

**Boston College**  
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY AND MINISTRY  
**Continuing Education Encore Events**

**Transcript of**  
**“From Barriers to Belonging:**  
**The Church and People with Disabilities”**

**presented on October 4, 2017 by**  
**Dr. Erik W. Carter**

**Fr. Thomas Stegman:**

Thanks to Dr. Carter for starting the applause. I was beginning to wonder if I merited any. I really don't. But it is my pleasure to introduce Dr. Erik Carter, who comes to us from Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. There, he serves as the Cornelius Vanderbilt Professor of Special Education and is a researcher with the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Research on Education and Human Development. He combines the disciplines of religion and special education, having completed his undergraduate studies in Christian education at Wheaton College and his graduate studies in severe disabilities from Vanderbilt University. Prior to receive his doctorate, Dr. Carter worked as a high school teacher and transition specialist.

Dr. Carter's research and writing focus on promoting inclusion and valued roles in school, work, and congregational settings for children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Invested in collaborative partnerships across the university, Dr. Carter co-leads the Collaborative on Faith and Disabilities and the Putting Faith to Work project, focused on enabling faith communities to address the employment needs of their members with disabilities. He also partners with a core group of faculty to host the annual Summer Institute on Theology and Disability.

An accomplished and promising scholar, Dr. Carter has received numerous awards for his work. He was the recipient of the distinguished Early Career Research Award from the Council for Exceptional Children, the Early Career Award from the American Association for Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, and the Patricia Sitlington Research Award from the Division on Career Development and Transition.

Dr. Carter has coauthored 150 articles and six books. One of those books, *Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities: A Guide for Service Providers, Families, and Congregations* is available for sale at our book sale table in the back. He is currently working on a book that addresses the topic of today's talk, belonging and the church.

A person who continues to make significant contributions to teaching, research, and practical implementation in the area of disabilities, I invite you to welcome our 25th Annual Pyne Lecturer, Dr. Erik Carter.

[APPLAUSE]

All right, good evening. I hope you got to know your neighbor just a bit.

It's a pleasure to be with you, and honor, of course, to be at Boston College, and a joy to be among so many people who care deeply about creating communities where people with and without disabilities have opportunities to worship and learn and serve and fellowship and live life right alongside and with one another together. So I'm especially grateful for the invitation to be part of this conversation, to

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the Pyne Endowment Trust for supporting this annual series, but also for all of you for investing in being here. But also investing in helping churches across this city, across this region, across this state [to] be places where people with disabilities and their families are known and are needed and are invited and are embraced.

What I want to do tonight is speak about the topic of belonging, and highlight some of what we're learning from our work with young people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families about what it might look like to be a church that's marked by belonging, a church that's marked by belonging for a segment of our community that's so often at the margins. But I also want to just encourage you to think about, what does it look like to be a place of belonging for anyone who finds himself on the margins or outside of community?

So I want to give a little historical context. Because the experiences that we have and the outcomes that we've pursued for young people with labels like Down syndrome and autism and intellectual disability, they've changed a lot over the years. They've evolved a lot of how we think about what we're really pursuing.

I am 43 years young. But when I was born in 1973, many children with disabilities were wholly excluded from services and supports and from community activities. And even when legislative and policy and other advocacy efforts started to have some initial success, those services and opportunities that were introduced for people with disabilities were largely segregated. They were separate from anyone else and largely involved people only with similar labels learning and spending time together.

And then throughout the eighties and the nineties, we started to pursue integration in the same school so that young people with and without disabilities would go to the same schools as one another. But often, they really didn't encounter one another very often in that school. They were in the school, but often together and often in a different corner of that school. And I think more recently, we've been captivated by the idea of pursuing inclusion, inclusion in the same classes and clubs and cafeterias and school activities, right alongside other kids who share their interests and their passions and want to develop relationships.

I share this series of images with you for a few different reasons. And the first is that I think it's a way also of depicting some of the movements in our churches over the same time period. You can find schools and communities in each of these places right now. And you can also find churches in each of these places right now.

But the second reason I wanted to share it with is you is I'm not sure this progression indicates that we've quite arrived in pursuing what we think really, really matters most for people with disabilities and our families. Because people want to be more than just integrated and more than just included. We all want to belong. And the church, of all places, should be a place that's marked by belonging. So I think I want to add a different image, and I'm still playing with what this looks like. But I want to elaborate on, what does it look like maybe for us to be a place, a community that's marked by the kind of belonging that we leave, and we live life together the other six days of the week as well?

So that brings us to our conversation tonight: belonging. Have you ever thought about just what it is that makes you feel like you belong somewhere, about the things that make you feel like you're really part of a community? And if you took a minute—and I could probably do this as audience participation, but I won't for time—what would you point to that tells you that you belong in your church, in your neighborhood, in a community?

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I think belonging is kind of a hard concept to define. I think that's true of a lot of things that matter most. It's easy to affirm its importance. It's hard to pinpoint just what makes us feel like we belong. We definitely know when it's absent, when we don't have it, because we deeply feel that, don't we? But describing its presence is a little bit more challenging. But it's important to do if we're going to ask the church to move in ways that foster belonging. So what might the markers be of a community of belonging?

Well, answering that question has really been one strand of a project that we've been part of for the last number of years, a project we call Faith and Flourishing. We've interviewed about 50 young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families. We've surveyed about 500 families about their experiences within their faith communities. We've talked with scores of clergy and church leaders and ministry leaders about their experiences within faith communities around this issue.

And so much of what we heard kept circling back to the attitudes and the actions and the experiences that promote belonging. So as we kind of culled through all of that data over the years, we identified 10 dimensions of belonging that really emerged from people with disabilities and their families that were part of this project.

And here's what we heard from those individuals. They indicated that belonging was felt when they were present, invited, welcomed, known, accepted, supported, cared for, befriended, needed, and loved.

Now, I bet you could add your own dimensions to this. And I'm not suggesting this is universal, that everyone would affirm this, or that it's exhaustive. But it does give us an important place of reflection as we think about our movements as churches and communities. What would it look like to make sure every person experienced these things?

So I hope you'll notice a few things about these dimensions. One is they remind us that belonging is not about location, which is what integration and inclusion prioritize. Location matters. Where people are matters. But belonging has much more to do with posture than it does place. And I'll elaborate on that.

The second thing I hope you'll notice is that belonging is ultimately fostered not by starting new programs, but through relationships. Relationships matter more than programs.

