

National Collaborative on Faith and Disability Webinar Series

Honoring Spiritual Needs and Gifts:

From Inertia to Collaborative Action by
Providers and Congregations

February 23, 2015

A webinar series hosted by:

National Collaborative on Faith and Disability (faithanddisability.org)
AAIDD Religion & Spirituality Division (aaidreligion.org)

National Collaborative on Faith and Disability Webinar Series

Addressing Spiritual Needs and Choices:

Creative Strategies by Provider and
Service Organizations

Moderator:

David Morstad, M.Ed. (*Bethesda Institute*)

Presenters:

Lida Merrill, M.Th. (*Heritage Christian Services*)

Bessie Senette (*Volunteers of America*)

Rick Benjamin, M.A. (*Hope Community Resources*)

Wes Allen, M.Div. (*Quality Management Associates*)

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Also Supported By:

- Autism Society of America
- Parent to Parent
- Bethesda Institute
- The Arc
- ANCOR
- Vanderbilt Kennedy University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities

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A Few Important Notes

- This webinar is being recorded and will be posted this week on the Collaborative on Faith and Disability website (faithanddisability.org).
- All slides, mentioned resources, and several helpful links will also be posted along with the webinar recording.
- Questions can be submitted in the chat box for discussion after the presentations.
- We will read posted questions to the presenters during the Q&A at the end of the presentation. All phone lines are silenced.
- Our time is brief.
- Information about upcoming webinars and the Collaborative on Faith and Disability will be shared at the end of the webinar.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE TOPIC

David Morstad, M.Ed.
Executive Director
 Bethesda Institute
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ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGIES THAT SUPPORT THRIVING PEOPLE

Lida Merrill, M.Th.
Director of Spiritual Life
 Heritage Christian Services
 Website: www.heritagechristianservices.org
 Email: lmerrill@heritagechristianservices.org



HERITAGE
CHRISTIAN SERVICES

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Instilling Culture

- Culture: The sum of attitudes, customs, and beliefs that distinguishes one group of people from another. Culture is transmitted, through language, material objects, ritual, institutions, and art, from one generation to the next. (Dictionary.com)
- Culture exists in tradition, people, and their stories.
- The Heritage Difference grows from our mission statement and sums up our culture.

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Instilling Culture

- The Heritage Difference
- Mission (statement) focused
- “Our mission is.... For this is their rightful heritage.”
 - Annual mission statement in-services
 - We all speak the same language and have the same expectations.
 - Interactive conversation about how our mission comes to life at each program and department.
 - Annual team conversation that gives attention to the spiritual needs of the people we support.
 - Annual team conversation about faith-community relationships and natural supports.

Instilling Culture

- For a culture to survive it must be vital and shared.
 - Hire people who support the mission and the culture
 - [realistic job preview](#)
- Educate employees about their role in whole person service provision and their role in supporting people to accomplish their valued outcomes.
 - Person-centered services encompass the whole person (body, mind and spirit).
 - Maintain focus on the desired outcomes of the person receiving services.
 - Empathy lessons- It is okay to be uncomfortable; it is okay to stretch yourself. It is not okay to impose personal beliefs on others.

Instilling Culture

- “Champion”
 - Champion of a cause... The cause? A person achieving what really matters in their life.
 - Identify employees who seem to naturally serve in a whole-person honoring manner.
 - Empower these employees to lead and model this style of serving.
 - Spiritual Life team
- Bridge Builders
 - Connectors
 - Listeners
 - Networkers
- Story-tellers
 - Fosters inspiration and possibility thinking.
 - Creates a supportive community.
 - Carries traditions into the future.

Faith Community Inclusion Project

- New York State Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) Faith Community Inclusion Project participants, 2014.
- Identified 21 people who utilize our services and indicated via the Personal Outcome Measurement (POM) interview and written summary that they would like more faith community involvement or to explore spirituality or faith.

