

Religious Education and Sacramental Guidelines for Persons with Special Needs



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RELIGIOUS EDUCATION FOR PERSONS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

If the participation of persons with disabilities is to be real and meaningful, the parish must prepare itself to receive them by creating a warm and welcoming environment. A parish should appreciate fully the contributions persons with special needs can make to the church's spiritual life, both by what they can contribute and by the witness of their very presence within the community. Because persons with special needs may not be fully aware of the contribution they can make, church leaders should offer them practical ways of serving, in such roles as catechetical, liturgical and service ministries, with suitable adaptation of the physical environment as needed.

All persons with special needs have a right to be fully welcomed into their parish catechetical, Sacramental and youth ministry programs and should not be denied access because of their disability. Evangelization and catechesis for individuals with disabilities must be customized in content and method to the particular situation of the individual. As far as is possible, these persons should be integrated into the normal catechetical activities of the parish.

Catechesis for persons with special needs requires sensitivity, compassion and a clear understanding of the gospel imperative to favor the least ones among us. Catechetical leaders can do this by recognizing first of all that such persons want above all to be accepted and valued for who they are.

Paragraph numbers within this document refer to the *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Special Needs* (USCCB, 1978).

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Most children with disabilities who come to a parish religious education program will already be in an inclusive education program in their public school, learning side by side with their peers. Great care should be taken to avoid isolation of these persons through fragmentation of programs or through attitudes. In spite of his or her disability, a person with special needs has the same right to participate in the full life of the faith community and in its Sacraments as any other baptized person.

Therefore, a student with special needs should be placed in a regular classroom with support. Support is the key to successful inclusion. Special children learn their faith side by side with children of the same chronological age. Even if a child has developmental disabilities, he or she should not be placed with younger children since this action does not respect the dignity of the human person.

In the event it is necessary for children or youth to receive formation in a segregated setting, they should be included in any special events of their parish community, such as liturgies, social and recreational activities, so that they receive the support of their own community of faith.

Children learn best when they learn together. When children with disabilities are with their peers, it is often the typical child who benefits the most since they have the opportunity to grow in understanding, acceptance, and compassion of those with special needs. This interaction is a healthy preparation for adult life.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The first step in developing a religious education program for those with special needs is to conduct a needs assessment. While a parish is required to provide religious education for each of its parishioners, it may not require a full in-class program.

Alternatives to a full program for special needs include:

- providing formation programs for parishioners on an as-needed basis
- affiliating with another parish in a joint venture

Financing:

Since a program for special needs may require an additional investment for books, materials, etc., the parish should determine what these costs are and how they will be paid. Options would include simply adding it to the parish budget, or charging a book/materials fee.

Classroom Environment:

Another item to be assessed is whether or not the parish will need additional space for self-contained classrooms for those with special needs or areas for one-on-one instruction. In these instructional areas, clutter needs to be kept at a minimum.

In cases of students with physical disabilities, keep enough space for successful ambulation; make sure lighting is adequate and the acoustics acceptable.

In cases where a youngster may be self-abusive, care needs to be taken with items such as: scissors, staples, paint brushes, etc. Be careful of lit candles and the hot wax.

PLACEMENT OPTIONS

Placement options in formation programs for students with special needs are to be considered in the following order:

1. inclusion in a typical classroom with no additional supports or accommodations
2. integration in a typical classroom with appropriate supports and accommodations
3. part-time instruction in a typical classroom and part time in a segregated setting
4. full time in a segregated setting in a small group
5. full time individualized instruction
6. the parent or guardian as instructor, with the understanding that he or she will use approved curriculum materials and will meet periodically with the catechetical leader

In cases where parishes do not have enough students or resources to warrant their own special needs program, an agreement may be worked out with another nearby parish. Students may receive formation there with the understanding that the home parish will provide teachers' aides or other assistance. It is important that the catechetical leaders of both parishes work together to coordinate an approach tailored to the needs of the both the student and family.

Needs Considerations before placement is made:

Age

Children know their peers. To put a 13 year old in the same class with a 7 year old may be a hurtful experience, even if both youngsters are being prepared for their First Communion.

Skill Level:

Can the child read? Is she/he verbal?

Particular needs

1. How many children are in the special needs category?
2. What are their particular needs?
3. Where do they fit in the current religious education program or do some need to be in self-contained small groups?

Parish Resources:

1. How many teachers/teacher-nights are available?
2. Will one-on-one support be needed for any of the children?
3. Is there enough physical space to accommodate all the needs?
4. How can parents of regular students assist as part of the special needs learning team?

REMEMBER

Inclusion means.....

- All children learning together with necessary supports and services
- All children having their unique needs met in the same setting
- All children participating in all facets of parish/school life
- An important part of every child's education
- Opportunities for friendships to develop
- All children learning side-by-side even though they have some different educational goals
- Supporting regular education teachers
- Using innovative teaching strategies for children's varied learning styles
- Integrating related services in the regular classroom

Inclusion is NOT.....

