What Matters Most: Friendships, Faith, and Flourishing

Erik Carter

**Slide 1**

What Matters Most: Friendships, Faith, and Flourishing in the Lives of People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

2015 Summer Institute on Theology and Disability

**Slide 2**

WHAT MATTERS MOST Friendships, Faith, and Flourishing

Erik Carter, Vanderbilt University

**Slide 3**

No text. Two pictures of young people with developmental disabilities

**Slide 4**

No text. Two pictures of young people with developmental disabilities

**Slide 5**

No text. Two pictures of young people with developmental disabilities

**Slide 6**

Bar graph showing that 87% of people with significant disabilities consider their faith to be somewhat or very important to them compared to 84% of people without disabilities. Source: Harris/National Organization on Disability.

**Slide 7**

Bar graph superimposed on the prior slide bar graph. It shows 43% of people with significant disabilities attend worship services at least once per month compared to 57% of people without disabilities. An arrow shows the gap between these two numbers. Source: National Organization on Disability/Harris Interactive (2010).

**Slide 8**

Bar graph superimposed on the prior slide bar graph. It shows 38% of people with significant disabilities attend worship services at least once per month compared to 57% of people without disabilities. An arrow shows the gap between these two numbers. Source: National Organization on Disability/Harris Interactive (2010) and National Core Indicators.

**Slide 9**

OUR SACRED TEXTS. Pictures of man holding open an old, dusty book.

**Slide 10**

OUR SACRED TEXTS. Pictures of the covers of multiple professional journals in the area of intellectual and developmental disabilities.

**Slide 11**

OUR RESOLUTIONS. Picture of a couple of buttons that say “I resolve to \_\_\_ for the next year.”

**Slide 12**

Displays a quickly scrolling list of the names of almost 100 position statements by faith communities addressing disability.

**Slide 13**

“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.” Source http://aaidd.org/news-policy/policy/position-statements/spirituality

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“...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.” Source www.tash.org

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SOME CORE VALUES

Personal aspirations

Self-determination

Choice

Community inclusion

Supportive relationships

Cultural competence

Natural supports

Quality of life

**Slide 16**

FAITH AND FLOURISHING. Displays a picture of a family with a son with Down syndrome.

**Slide 17**

Displays a picture of four concentric circles. The inner circle is labeled “Family Members.” The next larger circle is labeled “Friends and Close Companions.” The next larger circle is labeled “Acquaintances (Coworkers, Neighbors).” The outer largest circle is labeled “People Paid to Be There.”

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SUPPORTING SPIRITUALITY From Both Sides of the Congregation Door

Displays four circles each with the following research statistic:

52% of adults with IDD don’t attend

56% kept their child from participating

32% changed their place of worship

18% or fewer churches offered supports

**Slide 19**

Displays three pictures of churches that are very inaccessible.

**Slide 20**

Displays a picture that says “Welcome, we’re glad you’re here?”

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SUPPORTING SPIRITUALITY: From Both Sides of the Congregation Door

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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.

Someone else is addressing it.

It is not relevant to this segment of the community.

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A FEW (GOOD) IDEAS. Displays a picture of five cartoon light bulbs.

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1. REFLECT ON YOUR PRACTICES

What are we doing well right now in this area?

What might we do even better?

What should we be doing quite differently?

And what makes sense as the first, best next step to promote flourishing in this area?

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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.

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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.

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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

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2. ASK GOOD QUESTIONS

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HOPE Approach

Sources of Hope, Meaning, Comfort, Strength, Peace,

Love, and Connection

What are your basic spiritual resources? What gives you support? What sustains you in difficult times?

Organized Religion

What role does organized religion play in your life? What aspects are most and least important to you?

Personal Spirituality and Practices

What spiritual practices are important to you? How would you describe your rela- tionship with God?

Effects on Care

How should your spiritual needs, strengths, and resources impact the supports and opportunities we provide?

FICA Approach

Faith and Belief

What brings you meaning? Do you consider yourself to be spiritual or religious?

Importance and Influence

How important are those beliefs in your life? What influence do they have on the decisions you make?

Community

Do you belong to a congregation or other spiritual community? How important is this community to you?

Address or Application

How (if at all) would you like us to address these issues through our supports and services?

SPIRIT Approach

Spiritual belief system

How do you describe your formal religious affiliation?

Personal spirituality

Are there particular beliefs and practices that are more or less important to you?

Integration with a spiritual community

Are you a member of a particular congregation or community group? What supports do they provide?

Ritualized practices and restrictions

What activities and behaviors are encouraged or forbidden within your personal belief system?

Implications for care

What should we keep in mind as we pro- vide services and supports to you?

Terminal events planning

What should we know about how you wish to be supported and cared for? (For peo- ple nearing the end of their lives)

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Congregational involvement

Do you currently attend a congregation (e.g., church, mosque, synagogue, tem- ple)?

Tell me about it.

Who do you go with?

What do you do there? How do you participate in services and activities?

How often do you go?

What do you like most about your congregation? What do you wish was different?

How is being part of this congregation important in your life?

In what ways would you like to be more involved? Less involved?

If you could try out any new class, program, or activity, what would it be?

Is your congregation supportive for you? How so?

Are there particular people who are especially friendly or helpful?

What keeps you from being involved in the ways that you would like?

Were you involved in a congregation when you were younger? Was this an important part of family life?

Religious and spiritual expression

What are some things that give you joy or happiness? What brings meaning to your life?

Do you have religious or spiritual beliefs that are important to you? What are those beliefs?

What are some of the ways that you express your faith or spirituality?

What traditions, rituals, or practices are especially important to you?

Are there holy days, festivals, or other special events that you observe?

What gives you strength?

How do you cope when going through difficult times? To whom do you turn?

What would you say are your gifts? What are you good at? What do people compliment you on?

Have you experienced a sense of calling in your life?

What else is important for us know about your religious and spiritual beliefs?

Support needs

What supports will you need to be involved in your congregation in the ways you would like?

Which of these supports can we provide? Which would you prefer come from someone else?

Would you like help finding a congregational home?

Do you have the spiritual supports, relationships, and connections that you would like?

Are there religious practices or restrictions that we 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 well are we doing at helping you meet your spiritual needs?

Do you have any needs that are not being addressed?

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WHAT MIGHT YOU DISCOVER?

Displays four six circles that each say: exploring, connecting, maintaining, deepening, changing, no interest

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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?*

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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?

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3. THINK BEYOND SUNDAY

**Slide 35**

PUTTING FAITH TO WORK: www.puttingfaithtowork.org

Displays an image of a group of people at a person-centered planning meeting.

**Slide 36**

FRIENDSHIP HOUSES: www.friendshiphousepartners.org

Displays an image of 13 young people with and without disabilities having fun.

**Slide 37**

FOSTERING RELATIONSHIPS

Displays an image of four young people with and without disabilities sitting together.

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4. WORK TOGETHER

Displays an image of lots people holding hands.

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A FEW (GOOD) IDEAS

Displays a picture of a row of light bulbs, with one lit up.

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To Learn More…

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What matters most

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