Faith Community Inclusion Project

- Best Practices garnered from project
 - Self Advocacy
 - This is not a passive journey.
 - ‘With’ never ‘for’ approach (Nothing about me without me)
 - Listen to the person to help her sort out what she meant by her answers regarding faith during the POM interview.
 - Development of social media connections
 - Websites
 - Facebook
 - On-line faith community presence
 - Email communication
 - People served need personal email accounts.
 - Obtain permission before using the ‘cc’ feature.

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Faith Community Inclusion Project

- Best Practices continued
 - Utilize established networks
 - Past faith community involvement.
 - Family's faith community
 - Volunteer experiences at para-faith organizations, i.e., food pantry or clothing distribution.
 - Employee and peer networks if they are a match for the person's faith exploration.
 - Location, location, location.
 - Ambassadors or guides
 - The art of making introductions
 - Listener, observer, connector
 - Learning and communicating a community's unstated rules of behavior and expectation.

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Faith Community Inclusion Project

- Best Practices continued...
 - Pursue opportunities for connecting with others outside of the weekly scheduled worship service.
 - Utilize community bulletins and online calendars.
 - Create faith supports to be used at home if home worship or observance is part of the individual's chosen faith.
 - Encourage the support staff to ask questions of the ambassadors or faith community members; do not make assumptions. For example- communion practices and prayer customs.

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Faith Community Inclusion Project

- Opportunities Encountered
 - Sensitivity to personal faith community practices such as those around sacraments of baptism and communion as well as requirements of volunteering.
 - The reality of living with a disability and receiving services is that there will be schedule and transportation challenges; communication, brainstorming, compromise.
 - Expect flexibility and tolerance from support staff but be sensitive to their experience.

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Faith Community Inclusion Project

- Presence and role of support staff
 - At a meeting of direct support professionals from each residential and day services program the question was asked:
 - What are the behaviors that you and your peers engage in when supporting a person with their personal faith journey and faith community inclusion?

Faith Community Inclusion Project

Their answers:

- Listen to people
 - Listen to keep the focus that the faith journey is not about what the staff person believes or practices with regards to faith and spirituality.
 - Listen to be supportive of a person's personal dreams.
- Have a desire to see others succeed.
- Willingness to learn about a person's faith practices and observances to better support them in this part of their life.
- Role modeling and coaching a person regarding appropriateness of behavior and appearance; be an example in a variety of settings.

Faith Community Inclusion Project

- Make introductions.
- Utilize People-First Language.
- Weekly review of communications (printed bulletin or on-line) from the person's chosen faith community, with the goal of finding activities and opportunities to be present with members of the community, build relationships and use gifts and talents.

Faith Community Inclusion Project: Bob's Story



Faith Community Inclusion Project: Burton's Story

- Burt requires supports in most areas of his life.
- Based on observations of Burton and his faith expressions the Staff Support portion of his POM summary included their belief that he desires to further explore and practice his faith in his home.
- As an elderly person he frequently chooses to not attend local synagogue services.
- Honoring the Sabbath evening is a crucial part of Jewish home life so it was decided to begin with that weekly observance.

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Faith Community Inclusion Project: Burton's Story

- Burton appreciates touching things to learn about their purpose and design. With this knowledge about Burton he was asked if he would like to have a Sabbath in a Box created that utilizes sensory items that he can use in his Sabbath celebration.
- This project has brought several Jewish communities together on Burton's behalf. The next steps include introducing Burton to the people who are investing their time, talent and treasure in this opportunity for him to explore his faith and express his spirituality. Support staff training is on-going and staff is invested in supporting Burton spirit, soul and body.

