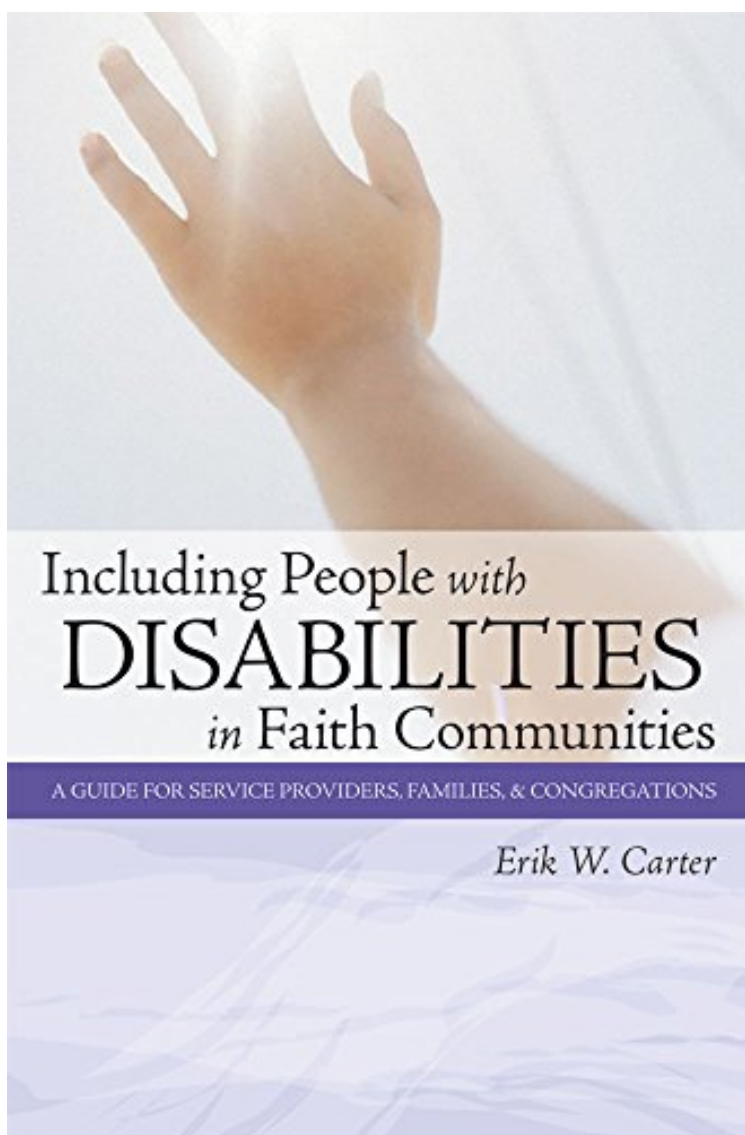


[Read now] Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities: A Guide for Service Providers, Families, and Congregations

## Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities: A Guide for Service Providers, Families, and Congregations

*Erik W. Carter*

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**Erik W. Carter : Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities: A Guide for Service Providers, Families, and Congregations** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities: A Guide for Service Providers, Families, and Congregations:

