WHAT MATTERS MOST
Friendships, Faith, and Flourishing in the Lives of People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities
2015 Summer Institute on Theology and Disability

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MY FAITH IS SOMEWHAT OR VERY IMPORTANT TO ME...

People with Significant Disabilities
People without Disabilities

Source: Harris/National Organization on Disability

ATTENDING WORSHIP SERVICES AT LEAST ONCE PER MONTH

People with Significant Disabilities
People without Disabilities

Source: NOD/Harris Interactive (2010)

ATTENDING WORSHIP SERVICES AT LEAST ONCE PER MONTH

People with Significant Disabilities
People without Disabilities

Sources: NOD/Harris Interactive (2010); National Core Indicators
OUR SACRED TEXTS

OUR RESOLUTIONS
“Spirituality, spiritual growth, and religious expression that respect a person’s history, tradition, and current preferences are rights that must be honored by services systems and faith-based communities, as should the choice not to participate.”

“...the right of individuals with disabilities to participate in spiritual expression or organized religion as they so choose and promotes the provision of any and all supports needed by people with disabilities to so participate.”

SOME CORE VALUES
- Personal aspirations
- Self-determination
- Choice
- Community inclusion
- Supportive relationships
- Cultural competence
- Natural supports
- Quality of life

FAITH AND FLOURISHING

Sources: Biggs & Carter (2015); Boehm, Carter, & Taylor (in press)
Family Members

Friends and Close Companions

Acquaintances (Coworkers, Neighbors)

People Paid to Be There

SUPPORTING FAITH AND FLOURISHING
From Both Sides of the Congregation Door

52% of adults with IDD don't attend
56% kept their child from participating
32% changed their place of worship
18% offered supports

Sources: Ault, Carter, & Collins (2013); Carter, Gaeth, Annandale, & Taylor (in press); Kleinert et al. (2015); Liu, Carter, et al. (2014)
SUPPORTING SPIRITUALITY  
From Both Sides of the Congregation Door

REASONS FOR OMISSION

- I do not know how to address it.
- I feel uncomfortable addressing it.
- I never really thought about it.
- I do not have time to address it.
- It is not my responsibility to address it.
- I am not permitted to address it.
- It is not relevant to this segment of the community.

Source: Carter (2007)

A FEW (GOOD) IDEAS

1. REFLECT ON YOUR PRACTICES

Adapted from Forest & Peerpoint (1997)

www.hsrcdane.net/library/docs/FOURQUESTIONS.DOC
REFLECTION POINTS

- Our mission/vision statement reflects a commitment to support the choices of people with disabilities, including those related to spiritual exploration and religious expression.
- Our written policies explain the importance of supporting people’s religious preferences, as well as point to practical strategies for doing this well.
- Our staff and the people with disabilities whom we serve are aware of and familiar with these policies.
- We can name someone (e.g., staff person, board member, advocate) who is responsible for ensuring that spiritual supports are addressed and that our policies are evidenced in practice.
- We understand the different ways we should be addressing the spiritual and religious needs of the people whom we serve.
- We discuss with new staff the importance of listening for, seeking out, and supporting people’s choices and preferences, including their religious preferences.
- We provide staff with the training they need to do this effectively and with confidence.

Source: Carter (2007); http://www.opwdd.ny.gov/opwdd_community_connections/faith_based_initiatives/Sharing_material

REFLECTION POINTS

- We ask about the spiritual needs, strengths, and connections of people with disabilities when they first begin receiving our services and supports.
- We revisit these conversations periodically to make sure we are continuing to meet people’s needs in winsome ways.
- We orient people with disabilities and their families to the types of supports we make available for individuals interested in being involved in a faith community.
- We provide the opportunities, space, and support people need to explore and express their spirituality at home, within a congregation, or elsewhere, if they so choose.
- We periodically assess and seek to remove potential barriers that hinder us from addressing the spiritual and religious needs of people with disabilities.
- We can point to people whom we serve who are involved in the faith community of their choice.
- We have established relationships with local congregations and faith-based organizations as partners in this work.
- We recognize and affirm the sense of calling or vocation held by our staff providing direct support to people with disabilities.