- Dumping children in regular classes without necessary supports and services
- Trading off quality for inclusion
- Doing away with or cutting back on special education services
- Ignoring each child's unique needs
- All children learning the same thing, and the same time, in the same way
- Expecting regular education teachers to teach without the support they need
- Sacrificing the education of typical children

**CATCHIST FORMATION FOR THOSE TEACHING
ADULTS AND CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS**

It is the responsibility of the pastor and catechetical leader to provide evangelization, catechetical formation, and Sacrament preparation for persons with disabilities (*Code of Canon Law 777.4*). However, persons with disabilities, their families and advocates, as well as those knowledgeable in serving disabled persons may serve as catechists or aides for preparation of those with special needs with the following caveats:

Coordinators and catechists for special needs programs or individualized instruction (including parents) must be practicing Catholics and go through the same diocesan initial catechist certification and ongoing formation as catechists in the regular religious education program. This is true even if they have training or background in special education for public school classroom teaching. A non-Catholic specialist who assists those with a particular disability may serve as an aide or “interpreter” in the presence of a qualified Catholic catechist.

Characteristics of the Special Education Catechist

This person MUST be ..

- a person of faith, ever striving to be more aware of God's presence
- mature, and one who sees this task as a real challenge, and part of the true ministry of the church
- free of the anxiety related to the responsibility of the task.
- generous with their time. There's no other choice. Ready-made materials aren't readily available, and have to be made, or modified from something already on the shelf.
- patient with the students, and with themselves.
- realistic about what each student can accomplish
- willing to work closely with the parents, and on occasion, with the teachers who work with the students during the week.
- someone who believes in the ability of the students to learn

TEACHING PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

One of the pastoral challenges facing catechists is to meet the needs of those who have special needs of any sort. Certain principles underlie this catechesis:

1. Get to know the individual

As part of preparation and assessment, getting to know the individual in a special catechetical situation allows possible insights into the person which can help decide how the catechesis is going to be delivered and what the appropriate approach or program should be. The opportunity to practice or learn greater social skills may be an important component of catechesis and should be part of the equation.

2. Identify need and gifts/strength

Working with an individual's strengths will facilitate meeting his or her needs – ex. child who is gifted in art will benefit from catechesis through artwork.

3. Be inspired through Scriptural reflection

Scripture is filled with accounts of exchanges between Christ and others in various need, (Philip and the Ethiopian who doesn't understand, the man who cannot walk and is lowered through the roof by his friends etc).

4. Place yourself in the shoes of your participants

"What might capture my attention? When have I felt bored?" "When have I felt confused by something?" "Who helped me understand, and how?"

5. Call the individual by his or her name

The Gospel message is given to each individual by name. This emphasizes the value of the person addressed and the personal character of the message, puts the message in the 'here and now' and draws our attention back if we are 'wandering'. To be called by one's name is very powerful.

6. Work with the individual's parents

Express your sincere desire for the individual to feel welcome and do well in your setting. Ask what helps at school and at home. No one knows the individual better than the parents.

7. Do research

Search the web or catechetical resources for adaptations that fit the need you are seeing. Sometimes basic accommodations can be made with a few simple steps.

8. Plan the Lessons (Religious Education or Sacramental Preparation)

If you are following a curriculum established by an organized group (e.g. *The Kennedy Curriculum*) the task is easier. Whether following a curriculum or not, keep in mind:

1. Your level of comfort with the material
2. The abilities of your students
3. Available resources

4. The identification of Christo-centric themes such as: Life of Jesus, Life of Mary, Miracles, Parables. Friends of Jesus, Gifts of the Holy Spirit, Fruits of the Holy Spirit, The Beatitudes
5. Plan for both the individual students as well as the group

9. Consider where the best venue for catechesis will be and the timing of the sessions.

Those who live in institutions or require a caregiver, like everyone else, have times of the day when they feel more alert. They may feel more comfortable in some environments than others and they may wish for a period of time before or after a catechetical session when they can be quiet, or can have a cup of tea. Some children as well as adults use a wheelchair, which may necessitate a particular form of transport to go outside the usual residence. Most importantly adults particularly may want the right to receive catechesis without the presence of staff or family caregiver. The inner process can be a very private thing. However, there can be a tendency in most of us to work with the routine of the institution, the rota of the staff, the requirements of the caregiver or own convenience.

10. Consider the choice of language and presentation.

The Church is very aware of the value of ritual, of drama even (think of the mediaeval mystery plays), and general presentation. The vestments worn in the Mass at different seasons of the year, the music and the incense all attract the senses. Holding aloft the Gospel Book and showing it to all the people is a very explicit gesture, holding the attention and indicating the tremendous importance of the Word of God. When a liturgy is done well it has a richness of presentation that reinforces and strengthens the catechesis contained. If for some other reason, individuals have difficulty in hearing or understanding the words, catechists need to become aware of that and help them to find a way of compensating. Since liturgy is primarily symbolic communication, it is very possible that someone unable to put the experience of faith celebrated in a Sacrament into words and logical categories might nonetheless be very well prepared for its reception.

11. Consider how to integrate the individual into catechetical activities.

Evangelization and catechesis for individuals with disabilities must be geared in content and method to their particular situation. Great care should be taken to avoid further isolation of people through these programs, which, as far as possible, should be integrated with the normal catechetical activities of the parish.

Option One - Preparation within a peer group in the parish. Decide what is in the best interests of the candidate but also consider whether peers will benefit. If two catechists are working with thirty children, one of whom has a very limited attention span and constantly requires attention another approach has to be devised. However, if there is sufficient support for the child with special needs, the other children are not distracted and she/he will clearly benefit from the parish program, proceed. Peers can benefit from mixing with children with extra needs from an early age. Adults can gain a greater awareness and respect, seeing another human being rather than a problem. Take into account age when considering this option. It

would not be appropriate for instance for a forty year old (with a young mental age) to be prepared for First Communion with a group of eight year old children in the parish.

