AAIDD Religion & Spirituality Division Membership

The Religion and Spirituality Division is one of thirteen professional divisions within the AAIDD, which has approximately 6,000 total members. Religion and Spirituality Division members include: chaplains, clergy, religious educators, coordinators of ministries with people with disabilities, of residential ministries, and staff from a variety of disciplines and settings who share a common commitment to the role of faith and spirituality in services with people with developmental disabilities.

Why Join?

• Deepen the recognition of spirituality in the lives of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

• Dialogue and partner with other disciplines and agencies in the areas of commonality across religious groups, including justice, human rights, expressing spirituality, quality of life, and alleviating human suffering.

• Model collaboration for secular and religion specific organizations.

• Support research in spiritual needs with our own organizational finance.

"I am a member in order to meet other people—both professionals and people with intellectual and developmental disabilities strong in self advocacy, and to learn how to affirm and support their participation in the higher faith community."

—Anne Masters

For more information, please contact:

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Who We Are
The Religion and Spirituality Division of the AAIDD (American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, formerly the American Association on Mental Retardation) is an interfaith, interdisciplinary association of professional ordained and lay people who journey with persons with developmental disabilities and their families.

Our Mission
Providing interfaith, interdisciplinary leadership in religious participation and spiritual growth with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Our Goals
- To foster inclusion of persons with developmental disabilities and the sharing of their gifts and graces in the total life of the congregation and community.
- To provide a forum for dialogue to creatively foster religious education programs that are lifelong and age appropriate.
- To work cooperatively with all divisions of the AAIDD to enhance the spiritual supports available to persons with developmental disabilities and their families.

Why the Religion and Spirituality Division was Established
The AAIDD Religion and Spirituality Division began in the 1960’s as a small network made up of chaplains serving in the institutions. Their work acknowledged that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities have spiritual and religious interests, needs, and gifts, but too often do not have the opportunity to express those parts of their lives.

Today agencies may overlook the importance of spirituality for their consumers, or not be able to help them be involved in religious congregations and other spiritual activities. Congregations of many religions often fail to welcome and include people with disabilities in their worship services and programs. It is the responsibility of both support agencies and religious organizations to work together to help provide the opportunity for spiritual and religious expression, depending on the choice of each person.

What We Do
- Henri J. Nouwen Award
- Certification for chaplains
- Networking opportunities
- Publish a quarterly newsletter and an online newsletter
- Offer members discount subscriptions to Journal of Religion, Health, and Disabilities
- Resource Exhibit of materials for inclusion in faith communities
- COMISS: network on ministry in specialized settings
- Sponsor annual Religion and Spirituality Dinner and sessions at national conferences