



FAITH COMMUNITIES:

*A VEHICLE FOR FOSTERING RELATIONSHIPS &
WELL-BEING*



MICHAEL MAGEE

Archdiocese Of Philadelphia
Communities of Don Guenalla & Divine Providence



SISTER KATHLEEN SCHIPANI

Archdiocese Of Philadelphia
Office For Persons With Disabilities

FAITH COMMUNITIES: A VEHICLE FOR FOSTERING RELATIONSHIPS

- This workshop will explore the benefits of relationships with faith communities to foster meaningful, practical and realistic supports that respond to the spiritual needs and religious preferences of individuals with special needs. Practical strategies for fostering, respecting and supporting these relationships will be discussed, focusing on how this enhances the emotional and social life of individuals with special needs.
- **Who are we?**



QUALITIES OF RELATIONSHIPS

WORKING



- **MUTUAL**
- **RECIPROCAL**
- **BENEFICIAL**
- **OPEN TO LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER**
- **ENERGIZING**
- **LIFE GIVING -- NEW LIFE**

WHY CONSIDER SPIRITUAL NEEDS & RELIGIOUS PREFERENCES

OF INDIVIDUALS WITH IDD /ASD

- Basic rights of those we serve – religious preference and practice.
- Recognition of inner life and capacity for growth
- Normative Environment
- Often connects the individual to their roots/identity
- Can foster **PASSION, BELONGING AND PURPOSE**



Flourish: People with Disabilities Living Lives of Passion, Karin Meiberg Schwier (2012)

FLOURISHING AND THRIVING

- Lives full of spirit
- Positive sense of identity
- Activities that are meaningful
- Strong connections with people, places and what is “sacred” in ones life
- Spirituality not so much a set of beliefs as it is a **RELATIONSHIP – WITH ONESELF, OTHERS, GOD** ...traditions and future.



WELLNESS & SPIRITUALITY RESEARCH INDICATES

Liu 2014

Thriving includes friendships within faith communities, a sense of belonging that comes from membership, worship with others and serving with others.

Biggs and Carter 2018

Faith and Quality of life strongly correlated. ½ of Adults with IDD attended Church at least once a month.

NOD, 2004

90% of adults with IDD considered their faith to be important

LET'S CHECK WITH MIKE!

ASPIRATIONS

FAITH COMMUNITIES CAN BE A PLACE WHERE:

- Relationships matter most
- known not by their labels, but by their names
- friendships readily form when individuals with and without severe disabilities are part of **SHARED ACTIVITIES**, connected on the basis of **COMMON INTERESTS**, given **VALUED ROLES**, and provided **"JUST ENOUGH" SUPPORT**.

Carter, E.W., Asmus, J., Moss, C. K., Amirault, K.A., Biggs, E. E., ... & Wier, K. (2016).

84 %

OF AMERICANS WITH
DISABILITIES SAY
THEIR FAITH IS
IMPORTANT TO THEM



48 %

OF ADULTS WITH IDD
ATTENDED A
RELIGIOUS SERVICE
IN THE LAST MONTH

EXPERIENCE

Carter, Kleinert, et al.(2015);
NOD (2004)

www.faithanddisability.org

WHAT CAUSES THE GAP?

- Within Agencies
- Within Families
- Within the community
- Within Faith Communities**

Fear & Unfamiliarity

Real or perceived lack of resources & training

Misunderstanding about the nature of Disability

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HOW DO WE BRIDGE THE GAP?