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Must Read for every Pastor

By Marvin J. Miller

Persons with disability have co-existed within culture in a parallel universe - only recently have these two domains collided with each other. Normalization and inclusion have slowly advanced in many social and education settings, but grind to a mere crawl for many persons by early adulthood. A crucial bridge is needed to anchor the transition into adulthood to guarantee full participation in the community. The answer which Erik W. Carter posits in *Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities* may lie in the one social institution even more resistant to change - congregational communities. This work develops a prophetic picture of the ideal - a mutual interchange between social service providers and the church as community. Seeing this book as a practical guide, Carter drifts from his role as a recognized special educator and emerges as an aspiring practical theologian. This Best Special Needs Title 2007 awarded by *Exceptional Parent Magazine*, captures the essence of Carter's desire to integrate traditional special education transitional services alongside faith communities. Carter, (Wheaton College, PhD-Vanderbilt), a former high school transitional specialist and now Associate Professor in the Department of Special Education at Peabody College/Vanderbilt University approaches this 236 page volume from the perspective of one who was brought into a faith community through the witness of a person with intellectual disability. His approach, therefore, immediately places social valuation on the effectiveness of the contributions of persons with disability in the larger dominant domain and never looks back. He examines the symbiotic roles both religious institutions and social service providers can mutually undertake and highlights the changes each institution will need to undergo in order to exponentially expand the integration of persons with disability into the larger community. Carter intends for this book to be used as guide map for a congregational journey towards full inclusion. He clearly states the problem - only an insignificant percentage of people with disabilities are active in faith communities. The following seven chapters and two in depth appendixes of resources provide clear markers on where to go and what to do. For those unfamiliar with the developments in recent disability history, Carter offers a brief recap of the rise of disability rights and education in the 20th century and the remaining barriers persons with disability have to gain full inclusion. He then turns his attention to what signals a welcoming congregation through the lens of a person with a disability. In a convicting taxonomy, he establishes a metric for congregations to measure their progress in developing an inclusive church and then suggests systems and procedures that can propel a congregation in forward movement through critical reflection and response. Not content to just challenge a congregation, Carter spends the next three chapters developing resources, questions, and proposing solutions for the three main arenas of church life: corporate worship services, personal religious education, and daily fellowship and support. He asserts that congregations who think they are welcoming may not be perceived in that manner. He advocates that deliberate and targeted intentionality be added to mission statements, greeting programs and outreach events. Multiple sample surveys and vignettes are provided in order to help develop a vision team which assesses the congregation's readiness and willingness as well as examining what potential partnership resources already exist in the larger local community. Lest participants think everything can be program driven, he issues a key admonition - focus on prayer and people. An important reminder is also given - as congregations tend to change over every five years, successful implementation of cultural change will need to take place over the long term during several cycles for positive integration. Carter moves his focus from the facility and corporate culture of the church to that of individualized personal religious action programs and plans with a focus on equipping lay volunteers. He cautions that a program which merely segregates students at ability level does not take advantage of the mutuality of the richness of community - the most important faith lessons, he asserts, occurs in the relationships that develop between teacher and student. He suggests that religious education workers receive professional development and insight from public school and social service professionals on appropriate curricular accommodations and modifications within the faith goals of the congregation. Inversely, he recommends that the separate domains of Sunday school and public school be bridged - inviting religious workers to request observation time of the student in a daily educational setting. Recognizing that people's faith journeys do not occur only on the Sabbath, Carter spends extensive time looking at how the church can help during the other six days. Many families and adults touched by disabilities live in a realm of artificial paid supports and services. Carter asserts that natural lifelong supports already existing in the congregation have the potential to develop enduring relationships and real friendships within the community. For this to happen, however, requires an intentional effort on the part of the congregation and a change in visitation policies in pastoral care guidelines. He further recommends that congregations seek ways to develop vocation - meaningful work and service - in the lives of people with disabilities and urges them to lead by example. He advises a congregational review of every weekday ministry the church sponsors through the lens of disability. He offers numerous ideas on how congregations can develop spiritual and emotional support at major life transition times as well as through common respite events. After systematically tearing down objections to potential ministry, Carter concludes with a final prophetic injunction - the congregation must respond personally in some way. Carter, writing from within the social service tradition, does not lay all the blame for lack on inclusion at the foyer of the church. He knows all too well that the service provider industry has not traditionally taken steps to facilitate the appropriate spiritual growth of its clients. He takes to task and then challenges those within the profession to invest the time with their clients to find out their desire. He liberates providers and addresses their reluctance head