And third, I hope you'll see as we walk through these that addressing these 10 dimensions of belonging within the church is more likely to require ordinary gestures than extraordinary responses. So you already know what you need to know to be able to do this on behalf of people with disabilities.

So let me encourage you to use this time as a time of reflection to think about your own congregation, your own community, wherever you're doing this work, and ask yourself: what are we doing right now that's going well in each of these areas as I walk through them? Is there something that you're noticing that we could do better or more of? Or maybe we need to move in entirely different ways than we are right now if these are going to emerge for families. And I hope that you'll leave tonight with something that is maybe a next step for you as well.

So those of you who like to take notes, there's a handout. You can actually fill this out if you want.

But let's start with presence. I want to walk through each of these. Because belonging always begins with presence. And yet in so many congregations, the principal barrier to belonging may simply be the absence of people with disabilities and their families from worship, from service, from religious

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education, from social activities, all the things that make up congregational life. You cannot have a presence if you are not present. You can't have a presence if you're not present. It's hard to feel like you're part of a community from the outside.

And so I want to pause here to dispel a myth that kind of underlies a lot of the conversations that I have around this topic with churches and other groups as well. And I'm sure none of you have said this or had these conversations. I hope not. But they always involve some variations on the phrase, "Well, we don't have any people with disabilities in our congregation. Otherwise, if we did, we certainly would welcome them well and weave them into all we do." Or, "We'd be glad to make some changes in our church if there was actually any people with disabilities who went here. But since there aren't, there's not really the need to make those changes."

I'm seeing you start to smile. You're getting the theme of this, right? It's the idea that we'd build a ramp if there was someone who needed it. Right? Right. Maybe the explanation is, well, for presence, is "There simply aren't people with disabilities in our community."

So in Nashville, you would shout out, and say, "No, absolutely not. Of course, there are people with disabilities in our community." That can't be the barrier to presence. But I think that's the unspoken conclusion actually of lots of people, if they were to look around their sanctuary.

Jeff McNair, who's the director of church relations for an organization called Joni and Friends, wrote a really intriguing essay a few years ago. And he titled it with the quote that reflected the conclusion of his brother, who had never encountered people with intellectual disability in his church, or in his workplace, or elsewhere. "There are No People with Disabilities in St. Louis." Now, I've edited the quote a lot because of a lot of reasons. But . . . and I've changed it to Boston.

But it should, I think, prompt an important question. What would someone conclude about who lives in your neighborhood or in your community if all they had was a glimpse of who gathered together on Sunday morning? What would they think?

So those of you who are here tonight, I know you know the title of that essay is absolutely not true, because there are 60 million Americans with disabilities. 19% of any community fits that label, one in five residents. And about 2% to 3% of any community identifies as having a label like autism or Down syndrome or intellectual disability. And those are numbers that cut across every demographic group. It doesn't matter what group you're talking about. Those numbers hold up pretty steady because disability is a natural part of the human experience.

So let's do a little math. You all probably didn't come here to do math. But we'll do it. What is one-fifth of Norwood or Braintree or Medford or Weston? Or where you live? But here we are in the Boston metro area. If we did the math here, there are 4.6 million people living in the metro Boston area. That means there are 92,000 children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. And there are 870-plus-1,000 people with disabilities in this community right here. And as you heard earlier referenced, over half of all people over 65 have a disability. And so we hear that biblical question, who is my neighbor? My neighbor includes people with disabilities.

Those of you who didn't come here to do math, let me make those numbers a bit more or less abstract. 19% of this, 3% of that, how do we make them more concrete? So well, what if we all got up and we left this room—it would make for an interesting talk—and we walked into the neighborhoods that surrounded this particular building? What if we were all to get up together and walk out and see the neighborhoods that surround this particular college campus?

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I took the liberty of hiring Google to take some images for me. And I've put them up on your screen, neighborhoods all around this campus. And I just decided to pick one just for the sake of illustrating this point. So here's a neighborhood not too far. Maybe it's one you live in.

If we were to go into this neighborhood that could surround your church or your parish or wherever you worship, and started knocking on doors, what we would find is that one out of every three households we knocked on would be a family that has a member with a disability of some kind. And to illustrate, I've just put a little yellow dot on every third or fourth house in our neighborhood.

My point is, we can't wait to be welcoming until people show up. They don't show up because we're not welcoming. And we have to start pursuing people who are in our communities and inviting them back into community. I park on presence because most available metrics that I'm familiar with as a researcher indicate that ministry apart from people with disabilities is the dominant ministry model across the country.

Think about some of these statistics that come from some of our studies. More than half of all adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities in the United States have not attended any kind of religious service in the last month. More than half of parents have kept their child from participating in religious activity because support was not provided for their child with disabilities. More than two-thirds of teenagers with disabilities are not attending any kind of youth group or small group. And this one is the hardest one to hear: more than one out of three parents have changed their place of worship because their child was not welcomed or included. And less than one out of five churches in our studies are said to offer any kind of support for children with developmental disabilities, or host a support group for families, or respite opportunities.

So what's standing in the way of presence as a point, as a starting point for belonging in our faith communities? Maybe it's barriers of awareness. Maybe it's barriers of attitude or access? They certainly abound in churches, as they do elsewhere in our society. Maybe it's even architectural barriers. Possibly that's it, right?

Well, what I would say is, you can't make the case that the barrier is the lack of faith and the importance of faith in the lives of people with disabilities. Right? That can't be; that would be another myth that I just want to highlight, that well, faith just must be less important. If it was just as important, our churches would be filled.

And let me be clear about this next point, because the presence of a disability is not at all a reliable predictor of people's aspirations for their life. And the presence of a disability is not at all a reliable predictor of people's faith. Faith is just as important in the lives of people with disabilities as it is anyone else.

And let me make that point in a way that only a researcher would think is a good way to do that, by showing you a graph. So every four years, the National Organization on Disability surveys Americans with and without disabilities, and I'm drawing from data from several years ago, a couple of iterations ago. And what they found is exactly the same proportion of people with and without disabilities say, "My faith is an important part of my life." So that can't be the barrier to participation in our congregations. It's got to be something else.

And there are other barriers. Because in the same studies, when you look at how often are people with disabilities attending church, and in this case, accessing worship services at least once a month, what you see is 43% of people with disabilities go to church once a month compared to 57% of people without disabilities. And when you layer the importance of faith on top of those data, you see some really key gaps that we want to address.

