

**ENCORE  
ACCESS**

# **Fostering Belonging**

**with Erik W. Carter**

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**BOSTON COLLEGE**  
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY AND MINISTRY

# Fostering Belonging

## USING THIS RESOURCE

This resource is a guide to using an STM Online: Encore presentation as a conversation starter with members of a faith community. Each part of the presentation may be used separately, in combination with each other, or in a sequence over a period of time. The general nature of “Fostering Belonging” gives it broad application and makes it an excellent choice for a variety of groups. For example, consider using one or several of the segments with a parish council, a hospitality committee, catechists, Catholic school faculty, and high school religion classes. If you are looking for a service opportunity for a high school confirmation class, consider leading a discussion around Parts 3 and 5, and commit to implementing one recommendation to enhance belonging in the community.



## OVERVIEW OF THE PRESENTATION

Erik W. Carter offers ten elements of belonging: to be present, invited, welcomed, known, accepted, supported, cared for, befriended, needed, and loved. Focused on moving from barriers to inclusion of persons with special needs in a faith community, Carter provides an inventory through which any faith-based community—parish, school, classroom, committee—can evaluate itself on how it engenders a sense of belonging. Carter also offers many concrete strategies for inclusion.

**Erik W. Carter** is Cornelius Vanderbilt Chair and Professor of Special Education at Vanderbilt University

**Part 1: What does Belonging Mean? [video 5 minutes]**

**Part 2: Present [video 10 minutes]**

**Part 3: Invited, Welcomed, Known [video 10 minutes]**

**Part 4: Accepted, Supported, Cared For [video 9 minutes]**

**Part 5: Befriended, Needed, Loved [video 7 minutes]**

**Part 6: Six Myths Parishes Have about Persons with Disabilities [video 7 minutes]**

# Part 1: What does Belonging Mean?

## OVERVIEW

This segment provides an overview of the ten dimensions of belonging to a community: being present, invited, welcomed, known, accepted, supported, cared for, befriended, needed, and loved. It ends with some questions that assist the listener in assessing one's own community. Although Carter focuses on persons with disabilities belonging within congregational life, his elements of belonging can apply to any member of a parish or school.

ARE PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AND THEIR FAMILIES...	WHAT ARE WE DOING WELL RIGHT NOW IN THIS AREA?	WHAT COULD WE DO BETTER OR DIFFERENTLY IN THIS AREA?
Present		
Invited		
Welcomed		
Known		
Accepted		
Supported		
Cared for		
Befriended		
Needed		
Loved		

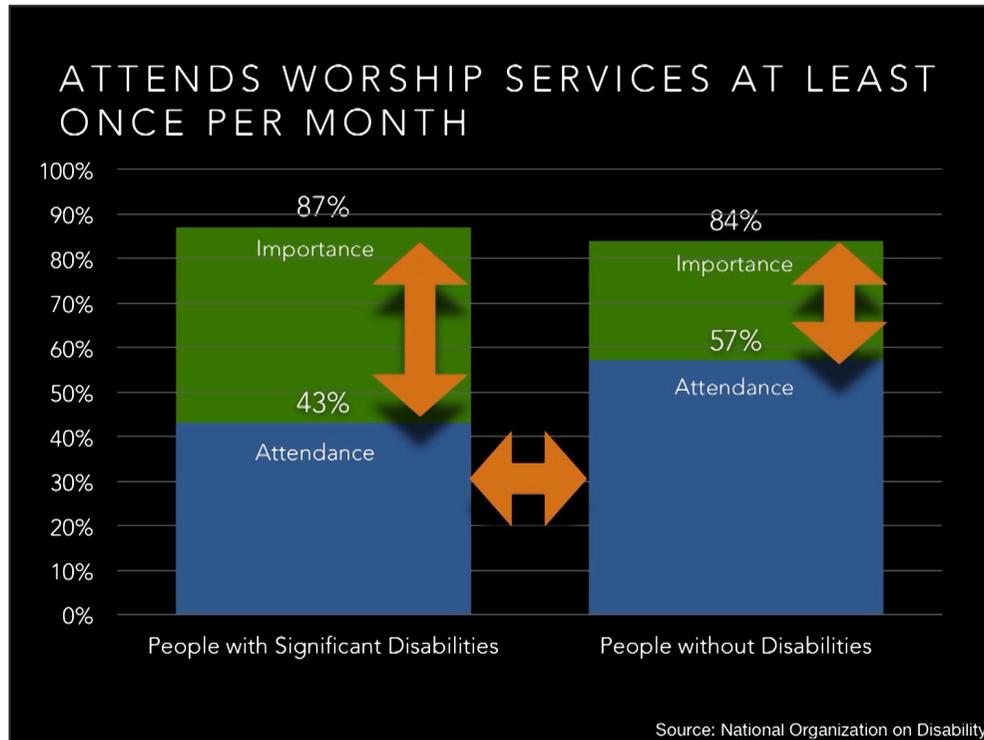
## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. Comment on Carter's definition of belonging. Is there anything you would revise or add?
2. In which elements of belonging is your community or school strong? Weak?
3. What are one or two tasks you would give priority to, so that persons with disabilities would feel welcome?