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Resources

- [Research and writings of Dr. Jeff McNair](#)
- [Vulnerable Communion: A Theology of Disability and Hospitality by Thomas E. Reynolds](#)
- [Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities by Erik W. Carter](#)
- [The writing of Jean Vanier](#)
- [AbleFaith blog by Heritage Christian Services](#)
- [Faith, Hope and Inclusion: Believing Together podcast, from Heritage Christian Services](#)
- Numerous blogs including [the writing of Amy Julia Becker](#)
- Various Pinterest Boards:
 - [Sabbath-honoring Pinterest board](#)
 - [Disability Resources Pinterest board](#)
 - [AbleFaith Pinterest Board](#)
 - [Occupational Therapist Pinterest boards](#)
- [Joni and Friends Ministry](#)
- [Disability Concerns Committee of the United Methodist Church](#)
- [Key Ministry](#)
- [Summer Institute on Theology and Disability](#)
- [Disability Concerns: Christian Reformed Church](#)
- [Jewish resources at Chabad](#)

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VOLUNTEERS OF AMERICA'S INITIATIVE FOR SUPPORTING THE EXPRESSION OF SPIRITUALITY FOR PERSONS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

Bessie Senette

Certified Healing Touch Practitioner and Reiki Master Teacher

Volunteers of America

Website: www.voa.org

Email: bessiesenette@gmail.com

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Evolving Progress

- Of 46 National Affiliates, 13 have programs for Intellectual Disabilities. Since the completion of the Research Report and Resource Guide, only 2 affiliates have adopted spiritual support policy... Minnesota and Greater Baton Rouge, Louisiana.
- Of 3 Louisiana Affiliates only Greater Baton Rouge is moving forward with spiritual supports not only with intellectual disabilities programming but all service programs.

Lessons Learned

- Without advocacy even the most brilliant initiatives die a quick death.
- Agency change happens at a snail's pace.
- Putting money where your mouth is can be easier said than done.
- Old dogs can learn new tricks, but what incentive do we offer our veteran service providers?

Volunteers of America

To obtain a complete copy of the Research Report and Resource Guide, contact:

Kara Frost

Kfrost@voa.org

CREATIVE PROVIDER STRATEGIES IN ADDRESSING SPIRITUAL NEEDS

Rick Benjamin, M.A.

Director of Spirituality

Hope Community Resources

Website: www.hopealaska.org

Email: rbenjamin@hopealaska.org



Addressing spiritual needs upon request, with respect to everyone involved.

This calls for creative strategies by providers – because everyone's spiritual needs are different.

How I Connect People to Faith Communities

- Brief interview
 - Spiritual history
 - Current needs and preferences
- 2-3 suggestions, with contact information
- Offer to go along
- “If one of these doesn’t fit, come back and we’ll try some others.”
- Follow up

Natural supports are the ideal.
Then people are members of their faith communities – just like everyone else.

I’ve even trained faith community members as volunteer support staff.

Accommodating Staff Spirituality

- What if supporting someone’s spiritual needs violates a staff person’s faith or spirituality?
- Suggestion: gently explore the word “uncomfortable.”
- Make accommodations when a staff person’s faith or spirituality are violated – “with respect to everyone involved.”

Transportation

- Agency vehicle
- Faith community vehicle
- Faith community volunteer
- Public transportation



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How I Stay Connected to Faith Communities and Leaders

- Be involved in clergy groups and events.
- Look for new faith communities in the area.
- Visit and participate in faith communities.
- Offer to do Disability Awareness presentations.
- Keep a current list of contact information.

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Annual Clergy Day



Join us for
Annual Hope Clergy Day
Thursday, Aug. 29th
10:30 am -2:30 pm
Hope Auditorium, 570 W. 53rd Ave.

RSVP by Aug. 22nd to
Rick Benjamin: 433-4707
rbenjamin@HopeAlaska.org



HOPE Helping People with Disabilities
Achieve Their Dreams

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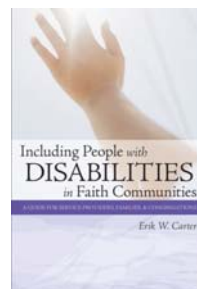
You must have support from the top.

To prioritize connections with faith communities and leaders, spirituality must be accepted and supported in the organizational culture.

