Ten+ Ideas and Strategies for Provider Agencies and Advocacy Groups to Enhance and Tap Spiritual Supports in States or Regions

1. Talk with your state or regional Council of Churches and other faith networks in your state. Many may have an office or a task force working in the area of inclusive ministries. Let them know of your interests and invite conversations that may lead to partnerships and collaborative activities. You can also see a listing of national faith networks working on inclusive ministries through the website of the Congregational Accessibility Network, [http://www.accessibilitynetwork.net/](http://www.accessibilitynetwork.net/). For example, you may not know that there are all kinds of activities happening in February which is Jewish Disabilities Awareness Month.

2. Share ideas and resources on a regular basis through your newsletters, e.g., develop a “Faith Corner” in your newsletters. Subscribe to the AAIDD Religion and Spirituality Division newsletter to get new resources and ideas. (To subscribe, add the Religion and Spirituality Division to your AAIDD membership. The $30 Division fee in addition to your level of AAIDD membership also includes an electronic subscription to the *Journal of Religion, Disability, and Health*.) But also highlight congregations or other faith based initiatives in your service area, including stories of the impact of congregational inclusion for individuals and families. If your agency or organization has an annual awards ceremony recognizing people and organizations in the community, think about adding a category for congregations or congregational leaders who exemplify the best in inclusive supports.

3. Contact seminaries in your state to encourage educational focus, continuing education events in ministries with people with disabilities, field education opportunities for seminarians in disability settings, and find faculty who might be allies/advocates for further infusion of disability issues. There are increasing numbers of books coming from the broad intersection of theology and disability as well as online resources by many of the leaders working in the field. (See the CD and Mp3 files from the 2010 and 2011 Summer Institutes on Theology and Disability at the Boggs Center website. Also check with Clinical Pastoral Education Programs in your region or state (go to [www.acpe.edu](http://www.acpe.edu) for a directory) and offer to help do training sessions for their students, particularly in pastoral care or grief/loss issues and intellectual disability.)

4. Explore ways that the University Center of Excellence may be addressing issues related to spiritual supports in its work. There is now a national Collaborative on Disability, Religion, and Inclusive Spiritual Supports, linking UCEDD’s who are working in this area and are exploring collaborations in training, technical assistance, research and dissemination with seminaries and other pastoral training programs. Contact: bill.gaventa@umdnj.edu or erik.carter@vanderbilt.edu.

5. Encourage and help sponsor a workshop or conference for clergy, religious educators, and other congregational leaders in your community, region, or state. Better yet, see if you can do a presentation to a faith network that is already meeting, such as denominational events, local clergy or ministerial associations, etc. Even better, find ways for parents and individuals with disabilities to simply tell their “faith stories” as part of those presentations.

6. Develop alliances with faith based men and women’s service organizations around employment opportunities as a way of living out their faith through the workplace. Reference: The Biblical injunction to an agrarian society that all farmers should leave a tenth of their fields for those on the margins (widows, orphans, etc.) to harvest their own food (i.e., it was not a charity handout but a job.) Our need for supported employment sites would disappear overnight if all Jewish and Christian employers committed a tenth of their work force to positions for people with disabilities. Provide speakers and resources for those groups.

7. If you are a provider of services, integrate spiritual assessments and support for participation in chosen faith related activities into individual service plans, person centered plans, etc. (Resource: Impact Issue on Supports in Faith

A University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Education, Research, and Service)
Communities.) There are a growing number of models and resources for doing so. Use Erik Carter’s book as a beginning. For individuals and their families, invite them to invite someone from their congregation to participate in the planning process if they wish.

8. If you have a Grief and Loss team in your agency, involve local clergy and/or hospice chaplains. For a listing of Grief, Loss and End of Life Resources, go the website of The Boggs Center under projects and aging. It is crucial to develop those community resources ahead of time in order to provide supports for individuals, families, friends, and staff dealing with grief, loss, and end of life issues: http://rwjms.umdnj.edu/boggscenter/projects/end_of_life.html

9. Open your agency AV library or other resources to use by community groups. For example, there are now excellent videos that can be used in congregations and also with staff, including The Ten Commandments for Communicating with People with Disabilities (Program Development Associates), some short videos on congregational supports (e.g., Believing, Belonging, Becoming) (an 11 minute video/dvd with four vignettes, two with kids and two adults available from The Boggs Center), a longer movie like Praying with Lior. (www.prayingwithlior.com), which also has extras, including a ten minute overview of inclusive ministries in some Christian, Jewish, and Muslim settings, and a sixty minute interfaith documentary, A Place for All. (www.divacommunications.com)

10. Develop an interagency, interfaith task force or committee to promote and encourage inclusive ministries in your community, region, and/or state. A number of area wide initiatives are springing up in different parts of the country. Encourage connection by local leaders in national networks such as AAIDD, NCPD, NAfIM, and more. (See Impact article: You are Not Alone!) There are examples of metropolitan (Atlanta Interfaith Disability Network), The Faith Inclusion Network in Norfolk/Virginia Beach) and statewide initiatives (New Jersey Coalition for Inclusive Ministries).

11. And if you are large enough, consider developing a part-time or full time role to help build inclusive spiritual supports for the people you serve and support. Agencies doing so are reporting significant increases in quality of life for many and new life for the agency as a whole.

Three resources that lead to many more:

- TASH Newsletter Connections in spring of 2012 entitled Spirituality: from Rights to Relationships. Edited by Bill Gaventa and Erik Carter, this upcoming issue is full of interfaith stories, strategies and resources for use by people with disabilities and their families, provider agencies, and congregations. An older issue of the Impact Newsletter (Winter 2001/02) from the Center on Community Integration at the University of Minnesota is entirely focused on faith communities and people with developmental disabilities. It is broad snapshot of trends, resources, and ideas in this country, and an excellent 36-page resource. Your first copy is free, from 612-624-4512 or download it from their web site at http://ici.umn.edu/products/newsletters.html. Additional copies are $4 each.


See also http://rwjms.umdnj.edu/boggscenter/projects/faith_based.html for additional 1-2 page resource listings:

- Key Resources for Creating and Building Partnerships between Provider Agencies and Religious Organizations/Congregations to Address Spiritual Supports for Adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities and their Families.
- Highlighting New Resources in Disability, Theology, and Inclusive Spiritual Supports 2011-12
- Beginning and Strengthening Inclusive Ministries

Other ideas that work or questions: Contact Bill Gaventa, bill.gaventa@umdnj.edu or 732-235-9304. This listing is created with the support of the Faith Community Leadership Project of the Pennsylvania Developmental Disabilities Council.