Option Two - Allow candidates to be included among their peers, while providing extra support. A catechist who has taken the time to know the candidate can be a support within the parish preparation and assess whether extra input is required at the same time. If it is, sometimes it is useful to adapt the parish program so as to concentrate on a salient point in the theme of a session. For other candidates extra sessions using Symbolic Catechesis are more productive. Whichever way forward is chosen the candidate has the right to be prepared by someone who is aware of suitable methods and approaches in preparing children and adults with learning difficulties or other special needs. Flexibility and respect for the uniqueness of the individual is probably the key.

Recognition of a candidate's age and experience does not mean that we dismiss the learning difficulty. Stages of development are important too and it is usually the case that language, example/ illustration and activity should recognize the power of the concrete. If the individual can relate to a 'lived' experience we are half way there. Concepts are too nebulous. Questions can prove threatening, either because they can smack of the interrogator or the teacher, or because they are not understood. Avoid the question 'why?' particularly. 'Why' requires quite a complex thought process followed by an answer that can formulate that thought process into words.

Option Three – Symbolic - Much thought, study and practical application has led to its eventual development as a valid and respected method of catechesis. Influences have come from education, especially Montessori, and developmental psychology as well as religion and the experience of pastors and catechists in Europe and the U.S.A., in particular SPRED (Special Religious Development).

Symbol, ritual, sensory input and narrative mime and drama are effective means of preparation for people with learning difficulties. As a picture does not need words, so symbolic catechesis actually benefits from an economy of words, which have been carefully chosen so as to be within the comprehension of most people without being patronizing. Crucially, words should be used to convey only one point at a time. Many of us are able to combine the cognitive and the intuitive in our nature to a greater or lesser extent but some have a considerable bias towards the cognitive rather than the other as we grow older. While intuition can be strong in childhood we tend to suppress our intuitive side in favor of logic and reason as we move into the ability to recognize and develop conceptual thought. Developmentally, a preponderance of adults with learning difficulties continue to use their intuitive ability. Their 'understanding' therefore is not easily expressed in the accepted way simply because it is not a cognitive understanding.

What we, as catechists, are looking for is the response of the heart, which is not often expressed verbally but is much more subtle. That is why it is so important that candidate and catechist get to know each other well. It is only when there is an easy and trusting

relationship that the intuitive response can be called forth and recognized. It is this personal intimacy that is the key to the preparation of profoundly disabled people, who may have no verbal language or other recognized communication skill.

There are other signals, other skills that we gradually perceive or are helped to see by others who know the individual well. Body language is an obvious one, though it can be very deceptive if, for instance, the candidate has cerebral palsy. Sometimes it is a smile, an eager expression on the face, eyes lighting up, that says 'yes, this is it'. This unique person, made in the image of God, wants a faith relationship and maybe here, at this moment, is aware of the presence of God.

ATTITUDES

Teacher Attitudes and Expectations

Your attitudes toward students with disabilities set the tone of the classroom and shape the interactions among students. One important aspect of attitude is expectation. Research findings have repeatedly emphasized the influence of teacher expectation on student performance. If teachers expect students to have behavior problems, students may very well fulfill this expectation. Labels may affect expectations. Frequently, labels introduce a set of preconceived characteristics (stereotypes) causing a teacher who is assigned a class including a student with a disability to envision a specific behavior pattern before even meeting the student. You should be aware of your own attitudes and expectations and should ascribe to labels no greater import than the information they provide about how the student learns and what the student needs.

Student Attitudes

Placing students with disabilities into the "mainstream," or regular class, does not guarantee that they will be liked, accepted, or chosen as friends by their peers. Without careful attention by sensitive catechists, such a placement could even be a harmful experience. You will find that working closely in advance with the parents, the student, and the resource or special class teacher, may be instrumental in preparing the student with disabilities for regular classroom experiences. To prepare the class for the entry of a student with disabilities, focus on student similarities rather than differences. Deal forthrightly and comfortably with students' questions, letting them know it is all right to discuss disabilities. Two other approaches can promote positive relationships among students: encourage cooperative learning tasks and establish ways for students to help each other.

COOPERATIVE LEARNING

In small groups, students work together on tasks that encompass all the students' abilities. Cooperative learning is the opposite of competition, which may not be fair to all students with disabilities. To teach cooperation, the catechist must be ready to help by:

1. Giving the student with the disability a structured role in the group.

2. Showing that each member of the group has different skills.
3. Emphasizing that the best work will need everyone's contribution.
4. Teaching typical students and students with disabilities how to cooperate.
5. Adapting the tasks so that the student with a disability can succeed. This may mean giving group members different tasks, and varying the amount of work each member receives, or using improvement rather than performance as a measure of success.

PEER TUTORING

Another way to promote acceptance among students is to encourage them to help each other. They do it all the time, informally. Given a little training, students can learn how to teach and encourage their peers, and in the process they can improve their understanding of the subject and of themselves. Students with disabilities do not always need to be on the receiving end. Their strengths can be used to help their classmates, and they can develop confidence in so doing. Students have great gifts of faith to share with their classmates. Peer teaching will not work without some guidance from catechists. In regular sessions with the tutors, catechists can demonstrate methods of instruction and answer specific questions, especially about the tutor's feelings. One unexpected benefit of the peer teaching approach is the effect it may have on the rest of the students. Students may begin to look out for their new friend in other situations outside the classroom. As students see their classmates assuming the tutor role, they may become interested as well, and associating with students who have disabilities may take on greater status. Above all, some real contact is being made between students who might otherwise never have gotten to know each other.

