meditation as synonymous and interchangeable, and some of us do not. By “unlinking” these terms, we can more inclusively communicate the benefits of a contemplative practice while releasing what can appear to some as religious requirements of the program.

As noted, prayer in ACA literature is frequently depicted in personified ways. From this perspective, when we pray, someone or something “hears” us, “speaks” to us, “walks” with us, “works” on our behalf, or “guides” us towards its “will” for us. In one instance, our literature seems to presume ACAs should pray in ways that God most “likes”:

- “Prayers that address our shortcomings should be simple but sincere. Typically, the fewest number of words uttered in humility seem to resonate best with God.”

This assurance of a presence during prayer is profoundly comforting to some of us adult children – the personification of a higher power can be powerful and resonate deeply. However, for those of us who do not embrace a personified deity, attributing humanlike qualities to something greater than us seems false and can feel distancing in our relationship with the program. Meditation in ACA literature is generally not depicted in personified ways and thus, works better for some of us as a practice of slowing down, quieting oneself, and “tuning in.”

So, what if someone in the program meditates but does not pray? Is personified prayer required in ACA recovery? ACA literature repeatedly refers to “prayer and meditation” as being essential to ACA recovery. A more spiritually inclusive approach might be to offer prayer “or” meditation as pathways to beneficial recovery practices, understanding that some of us may choose to do one or both . . . or even something else.

ASSUMPTION 5: ACA Literature tends to assume authority on spiritual matters by using “we/our/us” pronouns.

The working group discovered almost immediately that ACA literature sometimes uses “**we**,” “**our**,” and “**us**” pronouns in ways that denote universal authority and truth in the program. In a spiritual context, using these pronouns can imply that “**we**” (the authors of the text and presumably the majority perspective in ACA) know universal spiritual truth. If your perspective doesn’t align with “**ours**,” your view may be less valid, acceptable, or enduring, and perhaps you’re not actually a part of “**us**.” Here is an example from our literature that presents *some* ACA member’s spiritual perspectives as authoritative truth for the entire program:

“Each time **we** take Step Three, **we** drink down God’s love . . . **We** come to believe that God hears **our** prayers and loves **us** always.”

This statement resonates as true for some of us in ACA, and for some of us, it does not. However, first-person plural language presumes to speak for ALL of “**us**” in the program. When language presented as universal truth doesn’t spiritually resonate with ACA members, it can have the opposite effect of what was probably intended – it can feel distancing to adult children instead of allowing them to identify with the program more deeply.

One way to avoid claiming universal spiritual truth in ACA literature is to present personal spiritual truths as first-person singular shares using “**I**,” “**me**,” and “**my**” pronouns. For example, the above quote might be more inclusively expressed as a fellowship share using first-person singular language:

“Each time **I** take Step Three, **I** drink down God’s love. **I**’ve come to believe God hears **my** prayers and loves **me** always.”

In meetings, we ask each member to speak from one’s own experience using “**I**” statements and avoid using “we/our/us” pronouns. Our program suggests this because first-person singular voice (“**I/me/my**”) captures the beauty and power of individual experience, strength, and hope without claiming universal truth in the program. Additionally, we can add breadth to fellowship experiences by emphasizing greater spiritual diversity through first-person shares, giving more people the opportunity to experience themselves in our literature.

If “we/our/us” pronouns are used when writing about spiritual matters in ACA, it would be more inclusive to present multiple perspectives from within our fellowship. For example:

“Some of **us** believe in a higher power who hears **our** prayers and shares its will for **us**. And some of **us** connect to **our** greater purpose through meditative silence . . . finding clarity, safety, and comfort without the need for a personal deity.”

This document is an example of how authority can present itself in writing – in this case, the “authority” of the Spiritual Inclusion Working Group. Our writing demonstrates an attempt to mindfully use the pronoun “we” (first-person plural) more inclusively. Our group’s intention is for **all** ACA members’ perspectives to be represented equitably in this document – those of us who align spiritually with using “God” as a higher power, those of us who use other deity names, and those of us who do not identify with any religions or deities at all.

ASSUMPTION 6: ACA Literature assumes that spiritual tolerance of atheists, agnostics, nonbelievers, secularists, and spiritual but not religious members equates to spiritual inclusion.

As atheists, agnostics, non-believers, questioners, secularists, and spiritual but not religious fellow travelers in ACA, we can experience confusion, frustration, and even infuriation with the mixed messages about spirituality and religion in our program literature. On the one hand, spiritual perspectives that do not represent our experiences are regularly presented as universal truth. Yet, at the same time, we are told that ACA is “not pushing religion or spiritual beliefs upon anyone.”

As atheists, agnostics, non-believers, questioners, secularists, and spiritual but not religious fellow travelers in ACA, we can also feel invisible in our program literature. The phrase “atheist or agnostic” appears only five times in the *Big Red Book*. In one instance, it is clear that atheists and agnostics are not fully included as part of who “we” are in ACA. Instead, “**they**” (atheists and agnostics) should be respectfully allowed to participate in the program despite not wholly being a part of “us”:

- “[Some adult children] play God and avoid asking for help by appearing agnostic or atheistic. **They** seem put off by talk of spiritual matters. This does not mean that

the views of the agnostic or atheist mean less. These views are respected in ACA.”

