



Faith leader perspectives on access, inclusion, and belonging for individuals with disabilities in Connecticut: Preliminary Findings

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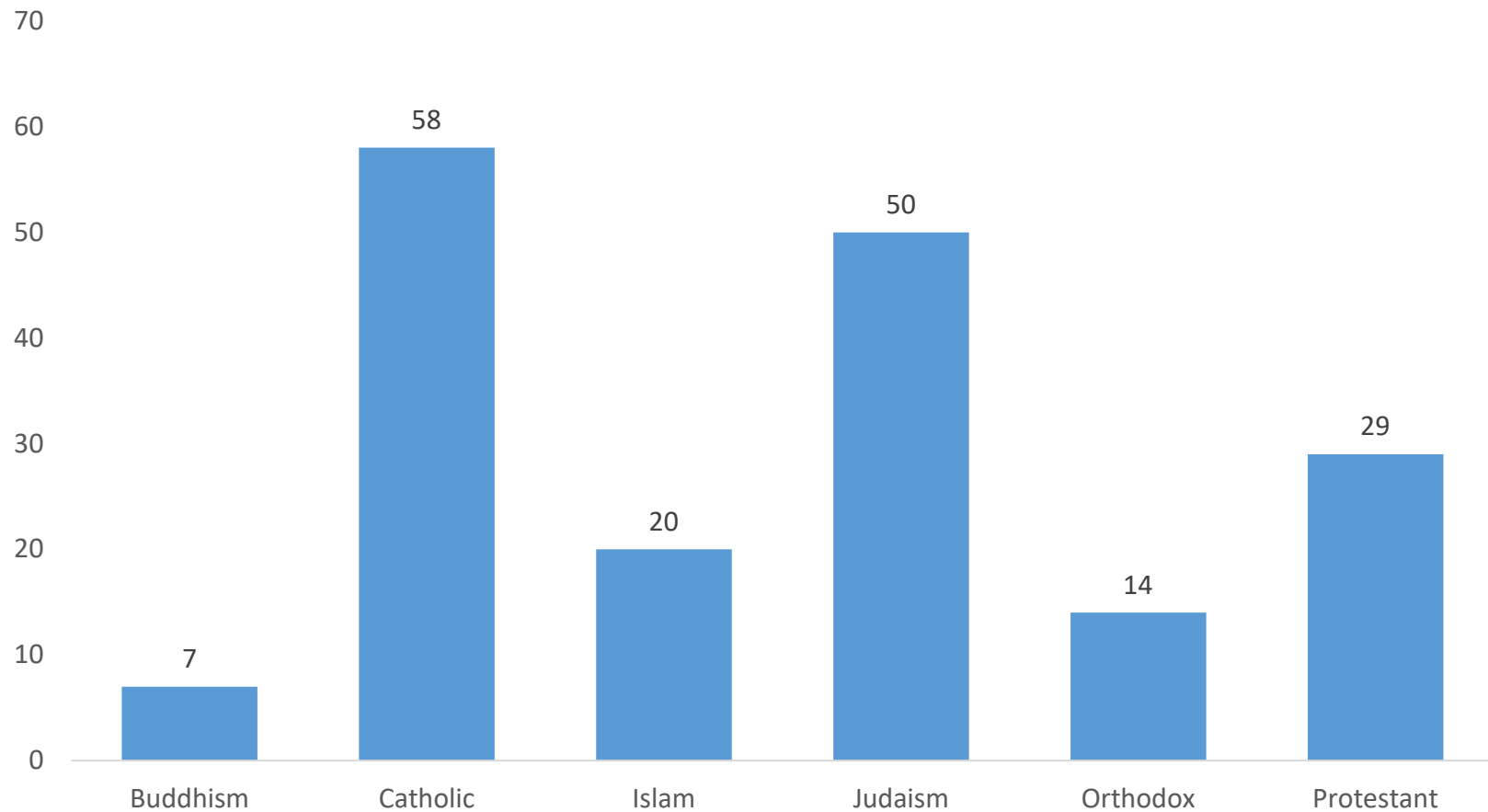


Background:

- Carter et al. (2023)
 - Faith communities are one way people with disabilities access community.
 - Faith leaders are an under-researched stakeholder group.
- Ault et al. (2021)
 - Faith leader Training correlates with accessible materials and counseling for individuals with disabilities.
 - There is a positive correlation between size of faith community and resources.