ORGANIZING THE ENVIRONMENT

Catechists organize the learning environment all the time, consciously or unconsciously. There are some very simple steps a catechist can take to maintain order. For example, desks can be grouped in ways that encourage or discourage interaction among students, and learning centers can be set up to structure independent work or provide for small group instruction. Areas for rewards and punishment (time-out space) can also be designated.

Students with special needs may need special equipment. For example, young children with physical problems may need to use a prone board while doing fine motor tasks, because positioning in a certain way gives them the greatest control over their movements. Therapists will advise you about these kinds of special needs, but incorporating the special equipment into the classroom routine will be of help. Seating considerations are another important aspect of physically structuring the class. Children with hearing impairments that rely on lip-reading skills will naturally need seating that gives them a clear view of the catechist or other speaker with adequate lighting on the speaker's face. Children who are easily distracted may be best placed near quiet self-directed classmates, rather than beside other children who are easily distracted. Students with visual impairments should be situated so that it is easy for them to find their seats and equipment (Braille writers, low vision aids, or other aids).

SUMMARY

Adequate support, the catechist's own attitudes, and a willingness to learn about specific disabilities are all facets of successful inclusion. In addition to structuring the physical environment, success will also be fostered by a well defined plan of classroom management. Such a plan should include carefully reasoned steps and consequences for discipline, reinforcement for positive behavior, and strategies for helping a student cope with failures. Verbalizing the mental process while using specific skills and strategies and helping students to develop learning strategies that include self-encouragement and self monitoring can also assist students with special needs in the learning process. Being attentive to the needs of individual students does require extra planning, patience, and great energy. As a catechist comes to better know the needs of each student, he or she will become not only a better catechist of students with disabilities but a better catechist for all students.

SACRAMENTAL GUIDELINES FOR PERSONS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

SACRAMENT PREPARATION

Catholics with disabilities have a right to participate in the Sacraments as full members of a parish community. Before and especially after Baptism, parishes should have a definite plan for providing a welcoming environment for them and their families.

1. Parishes should provide opportunities for persons who have not been fully initiated to participate in Sacrament preparation according to the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults/Children, with adaptations made for the needs and abilities of the individuals involved.
2. Persons with disabilities should receive the Sacraments in their own parish communities and with their appropriate peers, even if they are receiving preparation at another cooperating parish.
3. Parents or guardians of disabled infants should participate fully in the parish baptismal preparation and formation, with special attention given to the pastoral needs of the entire family.
4. If the person to be baptized is of catechetical age, the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults may be adapted according to need.
5. "Readiness" of such persons, especially for First Eucharist, may differ from other persons. Pastors are not to refuse the Sacraments to persons with special needs if they are suitably disposed (Canon 776). In the case of a person who cannot communicate well, parents or another advocate can ask on behalf of the individual. Readiness is discerned when the person has been prepared up to his or her full potential, although the ability to indicate understanding may vary, depending on the disability.

Excerpts from: *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments For Persons With Special Needs (USCCB, 1978)*

BAPTISM

"Because it is the Sacrament of universal salvation, baptism is to be made available to all who freely ask for it, are properly disposed, and are not prohibited by law from receiving it.

Baptism may be deferred only when there is no reason for hoping that the person will be brought up in the Catholic religion. Disability, of itself, is never a reason for deferring Baptism." (par. 9)

NOTE: Persons with disabilities may also serve as sponsors for Sacraments of Initiation.

EUCCHARIST

The criteria for reception of the Eucharist is the same for persons with developmental and mental disabilities as for others, namely that the person be able to distinguish the Body of Christ from ordinary food, even if this recognition is evidenced through manner, gesture, or reverential silence rather than verbally. Pastors and catechetical leaders are encouraged to consult with parents, guardians, diocesan personnel involved with disability issues, and other experts when making these judgments.

A student with a profound disability does not necessarily need to be on the same time frame to receive the Eucharist as other students in the program. With input from the catechist working with the student, the DRE, in consultation with the parents and any other advocates for the child will make the judgment about when the student is ready. The DRE should then consult with the pastor, and the decision is to be a result of this consultation. If it is determined that a person who is disabled is not ready to receive the Sacrament, great care should be taken in explaining the reasons for such a decision. However, in cases of doubt, the rights of the baptized to receive the Sacraments are to be honored.

"The Eucharist is the most august Sacrament... by which the Church constantly lives and grows ... The celebration of the Eucharist is the center of the entire Christian life." (Canon 897, par. 19)

"Parents, those who take the place of parents, and pastors are to see to it that children who have reached the use of reason are correctly prepared and are nourished by the Eucharist as early as possible. Pastors are to be vigilant lest any children come to the Holy Banquet who have not reached the use of reason or whom they judge are not sufficiently disposed. It is important to note, however, that the criterion for reception of Holy Communion is the same for persons with developmental and mental disabilities as

for all persons, namely that the person be able to distinguish the Body of Christ from ordinary food, even if this recognition is evidenced through manner, gesture, or reverential silence rather than verbally.... existence of a disability is not considered in and of itself as disqualifying a person from receiving the Eucharist." (par. 20)

CONFIRMATION

Persons who because of developmental or mental disabilities may never attain the use of reason, are to be encouraged either directly, or if necessary, through their parents or guardians, to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation with their chronological peers.