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You see a gap in the attendance of people with and without disabilities. But you also see a more important gap, which is, people who want to be part of the faith community are not finding that community that's going to welcome them well. And that's the gap.

Now, if we had another conference or workshop, I'd talk about the gap for anyone in the States. But that's a whole other topic. So my point in all of that is presence is not due, is not limited because faith is not important in the lives of people. So something else is standing in the way.

Maybe it's architecture. There are some churches that are pretty inaccessible. I used to show this one, thinking this is the most inaccessible church in the world. And people started sending me other photos of churches that were even more inaccessible. Took it to new heights here, or this one in particular. Right? These pictures always get a chuckle. But subtler barriers, I think, send the same message.

So what does your building then say or communicate about your theology? What does that one step say, that altar that someone can't get to, the classrooms that are inaccessible, the curriculum that kids can't access? Does where you gather and how you gather suggest that you might be thinking about your community too narrowly? Sometimes our architecture is the first thing that reveals that.

Accessibility has got to be a fundamental commitment. It is in our society by legal mandate elsewhere. That's not so in the church. But it should be a commitment that we have.

There's a quote from Harold Wilke, an incredible disability advocate. This was from 30 or 40 years ago. I just love this quote: "In Las Vegas last year, in five different casinos, I asked five different people in wheelchairs whether they had encountered any barrier to the entrance, the answer always being, "No, should there be?" Gambling casinos, okay. Churches, no."

Why is it easier to get into so many other places than it is to get into some of the places where we gather as faith communities? We so often misidentify the real sources of the barrier and the call to be out front of society on these issues. As Ed Wood reminds us, "If shut-ins can go to Walmart, but not your church, well, they are shut out, they're not shut in." Right?

So I put in your handouts a number of accessibility guides for congregations that you can look at. They will help you reflect on next movements you can make in this space.

I don't want to park too long on that, except to say that presence is the starting point for belonging. And so how, as you think about your congregation, what are you doing really well in this area? Are you noticing some things you could do better or more of or differently?

Well, maybe your starting point becomes one of inviting, extending new invitations. Because belonging begins with personal invitations. That's the second dimension that we heard from these families. Because when we're not intentional about reaching out to people with disabilities in our communities personally, we inadvertently leave people out.

And there was a pastor who said this really well. "It's not that we deliberately excluded people with disabilities. We just weren't deliberate at all. And that was the problem."

Many congregations proclaim that they're welcoming. They do that on their websites. They do that in their church signs, their outreach materials. And we often presume that's sufficient, that that is an invitation that we say everyone is welcome. But I would just push you to think that an announcement is very different than an invitation. One is a personal, right? And one is not. One says, "I'm thinking about you, and I want you here." The other leaves that open. An announcement leaves open that

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possibility that there's a little asterisk or a footnote or some unspoken qualifier that says "Maybe you, maybe not you." And there have been a lot of asterisks in the lives of families and people with disabilities. Those generic promises of a warm reception aren't always honored. And so families who have been wounded in the past wonder whether that might happen again when you say you welcome them.

A colleague of mine, Bill Gaventa, once recounted a conference panel of mothers who have kids with disabilities who shared the number of congregations they had that had asked their family to leave. One counted 13. Another parent counted 17 different congregations. One out of three families in our studies have said, "We've left our congregation because that welcome, that support just wasn't there."

And so, those are families that are going to need some added assurance that this time is going to be different, that that proclamation of everyone is welcome really does penetrate your practices. And I think, again, that's where those personal invitations become really important. Now, I'm not saying don't also announce that you're a welcoming place and accessible. Definitely do that, because the imagery and the language and the messages that you incorporate on your websites really do communicate to families that, "Hey, we're thinking about you."

I just put up on the screen some examples of ones I did from a quick web search just of the area of some congregations that seem to have made this an intentional commitment and somehow put that in their imagery on their website. There's definitely symbols that you can download and put on your site to indicate the accessibility features of your church or your parish that can be downloaded free.

And there's even some communities that are starting to establish faith community inclusion networks, where they're beginning to just kind of map, what are all the congregations in our area that offer a respite, or inclusive ministries for kids with disabilities, or accessibility features, or support groups for families, and making that information available for any family in the community who's looking for a congregation that offers that. This is just an example from the Faith Inclusion Network in Virginia. And I'm not familiar with anything like that in Boston. But wouldn't that be great that there was a network of congregations that say, "Here, we're committed to that"?

So again, those active invitations become most powerful. And I was reading in the U.S. Congregational Life Survey that says 75% of people who come to a worship service say the first time they came, they came because someone they know invited them. So start doing some invitations. And if you don't know how to find families and others who are impacted by disability, there are groups in this community who do, and can help you share that invitation out with them. And I've just put some examples on the screen of some places you might do that.

Third, so presence, invited, and now welcomed. And this is not really from what we heard from the families about necessarily what you say. It's more what is felt. I think the idea here is the host is not the one who determines what feels welcoming. It's the guest who determines that. And that welcome comes from personal encounters.

And you know, I think the thing that we often see in a lot of congregations is there are people, like there are in any corner of society, who are uncertain about what to say or what to do. They're worried they'll say the wrong thing. They might offend. And that uncertainty almost always leads to avoidance, almost always. And when people are avoided or go unacknowledged or overlooked or ignored, they eventually stop coming.

My sense is that, so often, we kind of arrange how we gather to make sure it feels welcoming to us, and we forget that we have to design our welcome so that it is welcoming for the stranger. We don't

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want to be this church that I've put up there, that I'm the one who feels welcomed. We want it to be someone else.

So let me return back to a quote from Bill Gaventa, where he recounted a committee that he was on, that I think this quote reminds us that we have to take that proclamation of welcome very seriously. Here's what he said. He said, "Several years ago, the Bethsaida Task Force, a committee working on accessibility and inclusion issues for Episcopal congregations in the diocese of Newark, New Jersey, brought a resolution to the annual meeting of the diocese. The resolution proposed that any church that had a sign on its front lawn stating the name of the church and the phrase, everyone's welcome, should have to take the welcome phrase off by a certain date if the building was not accessible to everyone, especially people with disabilities." And he goes on to say, the resolution did not pass. But it made a compelling point. Right? We want our practices to match our proclamation.

So what is hospitality? What does welcome look like? Well, it's greeting new families when they arrive. It's introducing them to others, drawing them into conversations, inviting them to church events, involving them in your small group, and noticing when they're not there and following up to find out why. Those are ordinary actions that communicate what this parent said in our study. "We just felt like we were wanted; that we were wanted, not welcomed, but wanted."

