

# 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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## WHAT MATTERS MOST

Friendships, Faith, and Flourishing

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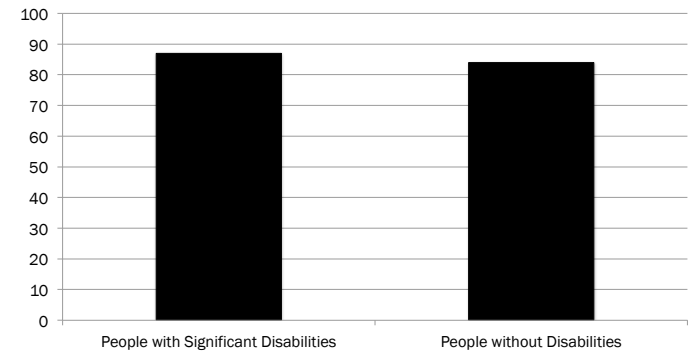


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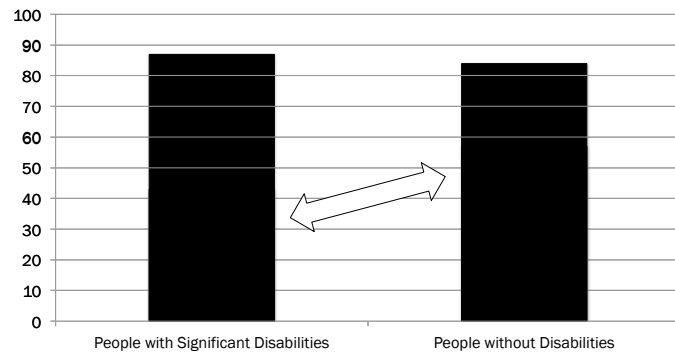
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## MY FAITH IS SOMEWHAT OR VERY IMPORTANT TO ME...



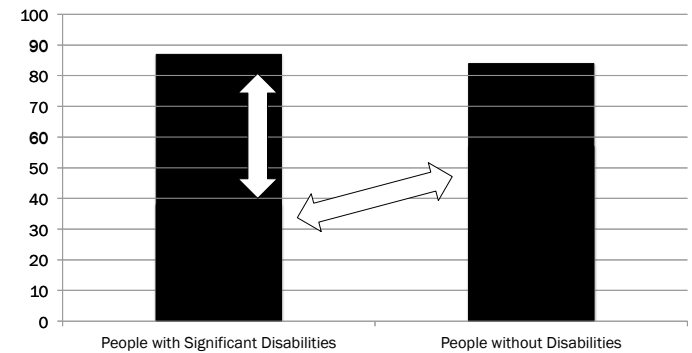
Source: Harris/National Organization on Disability

## ATTENDING WORSHIP SERVICES AT LEAST ONCE PER MONTH



Source: NOD/Harris Interactive (2010)

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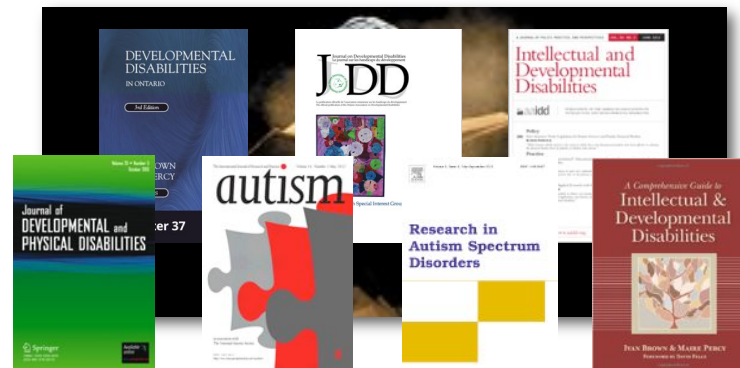
Sources: NOD/Harris Interactive (2010); National Core Indicators

## OUR SACRED TEXTS



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## OUR SACRED TEXTS



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## OUR RESOLUTIONS



[www.faitbanddisability.org](http://www.faitbanddisability.org)

American Baptist Churches, USA  
 Resolution on the Church and Persons with Disabilities (1978, 1994, 1998)  
 Resolution on Employment of Persons with Disabilities (1983, 1994, 1998)  
 Resolution on Mental Illness (1991)

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#### POSITION STATEMENT

People with  
right to choos  
expressions, a  
spiritual as  
gious p

**"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."**

<http://aaidd.org/news-policy/policy/position-statements/spirituality>

#### RATIONALE

Faith and spirituality  
do for other  
spiritual

**"...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."**

14 [www.tash.org](http://www.tash.org)