on by pointing to research that indicates persons with disabilities with spiritual supports have more meaningful expressions and relationships in the other domains for their lives. He provides numerous resources: surveys, person center planning approaches, revisited policy statements and new best practices guidelines that can aid service providers in crafting a different support approach. Carter concludes his book by melding both sectors together. He recognizes clearly that future success at true inclusion and integration will only come about through established partnerships between the social service sector and the local congregation within a broader community network. He recommends a process of strengths based community mapping which identifies current assets and focuses on networking them together. He also recommends that congregations create mutual disability gatherings - working together to transform the community. It is through these collaborative efforts, Carter believes, that persons with disabilities will be able to become fully integrated and included in the local community. In authoring this book, Carter brought an important witness to bear in the larger Christian community. Without question, he appropriately identified one of the largest hidden social justice issues in the contemporary Christian community today; moreover, he offered a practical solution. The author accomplished his stated intention - providing numerous reproducible resources and a flexible framework to assist any local congregation in developing a collaborative effort for mutual integration. Furthermore, it was written in an easily understandable fashion without falling into the trap of over using either theological jargon or clinical language. That asset, however, may have been one of its weaknesses. While it is clear Carter writes from a Christian religious perspective, it is also evident that he approaches this interfaith textbook from a clinical lay persons eye; he remains an outsider without inclusive access to clergy. While service provider and educational institutions are required to implement and often embrace best practices fairly quickly, congregational dynamics make change tediously slow. His arguments resound within the disability and service provider community, but they do not tend to convict congregations whom remain convinced they already do too much. Unless one is already attuned, his prophetic notes fall flat without a deeper exposition into contemporary expressions of theology. The Christian community becomes moved through narrative and testimony, connecting a daily spiritual experience within the larger scope of covenant history and redemption, yet very few connecting vignettes appeared outside of the introduction. This approach is undoubtedly due to the editorial requirement of the publisher rather than the actual experience of the author. After grappling with the issue and solution presented in this book, pastor leaders should be able to rethink their role and must let it affect their life prior to proclamation and presentation. This is not a task to be entered into lightly, as it will serve as a cultural shift in a congregation's missional strategy. Nevertheless, it remains a critical book for church leaders to comprehend as the onus of deciphering this into the language of faith lies squarely upon the local church pastor. 10 of 10 people found the following review helpful. Outstanding overview of the disability and faith landscape By Christopher Phillips This book provides an incredible overview of faith and disability with a remarkable interfaith perspective. The book provides a very well grounded foundation of why it is important to include everyone in our faith communities and then provides some very practical tips and ideas on how to start the discussion in your own faith community as well as practical steps for including people in all aspects of congregational life. Beyond that, the author also discussed how faith communities can work together with service providers and community organizations to ensure that the needs and desires of persons with disabilities are recognized and understood. The book included a number of stories throughout the book as well as quotes on the importance of inclusion. Besides all of the great information in the book, Erik has included a comprehensive appendix where he lists examples of faith group statements addressing congregational inclusion as well as a listing of resources for service providers, families and congregations. I work as the disability services manager for a religious organization and this book has provided me with an incredible blueprint for the work that we are doing in many areas. Highly recommended. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Great Resource! By Casey Excellent! Very informative! Great tool for congregations to use as they begin a disability ministry.

A congregational community is an ideal place to share and strengthen faith, form lasting relationships, and develop special gifts and talents. Too often, though, people with developmental and other disabilities lack the opportunities and supports to fully participate in the life of their faith community. That's why families and service providers need to read this groundbreaking guidebook and share a copy with congregations that want to become places of welcome and belonging for people with disabilities. Bringing his practical ideas to life with anecdotes, quotes, and examples of successful strategies, Erik Carter helps readers reflect on how welcoming their congregation is and could be for people with disabilities and their families articulate and pursue a bold vision of inclusion throughout their congregation, community, city, or state take steps to break down attitudinal, architectural, programmatic, and other barriers to inclusion design appropriate, inclusive religious education programs for children, youth, and adults learn how service providers can actively support the spiritual preferences, strengths, and needs of people with disabilities To make inclusion work in any faith community, this how-to book gives readers workable strategies and photocopyable forms for identifying indicators of welcome, encouraging community outreach, and gathering important information about the support needs of people with disabilities and their families.

"A foundational resource . . . will help faith communities broaden their mission to include people with disabilities, and will provide answers that state agency workers have been seeking."