"Parents, those who care for persons with disabilities, and shepherds of souls especially pastors- are to see to it that the faithful who have been baptized are properly instructed to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation and to approach it at the appropriate time."
(par. 15)

"All baptized, unconfirmed Catholics who possess the use of reason may receive the Sacrament of Confirmation if they are suitably instructed, properly disposed, and are able to renew their Baptismal promises. Persons who because of developmental or mental disabilities may never attain the use of reason are to be encouraged either directly or if necessary, through the parents or guardians, to receive the Sacrament of confirmation at the appropriate time." (par. 16)

RECONCILIATION

"If a person with mental or developmental disabilities is capable of having a sense of contrition for having committed a sin, even though he or she may not be able to describe the sin precisely in words, that person may receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Those with profound mental disabilities, who cannot experience even minimal contrition, may be invited to participate in penitential services with the rest of the community to the extent of their ability. In such cases, the priest may choose either to give Sacramental absolution or a blessing.

Only those who have the use of reason are capable of committing serious sin. Nevertheless, even young children and persons with mental disabilities often are conscious of committing acts that are sinful to some degree and may experience a sense of guilt and sorrow. As long as the individual is capable of having a sense of contrition for having committed sin, even if he or she cannot describe the sin precisely in words, the person may receive Sacramental absolution." (par. 23)

It is also important to know that it is also possible for those with profound mental disabilities to participate in penitential services with the rest of the community, to the extent that they are able. (par. 23)

For people who have poor verbal communication skills, expression of repentance that is expressed through gestures is also appropriate. (par. 25)

ANOINTING THE SICK

"Since disability does not necessarily indicate an illness, Catholics with disabilities should receive the Sacrament of anointing on the same basis and under the same circumstances as any other member of the Christian faithful." (par. 28)

"The anointing of the sick may be conferred if the recipient has sufficient use of reason to be strengthened by the Sacrament. If there is any doubt as to whether the sick person has attained the use of reason, the Sacrament is to be conferred." (par.29)

HOLY ORDERS

"The existence of a physical disability is not considered in and of itself as disqualifying a person from holy orders. However, candidates for ordination must possess the necessary spiritual, physical, intellectual, emotional, and psychological qualities and abilities to fulfill the ministerial functions of the orders they receive." (par. 31)

MARRIAGE

"All persons not prohibited by law can contract marriage." (par. 35)

"For matrimonial consent to be valid, it is necessary that the contracting parties possess a sufficient use of reason; that they be free of any grave lack of discretion affecting their judgment about the rights and duties to which they are committing themselves; and that they be capable of assuming the essential obligations of the married state ... Pastors and other clergy are to decide cases on an individual basis and in the light of pastoral judgment based upon consultation with diocesan personnel involved with disability issues, and canonical, medical, and other experts." (par. 37)

Excerpt from: *The Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1994*

"Those whose lives are diminished or weakened deserve special respect. Sick or handicapped persons should be helped to lead lives as normal as possible." (#2276)

Excerpt from: *Sharing the Light of Faith, National Catechetical Directory for Catholics of the United States (USCCB, 1977)*

General Diversity of Catechetical Activity (p. 39)

Catechesis is for all ages, all groups, e.g. ethnic groups, and that includes handicaps within all these groups. Catechesis will vary according to language, abilities, vocation, and geographical location of those to be catechized.

There are four components that **all** have in common:

1. Sharing Faith Life
2. Experiencing Liturgical Worship
3. Taking Part in Christian Service
4. Participating in Religious Instruction (These should take into account the participants' experiences and circumstances)

Persons With Handicapping Conditions (p. 195)

People who are developmentally challenged; people with learning disabilities; people with physical, behavioral or emotional disabilities; people with hearing or visual impairments

Catechetical programs should not isolate people with disabilities excessively or unnecessarily. Specialized training is required with some groups. **It is the responsibility of the parish to provide these learning opportunities.**

Special Catechesis (p. 231)

Catechetical programs for people with special needs are to be offered on a parish, regional and/or diocesan level. In each condition, a different approach is needed, and those involved in teaching these programs require special training that will prepare them for their role.

Excerpt from: *The General Directory for Catechesis (Congregation for the Clergy, 1997)*

Catechesis for the disabled and handicapped (#189)

Every Christian community considers those who suffer handicaps, physical or mental, as well as other forms of disability - especially children - as persons particularly beloved of the Lord. A growth in social and ecclesial consciousness, together with an undeniable progress in specialized pedagogy, makes it possible for the family and other formative centers to provide adequate catechesis for these people, who, as baptized, have this right and, if non-baptized, because they are called to salvation. The love of the Father for the weakest of his children and the continuous presence of Jesus and His Spirit give assurance that every person, however limited, is capable of growth in holiness.

Education in faith, which involves family above all else, calls for personalized and adequate programs. It should take into account the findings of pedagogical research. It is most effectively carried out in the context of the integral education of the person. On

the other hand, the risk must be avoided of separating the specialized catechesis from the general pastoral care of the community. It is therefore necessary that the community be made aware of such catechesis and be involved with it. The particular demands of this catechesis require a special competence from catechists and render their service more deserving.