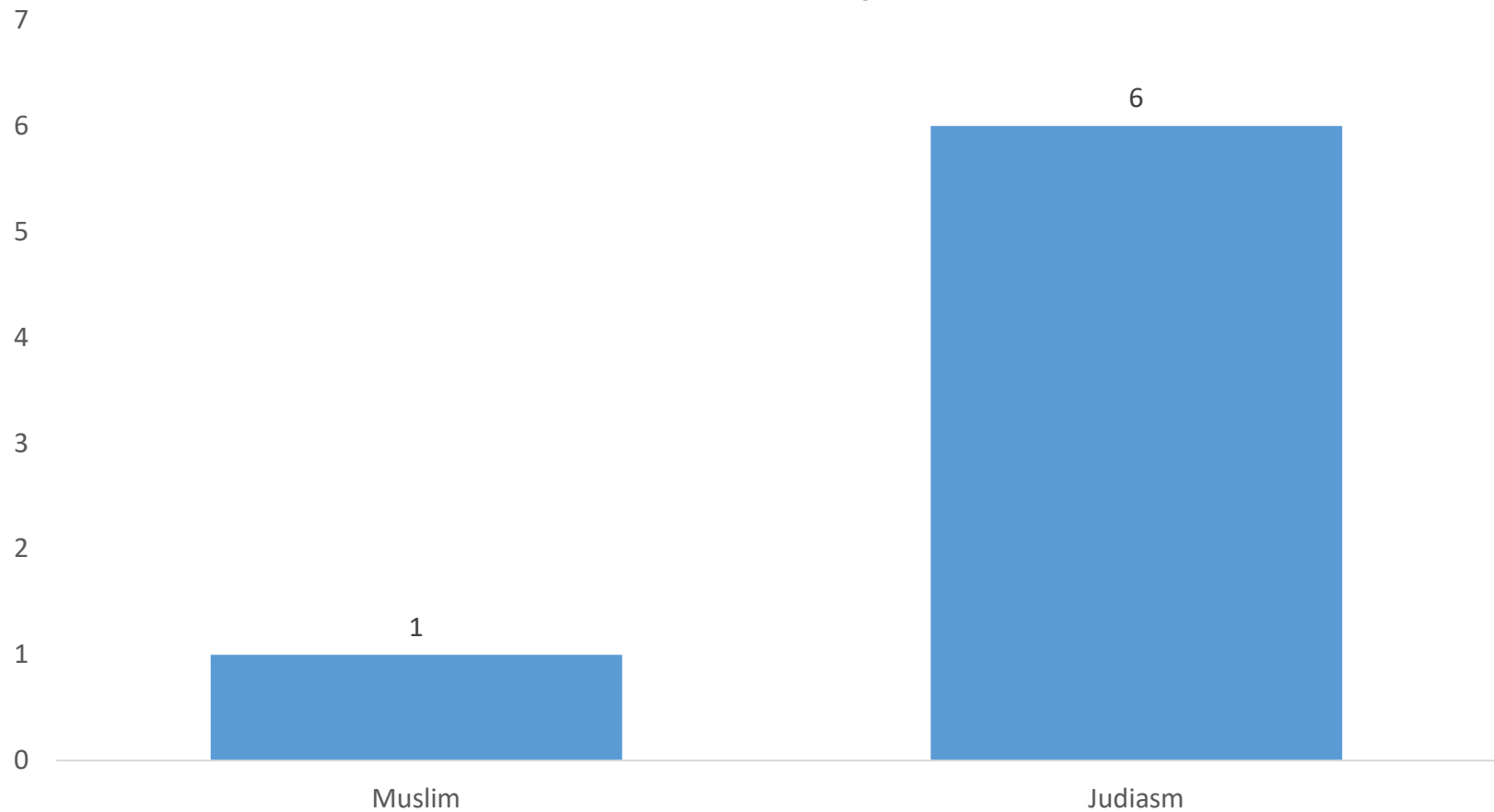


Faith Traditions Contacted: 178 Total Communities





Faith Traditions Responses: 7 Total Responses





Length of Service in Years

	1 - 5	6 - 10	11 - 15	16 - 20	More than 20
How long have you been a religious leader?	0	0	1	1	4
How long have you served your current community?	1	2	1	0	2



Similarities

- Everywhere had reserved, accessible parking
- (Almost) all used microphones
- All described having members with IDD or Autism
- All said there are opportunities for those with disabilities to share their gifts or take on roles during a gathering.