The principal requirement here is not disability-related expertise or even experience. And you should not delegate the work of welcoming people to your hospitality committee. That's all of our responsibility.

But sometimes congregational staff, sometimes volunteers, can feel more confident if they've had some guidance on etiquette, or language, or the support you offer as a congregation. Sometimes you have to provide more specific information to them about how to approach someone who has complex communication challenges, or who behaves in unfamiliar ways, or who has extensive support needs. That can be helpful to give people that confidence. So that's all part of the being welcomed.

Fourth, what we heard from families is that an important aspect of belonging was being known. And as Christians, we're called to welcome the stranger, of course. But the stranger is not supposed to remain a stranger. And it's becoming easier and easier on Sunday morning to navigate the same space and never really come to know people. So that's a bigger problem in our society. But people with disabilities are particularly at risk of not being known personally, of being known about, but not known personally.

So whether people are known was part of what belonging, was addressed by these families. But that's not what they parked on. What they parked on was how their son and daughter was known. Because so many people with intellectual and developmental disciplines are known first and foremost by their labels, not by their names, and by their deficits, not by their strengths and their gifts. And the disability service system does this extraordinarily well in terms of knowing people or viewing people in terms of diagnostic terms.

If you think about the labels we use in professional circles in society, they almost always emphasize what people can't do, or what they struggle to do. And that makes it a really hard introduction for a church that's trying to figure out, how do we weave a kid with autism into our Sunday school classes? How do we welcome an adult with significant intellectual disability? If all they have in their mind is an image of what people can't do or struggle to do, it's hard to envision a place for that kind of introduction.

So the challenge for the church is to think differently about everyone, but particularly young people with disabilities. And can we think about young people in terms of their strengths and their gifts, that



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they have important gifts to be received? Well, as we're prone to do, we did a study on this. Can parents, do parents view their sons and daughters with autism and intellectual disability in terms of gifts that would be attractive to others and to a community? And indeed, they do. In our study of 500 parents, when we asked, we had a great measure. We gave them a scale that didn't say, "What's going wrong with your son or daughter," but "What's going right."

We asked them about traits like— well, I'll share with you—traits that you see on your screen. We said, "To what extent are these traits like your son or daughter?" And the blue bar is the percentage of parents who said, "That's just like my son or daughter." 93% of these parents said "My son or daughter is happy and filled with joy." 86% said, "My child enjoys life and is thankful for life's simple pleasures. They have a great sense of humor." Or, "They're thoughtful and helpful to others. They demonstrate care for others. My son or daughter is bothered or concerned or upset when someone else is distressed or uncomfortable. My child's courageous. My child bounces back easily." I love this one: "My son or daughter doesn't try to retaliate or get back at others who have hurt them." And half said their child didn't lose their temper. But remember, these are children and adolescents. So that sounds about right.

A point in this is it's a different storyline about people. Can we find a place for these kinds of strengths in our congregations and our communities? And how many faith communities can find a place for someone known for their gratitude and their empathy and their kindness? How many people would love to develop a friendship with someone who's known as funny and happy and thoughtful? And how many of you who are clergy would love to see your congregation filled with people with these traits? Hopefully, all of you. Right? So we start extending some invitations. But we also come to know people in different ways.

We all are a combination of challenges and deficits and strengths and gifts. Why is it for some people, we only perseverate on this side and forget about the other side? We can't do that in the church. That's not how we come to know people.

Fifth, what we learned from these families is belonging involves acceptance. And acceptance comes not, again, from being known about, or from an information or awareness campaign, but from being personally known. And the families talked about their child being welcomed without condition and treated like family and embraced for who they are.

And attitudes have changed a lot over time. But you know also, the attitudes that are in society permeate our churches as well. And when we asked parents in one of our studies to share their perspectives on the extent to which their current congregation was accepting of their son or daughter, we were surprised that only 55% said, "My congregational leader is accepting of my child." And only 48% felt congregation members were accepting of their child. This is the church that they go to, not the one that they aren't at or left.

And you see kind of these sayings, or things that people say that reflect attitudinal barriers in our churches that are often subtle, but they reflect deeper views about how we think about people who are, have disability labels, or who have other labels as well. I put these in your handout so you can read through these. These are all variations on things I've heard in my conversations with churches.

So I think there is a place for kind of awareness activities. It might be a disability awareness or an inclusion awareness Sunday, or a curricular unit you put in your religious education. Those are formal ways of doing it. And there's value in that. But again, what we've learned about attitude change with other groups is, attitudes are most likely to change when you get in relationship with someone, not when you have an informational campaign. So don't do one without the other.

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And if you need resources on how to do inclusion awareness events, I put some in your handouts. There's lots of different denominations and traditions that also have resources that I'm glad to point you to. Some congregations put bulletin inserts periodically to help raise awareness about different issues. Some put bulletin inserts highlighting things around mental illness or employment issues for people with disabilities, or just awareness of the presence of people with disabilities in their community.

I won't pause to say much about disability awareness efforts, only to say I tend to see it done more often poorly than well. So get some input if you're going to do awareness efforts in your congregation from a local disability agency or families before you pursue that as well.

And since I'm at a theological school, let me emphasize that what is communicated from the pulpit matters incredibly when it comes to acceptance. If you have a pastor who is going to be unfazed when someone answers his rhetorical questions, that is huge. Someone who designates the entire sanctuary a no-shush zone, awesome. Right? It's that pastor who says, "Instead of having the people who make a little noise go to the cry room, let's have all the people who can only worship in complete silence go to the cry room. And the rest of us can move a little bit." Right?

[LAUGHTER]

It's the pastor who can just say, we're going to consider some alternatives to the way we've always done it if it brings people into community.

We did a national study on how theological schools are addressing the intersection of faith and disability, or were often not. I'm glad to share more about that in the Q&A if you're interested and point you to what we found from that.

Sixth, families we spoke with needed support. Sometimes that support was substantial, and sometimes it wasn't. But I think what was different about the supports is the need for them to be intentional and individualized for different kids. And this isn't a place to make presumptions. Actually, you just want to invite input, have conversations with parents about, what would it look like to make Sunday morning or Wednesday night or whenever you gather the best day of the week for your son or daughter? What can we do to make that happen? So many parents say, we've never been asked about how best to support our son or daughter.