# Part 2: Present

## OVERVIEW

A person cannot have presence if they are not physically present. Carter speaks about physical barriers in a faith community's buildings as well as false assumptions or "barriers of awareness." Two assumptions he debunks: 1) there are no persons of disability in our town/region/county; and 2) faith is not important to persons with disabilities.



*In Las Vegas last year, in five different casinos I asked five different persons in wheelchairs whether they had encountered any barriers to their entrance, the answer always being "No, should there be?"  
Gambling casinos, OK! Churches, no!*

**Harold Wilke**

*If 'shut-ins' can go to Walmart, but not to your church; they are **shut-out**, not **shut-in**.*

**Ed Wood**

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. What does your community's architecture say about its theology?
2. What hidden barriers or barriers of awareness might be reflected in your parish or school community?
3. What can you do to change the barriers in your community?

# Part 3: Invited, Welcomed, Known

## OVERVIEW

Are you intentional about inviting persons to belong to your community? How are newcomers welcomed? How does your community facilitate folks getting to know each other? These questions of hospitality may have already been asked in your community, but they may need to be raised again with persons with disabilities in mind. These questions are not just for a committee, but need to be embraced by the entire community.



### A Pastor

*It's not that we deliberately excluded them. In fact, we weren't deliberate at all. That was the problem.*

### A Parent

*We felt like we were wanted.*

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## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. What is your community doing well in the areas of inviting, welcoming, and getting to know each other?
2. What could your community do better?
3. What are one or two “next steps” in these areas?

# Part 4: Accepted, Supported, Cared For

## OVERVIEW

In this segment, Carter offers many practical suggestions to foster acceptance and support of persons with disabilities and their families. When addressing the element of being cared for, he points to efforts to help people with disabilities connect with employment opportunities; to help families get respite care; and to motivate communities and denominations to promote residential centers.

### THINGS PEOPLE SAY THAT REFLECT ATTITUDINAL BARRIERS

Dr. Erik Carter

From the Boston College presentation on October 4, 2017,  
“From Barriers to Belonging: The Church and People with Disabilities”

- *“It seems like a lot of energy and effort when we can’t really be sure that Louise will actually get anything out of being in Sunday school with the other children.”*
- *“We have a special class for children just like your son.”*
- *“These renovations seem a bit much. After all, we don’t have any people with disabilities in our congregation.”*
- *“I’d love to invite my neighbor to attend our church, but we just don’t have a program for people with disabilities.”*
- *“Maybe your family would feel more comfortable at Temple Beth-El—I believe they do disability ministry.”*
- *“If Abel can’t read, how will he get anything out of the class?”*
- *“She has autism? None of us are trained to work with those children.”*
- *“Some members of the congregation are finding your group to be distracting. Perhaps you and your clients would be more comfortable sitting in the balcony.”*
- *“Our church just isn’t big enough to have a disability ministry.”*
- *“Sandy really doesn’t understand the meaning of communion. I’m not sure we can really allow her to participate.”*
- *“I’m so sorry to hear about your child. You must be devastated.”*
- *“I know he is a little old, but he would probably still best be cared for in the nursery.”*

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. What is your community doing well in the areas of acceptance, support, and caring?
2. What might a disability awareness campaign look like in your community?

# Part 5: Befriended, Needed, Loved

## OVERVIEW

Carter takes us into the mystery of relationships in this segment on befriended, needed, and loved. He reminds us that the cultivation of relationship and loving each other are deeply embedded in Christian theology and can be the elements of belonging that a Christian congregation can model for society. In his remarks on being needed, Carter points out the reciprocity of relationship and the gifts persons with disabilities bring to the community.

Disability Category	Never Visits With Friends	Rarely Or Never	Not Invited To Other Youth's
Autism	44%	84%	51%
Deaf-Blindness	27%	64%	35%
Emotional Disturbance	11%	26%	17%
Hearing Impairment	8%	41%	12%
Intellectual Disability	16%	42%	25%
Learning Disabilities	7%	19%	11%
Multiple Disabilities	30%	63%	44%
Orthopedic Impairment	20%	47%	30%
Other Health	6%	24%	12%
Speech/Language	9%	22%	11%
Traumatic Brain Injury	8%	34%	20%
Visual Impairment	15%	33%	22%

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. What are some gestures of friendship outside of Sunday worship or the school day that you could extend to someone?
2. What are some talents or gifts in community members that contribute to the vitality of the community?
3. What are the next steps your community could take to help each member understand that they are valued and loved?