- Make it a Goal
- Begin with the
Person
- Do a Spiritual
Assessment Process

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SPIRITUAL ASSESSMENT /FAITH PROFILE

F
I
C
A

- **Faith or Beliefs.** What is a person's faith or belief? What gives meaning? Does this person consider himself/herself to be spiritual or religious?
- **Importance.** How important is spirituality for this person?
- **Community.** What kind of communal expression does this take, or would the person want it to take?
- **Address.** How does this person/family want us, as health and human service providers, to address these needs and interests?
- A very simple format for a spiritual assessment has been developed by Christina Puchalski, M.D., and others (Puchalski, 2000). She uses the acronym "FICA" to signify the format for initial exploration:



SPIRITUAL ASSESSMENT /PROFILE

- Religious Affiliation: _____
- Family of Origin Religious Background: _____
- Membership in Church/Masque/Synagogue: _____
- Address _____
- Contact Persons, name and #: _____
- Sunday/Sabbath/ Holy Day Worship Preference _____
- Ritual / Spiritual Practices Preferences _____
- **Spiritual Practices / Preferences related to illness, crises or dying**

- Open ended questions like:
*Tell me about your Church/
Synagogue/ Mosque faith story...*

DON'T JUST SHOW UP

MAKE CONTACT

BEGIN BUILDING A WORKING RELATIONSHIP



- Figure out the GO-TO person
- Speak about the persons strengths and desire
- Explain the needed accommodations
- Determine natural supports
- What will the role of Direct Support Staff be
- Ask for a peer mentor or host family



REGISTER BECOME A MEMBER

*Welcoming all people to the
Celebrations and
Obligations of membership
within your Church.*



WHAT DOES BELONGING LOOK LIKE



WHAT DOES BELONGING LOOK LIKE



VALUED ROLES – ABLE TO USE GIFTS



REACHING MILESTONES



INCLUSION IN FAITH FORMATION



OPPORTUNITIES FOR SOCIALIZING

MAKING FRIENDS



SERVICE AND GIVING BACK





1. Have faith leaders who were more committed to inclusion;
2. Used educational resources to address disability-related issues;
3. Portrayed people with disabilities positively in their religious teachings;
4. **Had stronger ties to disability organizations; and**
5. Had a stronger orientation towards promoting social justice.

More inclusive faith communities were described in one study as having five common characteristics.

**A PRELIMINARY
SURVEY OF
INCLUSIVE
PRACTICES IN THE
UNITED STATES.**
JOURNAL OF APPLIED
RESEARCH IN INTELLECTUAL
DISABILITIES, 2012

POSITION STATEMENT ON SPIRITUALITY

- **Joint Statement AAIDD and The Arc:** <https://aaid.org/news-policy/policy/position-statements/spirituality> & <https://www.thearc.org/who-we-are/position-statements/life-in-the-community/spirituality>
- **Spiritual resources and faith communities** are an **underused resource** in the community for people to exercise choice, develop relationships and social networks, demonstrate respect for cultural and family backgrounds, and serve others.
- Faith communities should be encouraged to **build their capacity to support** and welcome individuals with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities and their families, and should be **assisted in such efforts**.



Provider Organizations Impact

- Relationship with Faith Leaders can enhance commitment to Inclusion.
- Providing resources for families
- Presence and portrayal
- Strong ties: offering supports,
- Advocacy and rights

FIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF INCLUSIVE FAITH COMMUNITIES

- Have faith leaders who were more committed to inclusion;
- Used educational resources to address disability-related issues;
- Portrayed people with disabilities positively in their religious teachings;
- Had stronger ties to disability organizations; and
- Had a stronger orientation towards promoting social justice



RESOURCES & REFERENCES

- Church 4 Every Child: <https://church4everychild.org/2016/02/09/what-are-the-stats-on-disability-and-church/>
- Ministry Matters: <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/8739/welcoming-people-with-disabilities>
- TASH: https://www.gvsu.edu/cms4/asset/64CB422A-ED08-43F0-F795CA9DE364B6BE/2015_what_matters_most_tash_connections.pdf
- PATHWAYS / Team Belong: <https://pathways.org/team-belong/resources/>
- Vanderbilt Kennedy Center: <https://vkc.mc.vanderbilt.edu/vkc/resources/religionspirituality/>
- Office for Persons with Disabilities: www.opdarchphilly.org
- National Catholic Partnership on Disability: www.ncpd.org
- Collaborative on Faith & Disability: www.faithanddisability.org

For powerpoint and resources go to: www.OPDarchphilly.org