So ask good questions. Take someone out. Invite him for coffee. I put in your handout some of the kinds of questions that you might ask, not as a way to exclude their son or daughter, but as a way to make sure the supports are in place for them on Sunday or whenever you gather.

So these are the kinds of questions that we would ask, all aimed at not having the parent have to be the advocate in the congregation. But we would sit down, we'd listen to the family, and then we would go and do their asking for them. They have to advocate in schools and in medical facilities and all kinds of places all week long. They shouldn't have to be those advocates in the church as well. And so this is a way you can find out what might be helpful to them.

I don't know what you're going to find if you talk with families. I can tell you what we learned when we surveyed 500 families about the supports that they would like. Here's some things that they said would be helpful for their church to do. 70% said, "Some kind of disability awareness effort in our church would be somewhat to very helpful to including my son or daughter." Some said, "An advocate for family, someone who's just going to help us ask for the things that we need so we don't have to do the asking. Resources for us—trying to navigate the service system and all the things on the other six days of the week is really hard. Are there ways you can help us connect with the supports and

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services we need?" Counseling from a pastor or spiritual leader. Posting a support group for parents. Offering respite.

I know a church that once a year—this is their disability ministry. They buy a hotel room for parents who have kids with disabilities on their anniversary and say, go. We're going to watch your kids. Have a great night out. And for those parents, that's profound, because it's the only time of year they have that opportunity.

Modifications to religious education, support plans, so we're intentional about how we support kids. Support during religious education. Some talked about services that were designed with people with disabilities in mind at the outset as well. Financial support didn't come up a lot, but sometimes it's just like that. There's a little help with this assistive technology that the insurance won't cover. Transportation is a big issue.

But look what's interesting. The thing that families said was the least needed was the ramp. And that's often our starting point and our ending point for disability ministry. Now, I should say, if you can't get in the building, the ramp is the most important thing. My point is that's not the most important, collectively.

I just posted down the side the percentage of churches that actually do any one of these. Only 10% do disability awareness. Only 6% have an advocate for families. Only 4% have resources for families. Only one-third have any kind of spiritual counseling for these families. And it goes all the way down. An opportunity for ministries and the gap between those numbers of what would be helpful and what's available. If you're wanting to learn more about that—I know I threw that up really quickly—we have a downloadable guide completely free, walks through those 14 supports and helps you think about how you might implement them in your church as well.

All right, I know you're watching the time. We're at number seven. Hang in there.

Healthy families are marked by care, deep care for one another. They strive to meet the spiritual, the emotional, and the practical needs of their members. And I think care is also important for families impacted by disability. And it turns out there's no shortage of congregations that could provide that care, sometimes in Nashville, one on every corner. There's 335,000 congregations in the United States. Now, most of them are in Nashville. Every red dot is one in Nashville. But it turns out there are about 450 just in this county alone. Every dot is one. If your dot is not big enough, you're not paying enough to Google, I guess. So thinking about how can the church make an impact the other six days of the week.

You know, the poverty rate for people with disabilities is twice what it is for people without disabilities. The employment rate for people with intellectual disabilities is 10%. That was the employment rate. The unemployment rate is 90%. Inadequate housing options abound. Twice as many people with disabilities have no access to transportation. These are areas where collectively, as the church, we can do something about it.

I won't say much about it unless you have questions. But we've got a wonderful model called Putting Faith to Work that has a congregation come around to their members with disabilities, figure out what their gifts are, network through the congregation, and connect them to jobs. It's what we do for anyone in our church already. We just forget to do it for people with disabilities because we think a service system's going to take care of it.

There are congregations that are also moving in the space of residential options. Inclusive or faith-based residential options for people with disabilities are really in short supply. Churches can make

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movements in that place as well. So how can we stitch together collectively the work of people of faith to change the landscape those other six days after the benediction as well?

And eighth, now we're getting to the deeper parts of belonging. We were made for relationships. You know that. It's a theological point. I think it's empirical as well, because the companionship and the intimacy and the support and the reciprocity that comes from friends is essential to our thriving. It's a part of our flourishing. All the other dimensions I've talked about of belonging can be done at arm's length. Befriending starts to take belonging to a deeper level, I think.

And I love Sue Mosteller's quote here. She is a long-time member of the L'Arche Community in Toronto. She says, "Alone we are poor. Together we are rich." And we know that to be true firsthand. And yet the friendships so fundamental to our own flourishing are elusive for so many kids with disabilities.

For example, one nationally representative study of adolescents with autism found that 51% had not been invited to any other kids' social activity at all in the last year, not a birthday party, not a sleepover, not a football game, nothing. And more than one out of every four adults with intellectual disability who are in our service systems have no friendships or caring relationships in their life beyond family members or staff who are paid to be there, who are often a revolving support staff. You work with other kids. I've put in your handouts just some of what the portrait is there as well.

My point is that the relationship networks of kids with disabilities tend to be quite different than those without similar labels, not in the number of people in their lives. There's lots of people in the lives of folks with intellectual disability and autism. There's family members. There's friends. There's close companions. These are people who are in your life. Right? You have acquaintances. You have classmates, people you work with. And then you have people who are paid to be in your life. Right? You know, your doctor, your auto mechanic, your defense attorney. I don't know your story. Right?

[LAUGHTER]

Whatever it might be. Lots of people in our lives. For so many people with intellectual and development disabilities, there's no shortage of names. But they tend to show up in that inner circle of family members and this outer circle of paid staff. And I think this is the place where, as a church, we can make an incredible, incredible impact.

I want to just highlight here that when we think about befriending people, I'm really talking about the importance of what takes place between Sundays. You can't address a friendship in three hours on a Sunday morning substantively. This is about life lived together beyond the walls of the congregation. It's really what pushes us from acquaintances to friendships. And that means inviting someone to share a cup of coffee, participate in a favorite hobby, watch the big game, visit the mall, go for a walk in the park, join the same small group. And those ordinary gestures are things that rarely take place outside of the service system unless we step into that space. And what's great about this is being someone's friend requires no training, no expertise, no Ph.D. here. This is something we all know how to do, but we may not see how important it is to be intentional about it.

