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## Faith Community Leadership in Inclusive Ministries: A PA Project Ideas for Religious Organizations and Faith Networks

### **Background**

The Pennsylvania Developmental Disabilities Council has awarded a two year grant to The Elizabeth M. Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities in New Jersey for a project in “Faith Community Leadership.” It is headed by Rev. Bill Gaventa, Director of Community and Congregational Supports at The Boggs Center, with the assistance of Rev. Alice Walsh, also a parent, at The Boggs Center. A Project Advisory Board made up of Pennsylvania representatives will work with The Boggs Center, and a listserv for sharing ideas, information, and training resources is being established for anyone in Pennsylvania who is interested in the project.

The project is working through four strategies in developing, strengthening, and providing training opportunities for clergy and congregational leaders:

1. Collaboration with seminaries and other training programs for congregational leaders at colleges or universities
2. Collaboration with Clinical Pastoral Education programs.
3. Collaboration with faith networks and their own continuing education programs
4. Collaboration with individuals, families, and provider agencies working with congregations and clergy.

Our core beliefs are (1) that people with disabilities and their families have much to give, and to receive, from faith communities of their choice and tradition, and (2) that clergy, congregational leaders, and congregations have increasing opportunities and resources to develop inclusive ministries that can make a huge difference in the lives of individuals, families, and, indeed, the whole congregation.

### **Opportunities for Religious Organizations and Faith Networks**

#### **1. Strengthening Current Initiatives and Projects:**

We know and believe that many faith networks (dioceses, associations, presbyteries, conferences, statewide organizations, interfaith councils, etc.) have already led or begun initiatives to help clergy and congregations respond to the needs and gifts of people with disabilities and their families. If leaders involved in those projects would like to be part of the statewide listserv to share what you are doing, learn from others, and share ideas and resources, please email Elizabeth Ong, at [ongel@umdnj.edu](mailto:ongel@umdnj.edu) and ask to be on the [FCLPADDCC@umdnj.edu](mailto:FCLPADDCC@umdnj.edu). (Faith Community Leadership Pennsylvania DD Council)

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*A University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Education, Research, and Service*

## 2. Collaboration with Future Continuing Education Programs You Coordinate:

If a religious organization or network in Pennsylvania is interested in assistance with a continuing education event for clergy, religious educators, and/or other congregational leaders in the area of inclusive ministries and religious supports with people with disabilities and their families, the Faith Community Leadership Project can assist in one or more of the following ways:

- Strategies for planning a workshop or training that is part of your ongoing continuing education initiatives.
- Helping to develop a focused or special event.
- Providing training by project staff or helping you find the appropriate speaker (s) or trainer (s) or audio-visual resources for your event.
- Utilizing the statewide listserv for ideas and publicity.
- Suggesting/providing materials for handouts and/or a resource display.
- Other ideas depending on your interests, goals, and needs.

FYI, a number of excellent new resources that have been published in the last two years:

- Sharon Betcher, *Spirit and the Politics of Disablement*. Fortress Press, 2007.
- Erik Carter. *Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities: A Guide for Service Providers, Families, and Congregations*. Paul Brookes Publishing, 2007
- Stephanie Hubach. *Same Lake, Different Boat: Coming Alongside People Touched by Disability* P&R Publishing. 2006 (A Pennsylvania author!)
- Tom Reynolds *Vulnerable Communion: A Theology of Disability and Hospitality* Brazos Press. (March, 2008)
- Hans Reinders. *Receiving the Gift of Friendship: Profound Disability, Theological Anthropology and Ethics*. Eerdmans Publishing. (February, 2008)
- Amos Yong, *Theology and Down Syndrome: Reimagining Disability in Late Modernity* Baylor University Press. 2007
- Frances Young. *Brokenness and Blessing: Toward a Christian Spirituality*. Baker Publishing.

For a wider list of resources, see *On the Road to Congregational Inclusion. Dimensions of Faith and Congregational Ministries with Persons with Developmental Disabilities and their Families*. New Brunswick: The Elizabeth M. Boggs Center, Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, UMDNJ. (PDF version available at <http://rwjms.umdj.edu/boggscenter/products>.)

We have the following resources quickly and easily available electronically and/or hard copy:

- **Beginning Ministries**. A one page list of ideas and resources
- **Ten Strategies for Provider Organizations and Networks**.
- **Resources in Spiritual Supports** from national advocacy and human service organizations.
- **Autism and Faith: A Journey into Community**. A 52 pp. resource booklet for congregations and a wider resource listing in autism and religion resources.
- **Brain Injury: When the Call Comes. A Congregational Resource**. 36 pp. booklet from The Boggs Center.

For more information, contact Rev. Bill Gaventa, 732-235-9304 or [bill.gaventa@umdj.edu](mailto:bill.gaventa@umdj.edu) or Rev. Alice Walsh, 732-235-9314. [alice.walsh@umdj.edu](mailto:alice.walsh@umdj.edu) To be added to the Faith Community Listserv, email Beth Ong at [ongel@umdj.edu](mailto:ongel@umdj.edu).

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