- Board
- Executive Director
- Directors

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A Great Resource



Addressing spiritual needs upon request, with respect to everyone involved

It requires creativity, communication
and flexibility.

So far there's always been a solution!

ADDRESSING SPIRITUAL NEEDS AND CHOICES

Wes Allen, M.Div.

Director of Day & Employment Services

Quality Management Associates

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Email: WAllen@qmainc.com



The Essence of Spirituality ...



The Desire to Belong

"And when the time is right /I hope that you'll respond /Like when the wind gets tired
/ the ocean becomes calm /I may be dreaming but /I'm longing to belong to you."
- Eddie Vedder, "Longing to Belong", *Ukulele Songs*, 2011.

"Bonding is essential to for our species, and it is what us happiest ... [it is] a state of
satisfaction with the life one is living ... Rather than money, success, or fame, time
spent with friends and family is what does people the most good."
- Frans de Waal, "The Age of Empathy," 2008.

"The social fabric of community is formed from an expanding shared sense of
belonging. It is shaped by the idea that only when we are connected and care for
the well-being of the whole that a civil and democratic society is created."
- Peter Block, "Community," 2008.

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Abling Community ...



The slide features a collection of logos representing various organizations and faiths. On the left, there is a pink square with 'DD' in white, the Starbucks logo, and the Green Mountain Coffee Roasters logo. In the center, there is the Philadelphia Phillies logo and an eagle logo. On the right, there is a Star of David, a cross, and a crescent moon with a star.

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Quality of Life = more than meds and meals

- Interdisciplinary team needs focus on quality of life.
- Make quality of life priority of service plan.
- Train staff to plan and give tools to implement.
- Creativity and empathy as catalyst to quality of life...
- "Yes we can" trumps "no we can't!"

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Q&A WITH THE SPEAKERS

Please post your questions in the chat box

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NATIONAL COLLABORATIVE
ON FAITH AND DISABILITY

www.faithanddisability.org

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Vision and Mission

People with disabilities and their families will have compelling opportunities and supports to develop and express their spirituality, engage in congregational life, and share their gifts and talents in ways that are personally valued and that strengthen communities.

Our mission is to support people with disabilities, their families, and those who support them by providing national and international leadership in the areas of research, education, service, and dissemination related to disability, religion, and inclusive supports.

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Current UCEDD Partners



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Activities of the Collaborative

- ✓ Develop and support an interdisciplinary and interfaith network of scholars and leaders who are addressing the intersection of disability, religion, and/or spirituality in their work.
- ✓ Foster rigorous, collaborative, and interdisciplinary scholarship, including research, policy analyses, theological reflection, and program evaluations.
- ✓ Develop educational materials, programs, and technical assistance fostering collaboration among, or building the capacity of, religious leaders, human service professionals, service providers, congregations, individuals with disabilities, and families to address spirituality and build inclusive spiritual supports.
- ✓ Produce and disseminate compelling resources based on research and state-of-the-art practice in both disability services and inclusive spiritual supports.
- ✓ Provide national and international leadership by speaking to policy initiatives, cultural developments, and other emerging issues related to disabilities, religion, and spirituality.
- ✓ Serve as a central and visible "clearinghouse" for resources, research, trainings, conferences, programs, and organizations.
- ✓ Provide an accessible and engaging link between academic, professional, and lay communities.
- ✓ Support and enhance the efforts of other organizations, faith networks, and groups carrying out work in related areas.
- ✓ Pursue large-scale funding to carry out the work of the Collaborative.

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Upcoming Webinar Conversations

- **March 30:** *Congregational strategies for reaching out to agencies and working with them to identify and honor spiritual supports and enable inclusion and ongoing participation*
- **April 27:** *Strategies for congregations to use in building awareness and commitment within congregations*
- **June 29:** *Best practices and resources for moving from inclusion to belonging as contributing, valued members of faith communities*
- Register at www.faihanddisability.org