Some might say that the above *Big Red Book* excerpt referring to agnostics or atheists as “**they**” is an oversight, a literary technicality, and not what ACA really embodies. But for some atheists and agnostics, this passage is one of the clearest and most direct examples of why we commonly feel like “other” in ACA – because we are referred to, seen as, and treated like people who are “they” – not a part of “us.”

Some of us in the program refer to this type of “tolerance” as a spiritual “wink and nod” -- something like, *You are welcome to hang out in our recovery community with us (all suffering adult children are welcome), but to REALLY recover, you will eventually need to ‘come to believe’ as we do.* For example, the *Big Red Book* reads: “At some point the adult child realizes that he or she must seek a Higher Power with all earnestness . . . [to fully recover] **the person must seek God with urgency and intent.**”

Spiritual inclusion acknowledges that adult children come to ACA with an immense diversity of spiritual and philosophical frameworks, and that these perspectives can grow and evolve in recovery over time in a multitude of healthy directions. As long as someone has a “desire to recover from the effects of growing up in an alcoholic or otherwise dysfunctional family,” then that person is not to just be tolerated or respected in ACA, but needs to be fully welcomed and embraced as part of the ACA community.

Conclusion

The *Big Red Book* states that “spirituality is a surrendering process.” This statement aligns with ACA Step One, which asks us to acknowledge powerlessness and unmanageability in our lives. Some believe Steps Two and Three require that we surrender to a personified higher power to recover in ACA. And indeed, some of us choose to surrender to the open arms of a deity – we “let go and let God.” However, some of us in the program find other ways to surrender . . . to the great mystery of life . . . or to nothing at all – we simply “let go and not know.” Spiritual inclusion requires that we, as adult children in ACA, find ways to support each person’s unique path toward surrendering some control in our lives.

Still, some of us in ACA may not be interested in our program moving toward greater spiritual inclusion. Some of us would like to leave things as they are and might say: “The traditional 12 Step program’s religious/spiritual language and framework work well for me, and it has worked well for numerous others for many years. If it doesn’t work for some people, perhaps they should create another program that works better for them.”

It is also true that some of us in the program would like all references to spirituality eliminated from ACA and might say: “The concept of spirituality itself should be removed from the ACA program. True inclusion would eliminate all mention of that which cannot be empirically measured.”

And these viewpoints are to be expected. As adult children, we can easily gravitate toward rigid, all-or-nothing perspectives and controlling behaviors -- emblematic of our inner critic as described in *Big Red Book* Chapter 2. As children, mixed messages, contradictions, and confusion were probably part of the dysfunction we experienced. Opening ourselves to honestly addressing spiritual conflict in our literature can feel challenging, scary, or painful.

This document is an invitation to explore how ACA can become more welcoming to the diverse ways ACA members identify spiritually. By expanding our collective awareness in this area, we can heal inadvertent separation within our fellowship. By answering this call to action by amending our program literature to more fully reflect the diverse spiritual viewpoints of our fellowship, ACA can become more accessible to hurting adult children worldwide.

The ACA Solution asks us to be gentle and respectful toward ourselves and each other as we examine our program’s spiritual blind spots. We will need to lovingly reparent ourselves through this process when our inner critic or inner teen’s protective judgment and blame arise, or when we feel the weight of our wounded inner child’s helplessness. As a working group on this project, we repeatedly took deep breaths and summoned the courage to look honestly at our collective denial so that we might heal our program’s spiritual oversights. We are now inviting the fellowship to participate in this process, too.

From *A New Hope ACA Beginner’s Handbook* (Draft 5) – “Chapter 11: Spirituality”

“At its core, spirituality is a process of surrender: We release the illusion that we alone must have all the answers. When we recognize that we need help and sincerely ask for it in our ACA community, we open to sources of love, healing, acceptance, and wisdom that we never knew existed. To our amazement, these

resources become increasingly accessible, and our world becomes bigger and kinder. Some of us explain this in secular terms, such as the power of friendship, community, and connection. Others speak of nature, the universe, or life itself. And still, others more comfortably describe these resources in traditionally religious language. But whether atheist, agnostic, or believer . . . all recovering adult children have access to something greater than themselves. In this sense, spirituality is what many of us feel sitting among fellow travelers at an ACA meeting, and experience within as we learn to become our own loving parents.”

Appendix A

Spiritual Inclusion Working Group Safety & Conflict Resolution

Safety Statement:

It is this group’s conscience to provide a safe, respectful, and inclusive workgroup space for all participants, which we view as critical in working towards our purpose to achieve our goals. In order to provide a welcoming and trusting environment for everyone, we ask that all workgroup participants familiarize themselves with our ongoing safety discussion and embrace the spirit of respect it embodies. We suggest using the “Conflict Resolution Tool for the Spiritual Inclusion Working Group” provided below when disagreements or conflicts arise.

Conflict Resolution Tool for the Spiritual Inclusion Working Group

- Good to use when emotionally triggered or when raising a sensitive topic.
- Begin by asking the other person if they are willing to listen.
- Remember love: Invite love for yourself, love for the other person, and invite a larger conscience and perspective coming from love to help guide the discussion.

4 PART ACTION STEPS (Using "I" Statements)

1. State the facts of a situation as I observed them. (Example: "I heard..." "I saw...")
2. Share what I feel ("I feel sad," "I feel scared," I feel angry" etc.)
3. Share what I need or what I value in this situation.
4. Request what actions I would like taken in the future.

Let go of the results. Acceptance – I have acted and done what I can in a healthy way.