

God and the Group Home:

Moving Beyond the Nervous Relationship of Providers and Religion

Illinois QIDP Leadership Conference, January 24, 2023

Religious Practice is a Cultural Norm

- Religion and culture are intertwined. Religion influences culture, and culture influences religion.
- About 42% of the US population is regularly engaged with a place of worship. (2020 US Census)

Protected by Law & Supported by Professional Organizations

- The First Amendment and the church/state relationship
- Positions Statements of The ARC and AAIDD

The Home and Community-Based Services Regulations

- Passed in 2014, but implementation by states was delayed... and delayed again
- The new regulations pull no punches when it comes to answering the most fundamental questions:
 - Whose Plan Is It? *It is directed by and belongs to the individual being supported.*
 - Where does stuff happen? *In typical and ordinary community settings.*

Some Common Faith Community Perceptions

- There is evidence that faith communities view themselves as more welcoming and inclusive than they actually are.
- Faith communities—because they are a subset of the general population—may be deriving much of their knowledge about intellectual and developmental disabilities from social media rather than first-person experiences. Some popular misconceptions include:
 - People with I/DD are always happy and kind
 - People with I/DD are courageous in their “struggle” with the disability

- People with I/DD are eternally children
- Faith communities may see their role differently than people with disabilities or those who support them.
 - People with disabilities are not your mission projects
 - Proliferation of the “mercy” perspective

Where Does One Start?

- Start by asking questions... and the answer may be ‘no’.
- The pattern of questions is a familiar one
 - How important are your spiritual beliefs to you?
 - Are your spiritual beliefs something you wish to express?
 - How do you express your spiritual beliefs (e.g., alone, with others, traditional and non-traditional rituals, in your home, etc.)?
 - What is your faith preference?
 - What assistance do you need (if any) to express your faith/spiritual beliefs?
 - Is there any other information about faith or spirituality that you would like to explore?
 - Do you get enough opportunities to express your spiritual beliefs and/or faith?
 - Do you wish to learn more and/or develop a deeper understanding about the spiritual beliefs/faith you have chosen?
 - Is your current faith expression meeting your needs?
 - Are you sharing faith life experiences with the people you wish to?

A Case for Exploring Collaboration with Faith Communities

1. They are called to do good work.
2. They are called to be inclusive—and profess to be so.
3. They are networks of community connection.
4. They already face the things that threaten people with disabilities.
5. They are a place where friendships are developed and nurtured.
6. They are accustomed to exploring the gifts that people bring.

7. They are places where justice is consistently preached.
8. They espouse human value that is inherent rather than earned.
9. They are lifespan oriented.
10. They are family oriented.

Reference and Resource List

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David Morstad, M.Ed., FAAIDD
David.Morstad@gmail.com
LargerTable.com