## SOME CORE VALUES

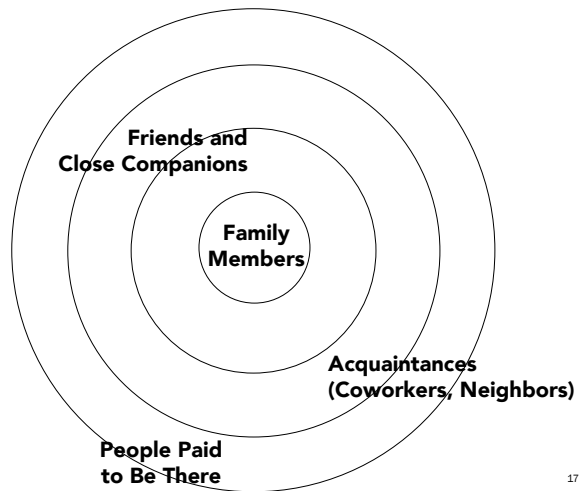
- ✓ Personal aspirations
- ✓ Self-determination
- ✓ Choice
- ✓ Community inclusion
- ✓ Supportive relationships
- ✓ Cultural competence
- ✓ Natural supports
- ✓ Quality of life

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## FAITH AND FLOURISHING



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



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## SUPPORTING FAITH AND FLOURISHING From Both Sides of the Congregation Door



Sources: Ault, Carter, & Collins (2013); Carter, Boehm, Annandale, & Taylor (in press); Kleinert et al. (2015); Liu, Carter, et al. (2014)



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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.

Source: Carter (2007)

## A FEW (GOOD) IDEAS



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## 1. REFLECT ON YOUR PRACTICES



Adapted from Forest & Pearpoint (1997)  
[www.fsrdane.net/library/docs/FOURQUES.DOC](http://www.fsrdane.net/library/docs/FOURQUES.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/training\\_material](http://www.opwdd.ny.gov/opwdd_community_connections/faith_based_initiatives/training_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.

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## REFLECTION TOOLS (EXAMPLES)

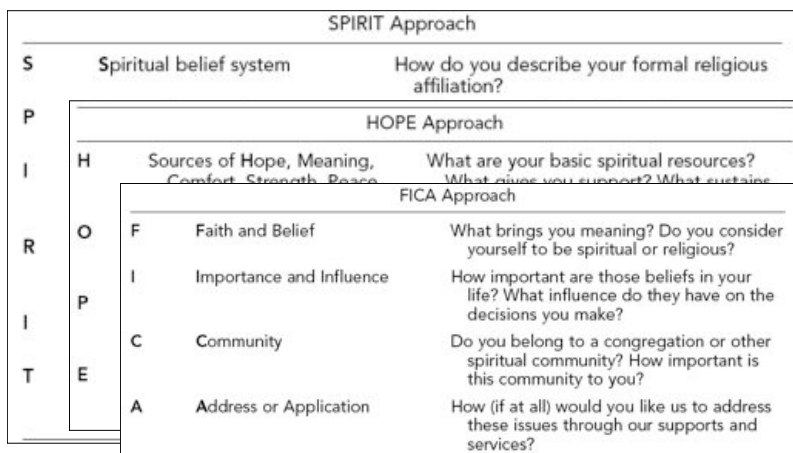
- *Indicators of Welcome*  
[www.brookespublishing.com/carter](http://www.brookespublishing.com/carter)
- *Journey of a Congregation* (National Organization on Disability)  
[www.aapd.com/what-we-do/interfaith/](http://www.aapd.com/what-we-do/interfaith/)
- *The "5 Stages"* (Dan Vander Plaats & Elim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

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## 2. ASK GOOD QUESTIONS



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Source: Saventa (2012)

### Congregational involvement

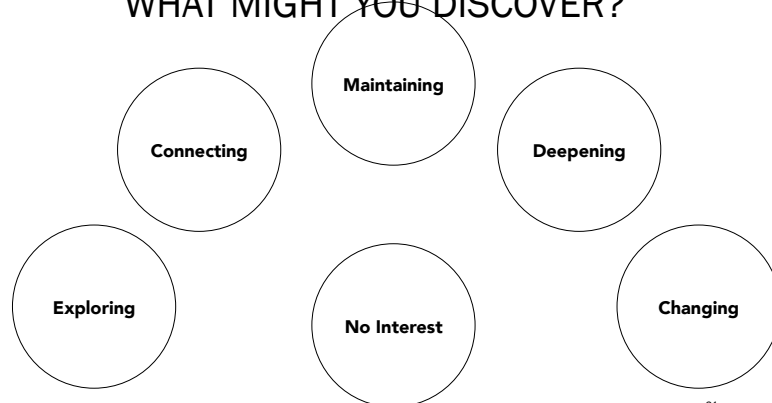
- Do you currently attend a congregation (e.g., church, mosque, synagogue, temple)?

### Religious and spiritual expression

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



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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?

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



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## PUTTING FAITH TO WORK



[www.puttingfaithtowork.org](http://www.puttingfaithtowork.org)

## FRIENDSHIP HOUSES



[www.friendshiphousepartners.com](http://www.friendshiphousepartners.com)

## FOSTERING RELATIONSHIPS



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## 4. WORK TOGETHER



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## A FEW (GOOD) IDEAS



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## WHAT MATTERS MOST

Friendships, Faith, & Flourishing



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## To Learn More...

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