Which takes us to number nine. The individuals and the families that we spoke with said they come to feel needed when the people in their congregation see them as bringing gifts and talents that benefit the whole community and are central to its thriving. This is ministry not to people with disabilities, but ministry by people with disabilities. And it recognizes, I think it's a reflection like anyone else that they are indispensable members of the Body. Because as those relationships start to form, that's when we start to see our need for one another. And a lot of times, churches sort of begin stepping into this as a ministry to people with disabilities, thinking what they are going to bring into people's

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lives. But people who've been on that journey long enough start talking about the reciprocity and the mutuality in that. And the idea of who is the giver and who's the receiver, who's the one serving, who's the one being served aren't static roles. And they often get overturned as you step into that space. And I think that's really where we need to see that there's a group of people that we need to be in relationship with as much as they need to be in relationship with us. And I shouldn't even use the us and them. But you get my point in all of that.

That's why I love this church sign so much. I hope you'll see the connection to this. I stopped to take this picture. It's at a church right next to my son's school a few years ago. Because to me, it suggests the posture that I think every congregation should be adopting when they think about their community that includes people with disabilities. "We need you here ASAP." And the idea is the church is incomplete without the presence and participation of people with disabilities.

I put on your screen the paraphrase of First Corinthians 12, which is what they were referencing. And I want you to think about it in the light of what we're talking about today. Because when we're convinced this is true, that every part is dependent on every other part, that when one part hurts, every other part is involved in the hurt and in the healing. And if one part flourishes, every other part enters into exuberance, we no longer think about inclusion as a nice thing to do because it's good for someone else. We start thinking about inclusion as important because it actually strengthens the Body.

When we believe this is true, we're not satisfied to wait until people arrive. We start extending new invitations. We start pursuing people whose gifts are missing. And we start extending invitations widely and wildly throughout our community. And I think we also stop tinkering and trying to retrofit our churches to make them work for people who might show up, and we start moving people with disabilities from an afterthought to a forethought. We design everything we do with the community in mind that includes people with disabilities as well.

And that leads us to our tenth dimension of belonging. And that, of course, is love. And if you are worried that a social scientist is about to lecture on love, don't worry. I'm not. You don't need me to explain what love has to do with belonging.

But some of you might know the work of Wolf Wolfensberger. He was a pioneer in our field, an advocate for people with disabilities, and talked about the principle of social role valorization. And he offered the observation that healing for wounded people with disabilities begins with three messages: that you're valuable, that you are as valuable as any other person, and that you are loved by those around you.

And as Henri Nouwen reminded us, that really lies, what lies among all of our deepest questions is that question of, is there anybody who loves me? Well, the Scriptures remind us over and over and over that all we do and all we are has to be marked by love. And a service system, the public service systems are not designed to love. But the church is. And that's a place we can step in uniquely to promote belonging.

So belonging, pretty simple. And then of course, I've made it complex. So let's take it back to some points of reflection. And as you think about your congregation, as you think about your church, the places where you're trying to make these movements, ask yourself these questions: Are people with and without disabilities personally invited? Are they present in all aspects of congregational activities? Are they experiencing a warm welcome when they arrive? Are they well-known throughout your faith community? Are they accepted without condition, without caveat? Are they provided the support they need to participate fully and meaningfully? Are they receiving the care they need to help them

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flourish in all aspects of life, spiritually, but also relationally in other areas? Are they developing friendships with others in your congregation? Are they seen as needed and indispensable to the thriving of your community? And are they loved deeply and unconditionally?

And you know I ordered these, I guess, in a way that kind of implies a deepening progression. But I'd argue that each dimension has to be in place. They all have special importance. Being present and being welcomed and being known, that's the requisite foundation for actually having a relationship with others. But being present and welcomed and known isn't enough to feel like you belong. And also, it's hard to be befriended and needed and loved if you're not there or known by others in your community. And so, maybe these are things that we can begin to think about, the areas that might help us foster belonging.

So I've already shared with you two myths. If you'll allow me three or four more, that'll take us right to discussion time. Are we on Central Time?

[LAUGHTER]

I thought I had another hour and five minutes. I'm just kidding.

[LAUGHTER]

So where does that leave us? I hope you'll agree with me that what the families shared with us, what these individuals shared, shatter a few more myths that I think are widely held, whether they're spoken or implied.

And here's the third of those myths. I think these dimensions of belonging reflect ordinary needs, not special needs. They're universal needs. They're not exceptional needs. I hope you'll agree. Because a lot of times, our conversations about disability ministry often accentuate the new or the distinct efforts we're going to make to support the presence and participation of people with disabilities. But the themes I heard from these conversations with families is that they're really relevant to the supporting and belonging of anyone.

And so hopefully they resonate, and we realize that the deepest needs people have—to belong, to be needed, to be loved—are not special needs. They're universal needs. How we might meet them might take some intentionality or some different ways of doing support. But more often, it's ordinary ways of meeting those ordinary needs.

The fourth myth that I wanted to share, I've actually never heard this spoken, so I may be projecting this. But I think it's implied in our practice that people need programs more than they need relationships. And I say this because the initial inclination of a lot of churches when they think about how to respond to the presence of people with intellectual disability in their community is well, let's start a new program, a new specialized experience. And they mirror a lot of what they see in our schools and in our workplaces and elsewhere. They start a separate Sunday school class, or a separate worship service, or separate social events, or just respite services.

And I'm not saying those are bad things. And we can have that in the Q&A. What I'm saying is, sometimes those make it difficult to become welcomed and known and befriended and needed by others. And we limit those inadvertently. So when we prioritize relationships first, we're only going to have programs that lead to those relationships. And if they don't, we find another way to do our programming. So hear me clearly. I'm not opposed to programs in that sense. But that's not what people need most. It's the relationships that lead to their flourishing and belonging.

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And then the fifth myth is that you need some kind of special training or an advanced degree to promote inclusion in meaningful ways. Not so. The markers that families identified are already within the capacity of your congregation. You already know how to do these ten things. It's about helping people to see the importance of being intentional in doing that. And it turns out, there are some experts in your congregation who can help you if you're stuck. I promise you that. Your congregation is filled with people who also know about disability, but have never been asked to bridge their faith and their professional work into this place of promoting belonging.

All right, last myth. I know what you're all thinking right now. You're like, I hear you, Erik. This sounds really like something other churches ought to invest in. I really, I see the value of it. We are not sensing the call on our congregation to do this. And besides, there's lots of other churches doing disability ministry. So would it be okay if we just adopt a ministry of referral? Is that okay?

[LAUGHTER]

So that's myth six, that someone else . . . actually, that's not a myth. Someone else should definitely address this. But that someone else also includes you. It includes me. It includes us. And given our short time together, and that I'm wrapping up, and that I'm in a room, probably, with very diverse denominations reflected, I'm not going to linger on the scriptural or theological support for why you are called to this. But I will tell you I collect position statements. And so if you want to know what the theological call is and the scriptural support, here is my short abbreviated list of all of the position statements and resolutions and theological statements that denominations have issued saying we must be invested in this work. There's a lot of them. Most people collect baseball cards. I have this weird collection of position statements.