Ten Things

Every Child with Autism Wishes You Knew

by Ellen Notbohm

from the book *Ten Things Every Child with Autism Wishes You Knew* (2005, Future Horizons, Inc.)

Some days it seems the only predictable thing about it is the unpredictability. The only consistent attribute—the inconsistency. There is little argument on any level but that autism is baffling, even to those who spend their lives around it. The child who lives with autism may look “normal” but his behavior can be perplexing and downright difficult.

Autism was once thought an “incurable disorder,” but that notion is crumbling in the face of knowledge and understanding that is increasing even as you read this. Every day, individuals with autism are showing us that they can overcome, compensate for and otherwise manage many of autism’s most challenging characteristics. Equipping those around our children with simple understanding of autism’s most basic elements has a tremendous impact on their ability to journey towards productive, independent adulthood.

Autism is an extremely complex disorder but for purposes of this one article, we can distill its myriad characteristics into four fundamental areas: sensory processing challenges, speech/language delays and impairments, the elusive social interaction skills and whole child/self-esteem issues. And though these four elements may be common to many children, keep front-of-mind the fact that autism is a spectrum disorder: no two (or ten or twenty) children with autism will be completely alike. Every child will be at a different point on the spectrum. And, just as importantly – every parent, teacher and caregiver will be at a different point on the spectrum. Child or adult, each will have a unique set of needs.

Here are ten things every child with autism wishes you knew:

1. **I am a child first.** My autism is only one aspect of my total character. It does not define me as a person. Are you a person with thoughts, feelings and many talents, or are you just fat (overweight), myopic (wear glasses) or klutzy (uncoordinated, not good at sports)? Those may be things that I see first when I meet you, but they are not necessarily what you are all about.

As an adult, you have some control over how you define yourself. If you want to single out a single characteristic, you can make that known. As a child, I am still unfolding. Neither you nor I yet know what I may be capable of. Defining me by one characteristic runs the danger of setting up an expectation that may be too low. And if I get a sense that you don’t think I “can do it,” my natural response will be: Why try?

2. **My sensory perceptions are disordered.** Sensory integration may be the most difficult aspect of autism to understand, but it is arguably the most critical. This means that the ordinary sights, sounds, smells, tastes and touches of everyday that you may not even notice can be downright painful for me. The very environment in which I have to live often seems hostile. I may appear withdrawn or belligerent to you but I am really just trying to defend myself. Here is why a “simple” trip to the grocery store may be hell for me:

My hearing may be hyper-acute. Dozens of people are talking at once. The loudspeaker booms today’s special. Musak whines from the sound system. Cash registers beep and cough, a coffee grinder is chugging. The meat cutter screeches, babies wail, carts creak, the fluorescent lighting hums. My brain can’t filter all the input and I’m in overload!

My sense of smell may be highly sensitive. The fish at the meat counter isn't quite fresh, the guy standing next to us hasn't showered today, the deli is handing out sausage samples, the baby in line ahead of us has a poopy diaper, they're mopping up pickles on aisle 3 with ammonia. . . I can't sort it all out. I am dangerously nauseated.

Because I am visually oriented (see more on this below), this may be my first sense to become over stimulated. The fluorescent light is not only too bright, it buzzes and hums. The room seems to pulsate and it hurts my eyes. The pulsating light bounces off everything and distorts what I am seeing -- the space seems to be constantly changing. There's glare from windows, too many items for me to be able to focus (I may compensate with "tunnel vision"), moving fans on the ceiling, so many bodies in constant motion. All this affects my vestibular and proprioceptive senses, and now I can't even tell where my body is in space.

3. Remember to distinguish between *won't* (I choose not to) and *can't* (I am not able to).

Receptive and expressive language and vocabulary can be major challenges for me. It isn't that I don't listen to instructions. It's that I can't understand you. When you call to me from across the room, this is what I hear: "*~^%\$#@, Billy. #\$\$%^*~^%\$#@." Instead, come speak directly to me in plain words: "Please put your book in your desk, Billy. It's time to go to lunch." This tells me what you want me to do and what is going to happen next. Now it is much easier for me to comply.

4. I am a concrete thinker. This means I interpret language very literally. It's very confusing for me when you say, "Hold your horses, cowboy!" when what you really mean is "Please stop running." Don't tell me something is a "piece of cake" when there is no dessert in sight and what you really mean is "this will be easy for you to do." When you say "Jamie really burned up the track," I see a kid playing with matches. Just tell me "Jamie ran very fast."

Idioms, puns, nuances, double entendres, inference, metaphors, allusions and sarcasm are lost on me.

5. Be patient with my limited vocabulary. It's hard for me to tell you what I need when I don't know the words to describe my feelings. I may be hungry, frustrated, frightened or confused but right now those words are beyond my ability to express. Be alert for body language, withdrawal, agitation or other signs that something is wrong.

Or, there's a flip side to this: I may sound like a "little professor" or movie star, rattling off words or whole scripts well beyond my developmental age. These are messages I have memorized from the world around me to compensate for my language deficits because I know I am expected to respond when spoken to. They may come from books, TV, the speech of other people. It is called "echolalia." I don't necessarily understand the context or the terminology I'm using. I just know that it gets me off the hook for coming up with a reply.

6. Because language is so difficult for me, I am visually oriented. Show me how to do something rather than just telling me. And be prepared to show me many times. Lots of consistent repetition helps me learn.