Notable Differences

- The largest community is the only one that identified as having members who use ASL and an ASL interpreter at services.
- The Faith Leader who has been a part of their current community 1-5 years (and smallest community) discussed their biggest barrier being that immuno-suppressed and older members have a difficult time staying connected. Also that PWD seldom participate.
- The Faith Leader from the largest community did not fill in many of the short answer questions.

Carter (2021)

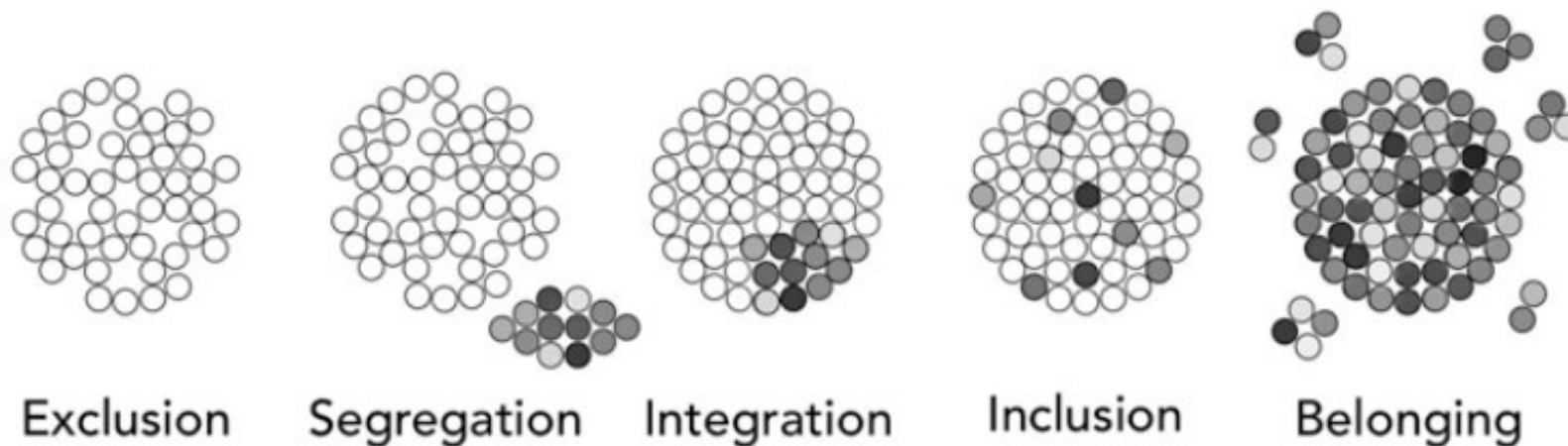


Fig. 2.1 Five portraits of communities in relation to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities

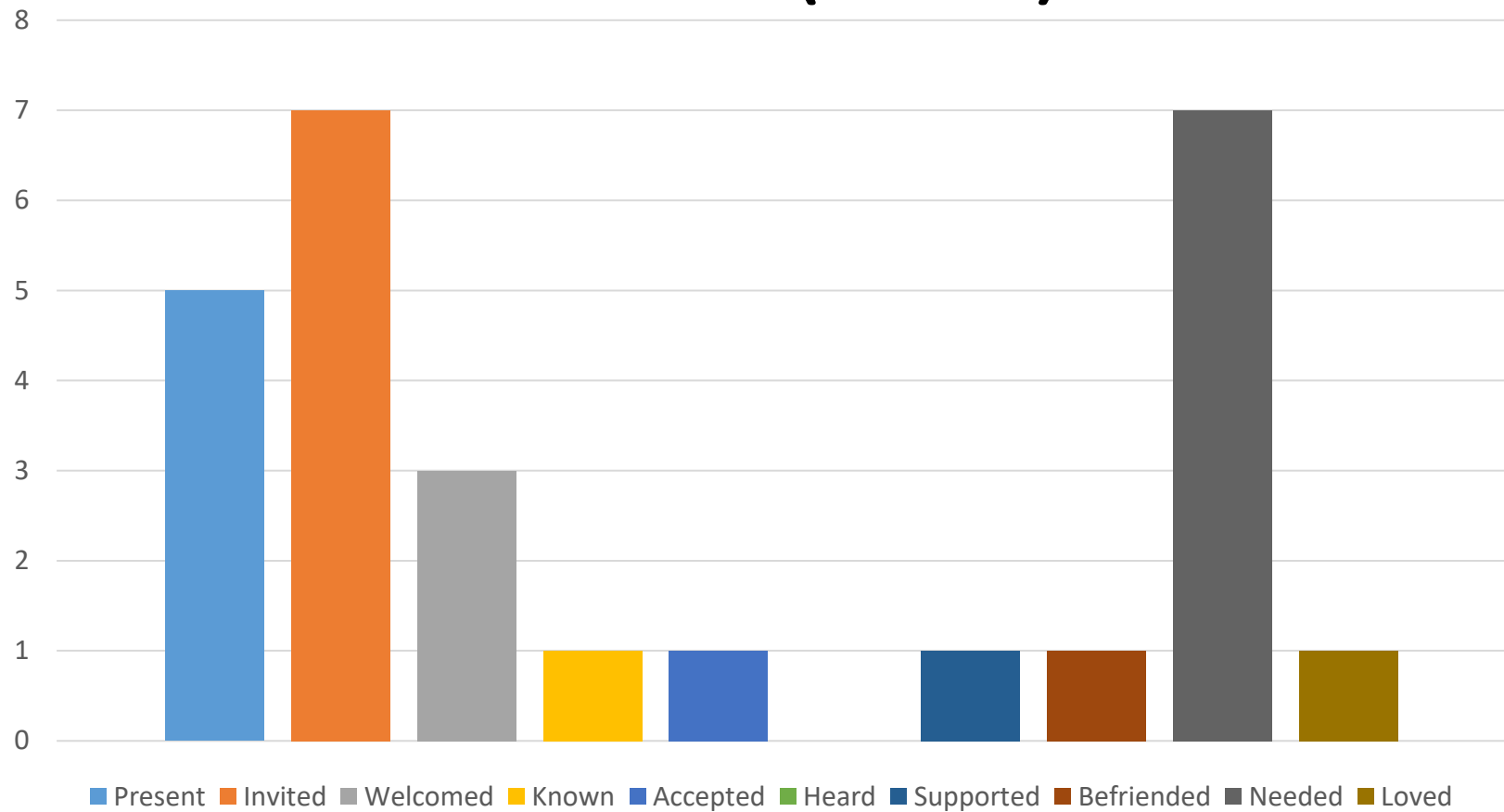


Dimensions of Belonging: Terms Carter (2021)

Present (Inclusion)	Invited (Participate)	Welcomed	Known	Accepted
Heard	Supported	Befriended	Needed (Volunteer, Work)	Loved



Dimensions of Belonging: Counted Carter (2021)





Notable Responses: What are you proud of.

What is one specific aspect/activity/accomplishment within your faith community to include individuals with disabilities that you are most proud of as a faith leader?

- 1 described that they run a social group (nonprofit) in CT specifically to bring together people with disabilities that focuses on belonging.



Notable Responses

What is the biggest challenge to fostering a sense of belonging for individuals with disabilities in your faith community, in your opinion as a faith leader?

- “overcoming unconscious bias and shifting from a mindset of inclusion to one of full belonging. Too often, communities believe they are being inclusive simply by allowing individuals with disabilities to attend or participate in programs. But belonging goes deeper, it means being missed when you’re not there, having your presence expected, and being empowered to contribute meaningfully.”

References

Ault, M. J., Slocum, V., Collins, B. C., Leahy, M. M., & Miller, V. P. (2021). Perceptions of Faith Leaders on the Inclusion and Participation of Individuals with Disabilities in Their Communities. *Journal of Disability & Religion*, 27(1), 138–159. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23312521.2021.1932691>

Borowska-Beszta, B. (2024). Object-Based Photo-Ethnographic Report on Disability Encoded in Access to Religious Historical Buildings. *Journal of Disability & Religion*, 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23312521.2024.2440730>

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Carter, E. W., Tuttle, M., Spann, E., Ling, C., & Jones, T. B. (2023). Toward Accessible Worship: The Experiences and Insights of Christians with Disabilities. *Journal of Disability & Religion*, 28(2), 189–219. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23312521.2023.2197435>



Extra Slide:

Borowska-Beszta (2024)

Five concepts of disability encoded in access objects in sacred buildings. These are:

- (1) respected;
- (2) considered;
- (3) peripheral;
- (4) paradoxical; and
- (5) concealed disability.