What's my point? We're really good at articulating positions. We need to be much better about putting them into practice. A position statement doesn't make anyone feel like they belong. So my challenge for you is to reflect on this question: What, beyond a well-crafted position statement or vision statement or mission statement or resolution, can you point to that really demonstrates your congregation's commitment to be in a place where people with disabilities can believe and belong and become who God has called them to be?

So let me conclude by inviting you to reflect. How might the attitudes and the actions of your congregation members and your leaders aim towards each of those 10 dimensions of belonging? And what steps might you take to become a place where all of your members are present and invited and welcomed and needed and supported and cared for, befriended, and needed and loved?

So thank you very much.

[APPLAUSE]

So what I'm going to do, following the lead, I think, of past talks, is I'm going to invite you to reflect where you are and turn to a neighbor or neighbors. This is the relationship piece. It's the eighth dimension. And spend a few minutes, just, what did you hear that resonates with you? Maybe there's something you heard that you're doing really well, or something that caught your attention that you think you could do better or differently, or you want to hear or know more about. And I'll give you about three or four or five minutes, and then call you back up. And we'll take some questions and continue the dialogue. Okay? Enjoy meeting your neighbor.

I tell you to befriend one another, and then I make it stop. So . . .

[LAUGHTER]

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It's a shame to stop the conversation. It sounds like you're reacting, and things are resonating, and you have lots of experiences and comments already. I'd love to hear some of the things that you're reacting to, or questions that you have, or comments that you want to make. And I think they have to go to a microphone. So . . .

**Participant:** Could you first repeat what love was, the three ingredients of love? I didn't get them all.

**Dr. Carter:** You mean the comment from Wolf Wolfensberger?

**Participant:** Yes.

**Dr. Carter:** That you are loved, that you are as loved as anyone else. I'm sorry, that you are valuable, that you are as valuable as anyone else, and that you are loved. Right? I think that's the . . . yeah. Great. Over here.

**Participant:** Thank you for that full-court press on church life. I'm a United Church of Christ minister and the parent of a special needs child. I appreciated your presentation so much. I wonder what you'd think of this. I submit that the churches have a disability. And that is innate and inherent in its in its nature, because church is a social is in a social zone. It's a social entity and function socially for most people, and there is a kind of protocol that goes with social life. And there's a sorting process, and it's dictated by categories like social fluency and the ease of communication and all these very difficult things for most of the people that we've been talking about.

And when you spoke of the need for them to be known personally, this requires a spiritual skill that goes beyond the social skills. And all of us and all of our church people are in a state of development on that very score, and sometimes we don't get very high marks.

**Dr. Carter:** We've reduced our social connections to a 15-second everyone stand up and greet your neighbor.

**Participant:** And just keep it at 15 seconds.

**Dr. Carter:** And yes, but please, because we have more important things, we have more important things to get to. And I think that's part of my concern. I'm very interested in what happens, again, when we gather on Sunday morning. I think there's profound implications for people who cannot be—our ability to not welcome and weave people into what happens then.

But I'm as or more concerned about what happens after the benediction, and we've packed up the coffee and the donuts. And there's six days that pass, and we're not involved in one another's lives. And I have a concern for the church as a whole. But it's particularly concerning for people who are so isolated those other days. So and culturally, we're drifting away from that, where we're thinking more about, *what do I come and get out of this*, rather than *what do I come and give and invest in others*. So there's some larger cultural trends that make people with disabilities particularly vulnerable in that space as well. Great comment.

**Participant:** Thanks for that. I have an 11-year-old who has Down syndrome and a number of autistic family members, and so very invested in this topic. And one of the things that I am thinking about that came up, too, in your talk is about the future of labor and work for this population, for my son. And I'm seeing a kind of cultural trajectory in this country where independence in the form of jobs in retail or something like this, all of which would be fine, but this is kind of the brass ring for kids like my son. So right and that that and I'll be happy if he wants to do that and terrific, all of those things.



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But given the realities that I see already and that you pointed out statistically about isolation, I sort of think like, why is our culture valorizing in this particular kind of independent, abstract notion of what a success story would be for an adult with developmental disabilities, when we know that belonging and social integration and community is actually how we thrive? But our labor, the structure of labor in this country is built on atomized individuals, right, with individual salaries and all this kind of stuff. So it seems to me, we're on a collision course with what we're really trying to do here.

And I find myself trying to express this. My son is mainstreamed, and I'm trying to talk about, what's the long story here? It's not probably what you think. So can you just comment on any of that?

**Dr. Carter:** Sure. I mean, the service systems are captivated now with outcomes—employment outcomes, college outcomes, and other things. And we're aiming towards that, and in many ways, using the metric of what kind of any other young person without a label would do. They work, and so we should pursue work. And we're forgetting that those are elements, but they are not the whole of what it means to flourish. And often, they're the pathway to flourishing, but they're not the flourishing itself. And we don't measure what we measure, whether some, what we measure what percentage of people who leave high school work one year out. We don't measure who is known and how many of the people who graduate know anyone who knows when their birthday is and make sure it's celebrated well and knows when they're not there and all those things.

So we've spent a lot of time around the employment piece, asking families in particular. We just finished a study of 2,500 families, asking, "What's most important in this space to you?" It wasn't the job, the pay, the rate of hours, the benefits. It was being in a place where their gifts could be shared, or they could learn what those gifts are, where they would develop relationships with others, and they would do something that they felt was meaningful, to have purpose. So a job can do that. But a job can also work against all of those things. And so the job is not the end goal.

And so I think we've lost that a lot in our effort to pursue outcomes that are measurable and make us feel accomplished. We forget that at the heart of it all, the real metrics of flourishing are to have purpose, to have relationships, to have intimacy, to have health and security. And these other outcomes are just pathways to that. And if they lead to that, great. But if not, that's not the end goal. Is that kind of what you're getting at?

**Participant:** Completely. But isn't that also a critique of just contemporary life? I mean, right? Like, this is the story that we've told ourselves about work in general and fulfillment. And so on individualization . . .

**Dr. Carter:** I don't know if I can say this quote, but it's my favorite quote from . . . Okay, some people actually quote real things. I love this quote from an abstract of a journal article.