A visual schedule is extremely helpful as I move through my day. Like your day-timer, it relieves me of the stress of having to remember what comes next, makes for smooth transition between activities, helps me manage my time and meet your expectations.

I won't lose the need for a visual schedule as I get older, but my "level of representation" may change. Before I can read, I need a visual schedule with photographs or simple drawings. As I get older, a combination of words and pictures may work, and later still, just words.

7. Focus and build on what I can do rather than what I can't do. Like any other human, I can't learn in an environment where I'm constantly made to feel that I'm not good enough and that I need "fixing." Trying anything new when I am almost sure to be met with criticism, however "constructive," becomes something to be avoided. Look for my strengths and you will find them. There is more than one "right" way to do most things.

8. Help me with social interactions. It may look like I don't want to play with the other kids on the playground, but sometimes it's just that I simply do not know how to start a conversation or enter a play situation. If you can encourage other children to invite me to join them at kickball or shooting baskets, it may be that I'm delighted to be included.

I do best in structured play activities that have a clear beginning and end. I don't know how to "read" facial expressions, body language or the emotions of others, so I appreciate ongoing coaching in proper social responses. For example, if I laugh when Emily falls off the slide, it's not that I think it's funny. It's that I don't know the proper response. Teach me to say "Are you OK?"

9. Try to identify what triggers my meltdowns. Meltdowns, blow-ups, tantrums or whatever you want to call them are even more horrid for me than they are for you. They occur because one or more of my senses has gone into overload. If you can figure out why my meltdowns occur, they can be prevented. Keep a log noting times, settings, people, activities. A pattern may emerge.

Try to remember that all behavior is a form of communication. It tells you, when my words cannot, how I perceive something that is happening in my environment.

Parents, keep in mind as well: persistent behavior may have an underlying medical cause. Food allergies and sensitivities, sleep disorders and gastrointestinal problems can all have profound effects on behavior.

10. Love me unconditionally. Banish thoughts like, "If he would just. . . and "Why can't she. . ." You did not fulfill every last expectation your parents had for you and you wouldn't like being constantly reminded of it. I did not choose to have autism. But remember that it is happening to me, not you. Without your support, my chances of successful, self-reliant adulthood are slim. With your support and guidance, the possibilities are broader than you might think. I promise you – I am worth it.

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Ten Things

Your Student with Autism Wishes You Knew

These ideas make sense for other kids too

by Ellen Notbohm

Author's note: When my article Ten Things Every Child with Autism Wishes You Knew was first published in 2004, I could scarcely have imagined the response. Reader after reader wrote to tell me that the piece should be required reading for all social service workers, teachers and relatives of children with autism. "Just what my daughter would say if she could," said one mother. "How I wish I had read this five years ago. It took my husband and I such a long time to 'learn' these things," said another. As the responses mounted, I decided that the resonance was coming from the fact that the piece spoke with a child's voice, a voice not heard often enough. There is great need – and ever-increasing willingness – for the general population to understand the world as the child with autism experiences it. Ten Things Every Child with Autism Wishes You Knew became a book in 2005, and the voice of our child returned in this article to tell us what children with autism wish their teachers knew. It too became quite popular and my book by the same title was published in 2006.

Here are ten things your student with autism wishes you knew:

1. Behavior is communication. All behavior occurs for a reason. It tells you, even when my words can't, how I perceive what is happening around me.

Negative behavior interferes with my learning process. But merely interrupting these behaviors is not enough; teach me to exchange these behaviors with proper alternatives so that real learning can flow.

Start by believing this: I truly do want to learn to interact appropriately. No child wants the spirit-crushing feedback we get from "bad" behavior. Negative behavior usually means I am overwhelmed by disordered sensory systems, cannot communicate my wants or needs or don't understand what is expected of me. Look beyond the behavior to find the source of my resistance. Keep notes as to what happened immediately before the behavior: people involved, time of day, activities, settings. Over time, a pattern may emerge.

2. Never assume anything. Without factual backup, an assumption is only a guess. I may not know or understand the rules. I may have heard the instructions but not understood them. Maybe I knew it yesterday but can't retrieve it today. Ask yourself:

- Are you sure I really know how to do what is being asked of me? If I suddenly need to run to the bathroom every time I'm asked to do a math sheet, maybe I don't know how or fear my effort will not be good enough. Stick with me

through enough repetitions of the task to where I feel competent. I may need more practice to master tasks than other kids.

- Are you sure I actually know the rules? Do I understand the reason for the rule (safety, economy, health)? Am I breaking the rule because there is an underlying cause? Maybe I pinched a snack out of my lunch bag early because I was worried about finishing my science project, didn't eat breakfast and am now famished.

3. **Look for sensory issues first.** A lot of my resistant behaviors come from sensory discomfort. One example is fluorescent lighting, which has been shown over and over again to be a major problem for children like me. The hum it produces is very disturbing to my hypersensitive hearing, and the pulsing nature of the light can distort my visual perception, making objects in the room appear to be in constant movement. An incandescent lamp on my desk will reduce the flickering, as will the new, natural light tubes. Or maybe I need to sit closer to you; I don't understand what you are saying because there are too many noises "in between" – that lawnmower outside the window, Jasmine whispering to Tanya, chairs scraping, pencil sharpener grinding.

Ask the school occupational therapist for sensory-friendly ideas for the classroom. It's actually good for all kids, not just me.