REFLECTION TOOLS (EXAMPLES)

- Indicators of Welcome
  www.brookespublishing.com/carter
- Journey of a Congregation (National Organization on Disability)
  www.aapd.com/what-we-do/interfaith
- The “5 Stages” (Dan Vander Plaats & Elim Christian Services)
  www.the5stages.com
- Congregational Assessment Survey (Paul Leichty, CAN)
  www.accessibilitynetwork.net/survey
- Inclusion Handbook: Everybody Belongs, Everybody Serves (Terry DeYoung & Mark Stephenson, RCA/CRC)
  www.crcna.org/disability

2. ASK GOOD QUESTIONS

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**WHAT MIGHT YOU DISCOVER?**

- Maintaining
- Deepening
- Connecting
- Exploring
- No Interest
- Changing

**CONVERSATION STARTERS**

- Tell us about your child.
  - What does she enjoy doing? Not enjoy doing?
  - What are her gifts and talents? What does she do well? What does she love to “show off”?
  - How does she communicate with others? Express excitement? Frustration?
- Tell us about your family.
- In what ways would you like to see your child involved in this congregation?
- What has been your child’s previous experience in other congregations?
- What should we know about supporting your child in congregational activities?
  - Are there things we should definitely avoid doing or saying?
  - Are there things we should absolutely do?
  - What does she find most rewarding?
  - What is the best way to respond when your child becomes upset?

**SPIRIT Approach**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S</th>
<th>Spiritual belief system</th>
<th>How do you describe your formal religious affiliation?</th>
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**SPR | HOPE Approach**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S</th>
<th>Sources of Hope, Meaning,</th>
<th>What are your basic spiritual resources?</th>
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**I | F | Faith and Belief | What brings you meaning? Do you consider yourself to be spiritual or religious? |
|---|-------------------------|----------------------------------------|

**C | Community | Do you belong to a congregation or other spiritual community? How important is this community to you? |
|---|------------|----------------------------------------|

**A | Address or Application | How if at all would you like us to address these issues through our supports and services? |
|---|------------------------|----------------------------------------|

**Religious and spiritual expression**

- What are some things that give you joy or happiness? What brings meaning to your life?
- Do you believe in a higher power or a guiding spirit?
- Which of these supports can we provide? Which would you prefer come from someone else?
- Are there things that you would like help finding a congregational home?
- What is important to you in terms of spiritual support, relationships, and connections that you would like?
- How do they help you find out more about your faith?
- Are there religious practices or restrictions that you should keep in mind as we support you?
- Would you like us to help you address your spiritual needs? If so, how?
- Would you like help finding out more about your faith?
- How will we do the helping you meet your spiritual needs?
- Do you have any needs that are not being addressed?

Source: Carter (2007)
CONVERSATION STARTERS

- How would you describe your child’s faith? What are the best ways to communicate spiritual truths?
- Are there important goals you have for your child as she participates in our program this year? As you look into the future?
- What could we do to make our children’s program the most exciting time of the week for your child?
- How would you like us to respond when other children or adults ask us about your child’s disability or support needs?
- What do you see as the biggest challenges to including your child in congregational activities?
- How can our congregation help support your family as you raise your child? Can we _______ [offer specific examples]?
- Is there anything else that you would like us to know about your child or family?

Source: Carter (2007)

3. THINK BEYOND SUNDAY

PUTTING FAITH TO WORK

www.puttingfaithtowork.org

FRIENDSHIP HOUSES

www.friendshiphousepartners.com
FOSTERING RELATIONSHIPS

A FEW (GOOD) IDEAS

4. WORK TOGETHER

WHAT MATTERS MOST
Friendships, Faith, & Flourishing

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