[LAUGHTER]

It's kind of weird; it's the shortest abstract I know, and it was written by Wolf Wolfensberger, who can only get away with this. But it essentially said—I hope this is okay—"The world is going to hell in a handbasket, and it's not going to do people with disabilities any good." And he was basically saying the cultural shifts are problematic for lots of people, but they are especially problematic for people with disabilities. Our prioritization of accomplishment and resume and all those virtues are not good for people who need time and space and relationships, which at the end of the day, is what all of us need. Right?

So I will just point . . . this Putting Faith to Work model is an incredible way of bridging those too, because it brings not a service system around a person, but people who care about them, see them as

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a person with a disability who is also called and has a vocation and helps them figure out what is that calling, and how can we help place you in a place where you will thrive. Sometimes it led to the job. A lot of times, it led to serving in the congregation. And that was also a really important vocation for people as well. Great comment.

**Participant:** Thanks for all you've taught us tonight. I have one question about disability etiquette, and that would be, what's the best resource for that? I think you know we always want to avoid saying the wrong thing when we're trying to be helpful. What can you give us so that we can learn more about that?

**Dr. Carter:** Yeah. This is a question. I'm not going to give you an easy answer because I would defer to individuals to share themselves what they'd like to be called and what's proper etiquette. And I'd be comfortable asking that question.

The interesting thing about etiquette—so there so I'll come back to this. But there, there are terminology is a big issue. The terminology that we use now to refer to intellectual disability was a different word not ten years ago. You saw the "End the R Word" campaign. Intellectual disability is, as I understand it, the fourteenth different term that we've used to describe that category, which means that we come up with a new name, but ultimately, if our fundamental views of a person haven't changed, then we just attach that to whatever the new label is.

So my point is, labels are constantly changing, and it's hard to keep up. And we want to be respectful. And it's not about political correctness. We want to be respectful. And because we don't always know and it's changing, then we avoid, again, saying anything altogether. So I think you know it's okay to ask families and individuals if you're uncertain. You know I really. I don't know what to say. You know.

And there's also a number of organizations on that list that I put that produce guides on people-first language and etiquette. And in fact, there's some links, I think, on the awareness pages that show, here's some etiquette related to people with a visual impairment, things to say or avoid saying in general, folks with Down syndrome, things to avoid saying and to say in general. And I've got some lists of those in the book back here as well. But I think you can get them for free online at those organizations.

[LAUGHTER]

So that'll help. Yeah, people always, a usual question I get is, what do I call someone? What's the label I use? And of course, the quick answer is, find out their name and use that. And there's very rare times we need to be talking about people as part of this larger group, and more how do we welcome Sam and Sophie and Elena and Leah. So good question.

**Participant:** You know, you have mentioned—I don't want to use us and them. And we do that. And it's hard writing and speaking to not use those terms. But I hear it in prayers, I hear it in liturgy, I hear it in sermons, I hear it everywhere, using us and them to talk about people that are "different from us." And I think the more we can become conscious of that and not do it—and it takes work to find other ways to phrase a sentence. But I think that's important.

**Dr. Carter:** And it becomes a lot easier to do when whoever would formally be referred to as us and them is not in another place, but is with you. So when your small group and your Bible studies and your things include the people, there's less of that too. It's a tangible embodiment of that, there isn't in us and them. There's us. And we have lots of labels that we could all attach to ourselves. But

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some of us are really good at hiding the things that would get labeled. And others, not so much. And so we're prone to that.

**Participant:** Thanks so much for your presentation. Both my siblings have cerebral palsy. So I resonated a lot with a lot of the barriers that you said. And the one specific barrier that I was wondering if you could comment on is access to religious education. Because my family didn't have access to a religious school, because there was no place for someone with special needs. And then, even just getting my sister to get her First Communion or to get her in religious education was a huge fight . . .

**Dr. Carter:** Right.

**Participant:** . . . for every class. So I'm not sure if you know of programs that have done this well, or if there are resources so we can help to make this more accessible for people.

**Dr. Carter:** We have begun to assemble a number of resources of national ministries and denominations and organizations on our website, the [faithanddisability.org](http://faithanddisability.org), which is our collaborative. Because it's so hard to find where those are those are.

I think in terms of resources for thinking about religious education—and I think we all maybe have different impressions of what that means. What I'm thinking about traditionally is Sunday school, that component of it. There's fantastic resources out there now for lay leaders and volunteers about how to think about what sort of planning do we need to do, what kind of adaptations and modifications might be embedded into that, what are some ways that we can involve peers in providing that support, so that the nuts and bolts of how you do it is, it is . . . there's wonderful resources out there right now.

There's less on how you get your Sunday school programs to commit to that. But if they're willing to step in that space . . . I particularly think about the work of Barb Newman, if you're not familiar with her work. Out of, she's out in Western Michigan and with the CLC Network, Christian Learning Center Network. It has wonderful resources on autism in the church and how kids and peers can be involved in that. So there's that dimension of it as well.

There's the other sort of the Christian schooling, when we think of K-12 kinds of religious education. And I wasn't sure you were referring there, which you were referring to. But that is a huge need where we are lagging way behind. There are so many families who desire a Christian education for their son or daughter. And two siblings go to the Christian school, or to the Catholic school, to whatever the . . . and the other one is in the public school because the capacity and the commitment isn't there.

So there are some networks that are beginning to form to support Christian schools around this topic. In fact, in a week-and-a-half, there is a gathering of Catholic educators who are coming to Vanderbilt who are all working on establishing this network to support one another and create some model programs in this area that others can replicate. So there are some movements, and I'm glad to talk with you and anyone else interested in how you can connect with those schools that are really shining in this area right now.

But I think that's a particular place that we're lagging behind. We know how to do special education services well. We struggle to figure out how the funding and the administrative and the logistics plays out. And that makes us so frightened that we don't go into that space. But we're called in that space as well.

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[pause]

I'm using something called wait time, which is where I awkwardly stare at you.

[LAUGHTER]

But I won't do it for long. Any other remaining questions? Well, I'll linger a little bit afterwards. But I just want to say again, thank you so much for being part of this conversation, for clearly caring deeply about creating communities of belonging, and especially to the endowment that funds this particular lecture. Because this is rare, far too rare around the country to have conversations at schools of theology that bring together our commitment to faith and disability in these kinds of conversations. So thank you all very much, and have a wonderful evening.

[APPLAUSE]

[MUSIC PLAYING]