



---

## Addressing Disability Issues and Opportunities in Seminary Education: A Pennsylvania Project

### 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. Bill supervises a CPE program based in disability settings, has taught seminary courses, founded the New Jersey Coalition for Inclusive Ministries and works with congregations, advocates, and agencies in the development of inclusive ministries. He will be working with others with interest and expertise in disability issues and ministries in Pennsylvania and a statewide Advisory Council. The project begins October 1, 2008.

One component of the project allows both time and resources to work with seminaries in Pennsylvania on strategies to address, integrate, and/or strengthen the ways that disability issues and training opportunities are part of current seminary curricula. This also coincides with a new voluntary policy on disability that has been passed by the Association of Theological Schools (attached).

### Possibilities, Opportunities and Resources

First, what are seminaries currently doing? The project is interested in discovering strategies or ways that disability issues and opportunities are already being addressed at individual seminaries or other institutions of higher learning that train religious community leadership. Rev. Gaventa edits a national newsletter with a seminary education column that describes courses or initiatives at individual seminaries. That newsletter is also sent free to any seminary faculty member who is interested in new resources, educational opportunities, and national developments in inclusive ministries.

Second, the following are some of the possible ways that Rev. Gaventa and others in the project can work with seminaries who are involved and/or interested:

1. Consultation with faculty on resources from disability perspectives related to topics and/or themes of courses in the theological disciplines, e.g., theology, pastoral care, religious education, congregational ministries, homiletics, church history, ethics, etc. There are a growing number of excellent resources, including books, videos, and articles.
2. Assistance with speakers and appropriate reading resources for a module within a course.

---

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

3. Leading and coordinating a course for a seminary, in collaboration with others on staff and local resource persons. In the course of this two year project, the projects supports enough time to lead one course each semester, at different seminaries, for a total of three or four over the course of the next two years. The course would be planned in collaboration with others at the seminary, and draw in other resource speakers, so that, if appropriate, it could be done by others in the future.
4. Assisting or leading special training events, e.g., a seminary wide workshop, Continuing Education event, chapel service, etc.
5. Explore field education opportunities for seminary students in area disability service agencies and provide consultation to the seminary/agency collaboration.
6. Suggestions for library holdings and places for students and faculty to submit publications coming out of projects in this area.
7. Dialogue events with faculty and/or students.
8. A video/film festival related to ministries with people with disabilities and their families.
9. Consultation with seminary staff on supports for students with disabilities.
10. Others that fit into the interests, curricula, and plans of individual seminaries.

This list is meant to stimulate possible dialogue and collaborative work, not to serve as ten additions to "To Do" lists. Bill Gaventa looks forward to the opportunity to talk with you, and find out more about what your seminary is already doing, and might like to do.

For more information, contact Rev. Bill Gaventa, 732-235-9304 or [bill.gaventa@umdnj.edu](mailto:bill.gaventa@umdnj.edu)

\*\*\*

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

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.umdnj.edu/boggscenter/products>.)