4. **Provide me a break to allow for self-regulation *before* I need it.** A quiet, carpeted corner of the room with some pillows, books and headphones allows me a place to go to re-group when I feel overwhelmed, but isn't so far physically removed that I won't be able to rejoin the activity flow of the classroom smoothly.
5. **Tell me what you want me to do in the positive rather than the imperative.** "You left a mess by the sink!" is merely a statement of fact to me. I'm not able to infer that what you really mean is "Please rinse out your paint cup and put the paper towels in the trash." Don't make me guess or have to figure out what I should do.
6. **Keep your expectations reasonable.** That all-school assembly with hundreds of kids packed into bleachers and some guy droning on about the candy sale is uncomfortable and meaningless to me. Maybe I'd be better off helping the school secretary put together the newsletter.
7. **Help me transition between activities.** It takes me a little longer to motor plan moving from one activity to the next. Give me a five-minute warning and a two-minute warning before an activity changes – and build a few extra minutes in on your end to compensate. A simple clock face or timer on my desk gives me a visual cue as to the time of the next transition and helps me handle it more independently.
8. **Don't make a bad situation worse.** I know that even though you are a mature adult, you can sometimes make bad decisions in the heat of the moment. I truly don't mean to melt down, show anger or otherwise disrupt your classroom. You can help me get

over it more quickly by not responding with inflammatory behavior of your own. Beware of these responses that prolong rather than resolve a crisis:

- Raising pitch or volume of your voice. I hear the yelling and shrieking, but not the words.
- Mocking or mimicking me. Sarcasm, insults or name-calling will not embarrass me out of the behavior.
- Making unsubstantiated accusations
- Invoking a double standard
- Comparing me to a sibling or other student
- Bringing up previous or unrelated events
- Lumping me into a general category (“kids like you are all the same”)

9. **Criticize gently.** Be honest – how good are you at accepting “constructive” criticism? The maturity and self-confidence to be able to do that may be far beyond my abilities right now.

- Please! Never, *ever* try to impose discipline or correction when I am angry, distraught, over stimulated, shut down, anxious or otherwise emotionally unable to interact with you.
- Again, remember that I will react as much, if not more, to the qualities of your voice than to the actual words. I will hear the shouting and the annoyance, but I will not understand the words and therefore will not be able to figure out what I did wrong. Speak in low tones and lower your body as well, so that you are communicating on my level rather than towering over me.
- Help me understand the inappropriate behavior in a supportive, problem-solving way rather than punishing or scolding me. Help me pin down the feelings that triggered the behavior. I may say I was angry but maybe I was afraid, frustrated, sad or jealous. Probe beyond my first response.
- Practice or role-play – *show* me – a better way to handle the situation next time. A storyboard, photo essay or social story helps. Expect to role-play lots over time. There are no one-time fixes. And when I do get it right “next time,” tell me right away.
- It helps me if you yourself are modeling proper behavior for responding to criticism.

10. **Offer real choices – and only real choices.** Don’t offer me a choice or ask a “Do you want...?” question unless are willing to accept no for an answer. “No” may be my honest answer to “Do you want to read out loud now?” or “Would you like to share paints with William?” It’s hard for me to trust you when choices are not really choices at all.

**RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND SACRAMENTAL GUIDELINES
FOR PERSONS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS**

You take for granted the amazing number of choices you have on a daily basis. You constantly choose one option over others knowing that both *having* choices and being *able* to choose provides you control over your life and future. For me, choices are much more limited, which is why it can be harder to feel confident about myself. Providing me with frequent choices helps me become more actively engaged in everyday life.

- Whenever possible, offer a choice within a 'have-to'. Rather than saying: "Write your name and the date on the top of the page," say: "Would you like to write your name first, or would you like to write the date first?" or "Which would you like to write first, letters or numbers?" Follow by showing me: "See how Jason is writing his name on his paper?"
- Giving me choices helps me learn appropriate behavior, but I also need to understand that there will be times when you can't. When this happens, I won't get as frustrated if I understand why:
 - "I can't give you a choice in this situation because it is dangerous. You might get hurt."
 - "I can't give you that choice because it would be bad for Danny" (have negative effect on another child).
 - "I give you lots of choices but this time it needs to be an adult choice."

The last word: *believe*. That car guy Henry Ford said, "Whether you think you can or whether you think you can't, you are usually right." Believe that you can make a difference for me. It requires accommodation and adaptation, but autism is an open-ended learning difference. There are no inherent upper limits on achievement. I can sense far more than I can communicate, and the number one thing I can sense is whether you think I "can do it." Encourage me to be everything I can be, so that I can continue to grow and succeed long after I've left your classroom.

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2005, 2010 Ellen Notbohm



Ellen Notbohm is author of Ten Things Every Child with Autism Wishes You Knew, Ten Things Your Student with Autism Wishes You Knew, **and** The Autism Trail Guide: Postcards from the Road Less Traveled, **all ForeWord Book of the Year finalists. She is also co-author of the award-winning** 1001 Great Ideas for Teaching and Raising Children with Autism or Asperger's, a **Silver Medal winner in the 2010 Independent Publishers Book Awards. Ellen is a contributor to numerous publications and websites around the world. To contact her or explore her work, please visit www.ellennotbohm.com . Join Ellen's community of Facebook fans at Ellen Notbohm, Author. Contact the author for permission to reproduce in any way, including re-posting on the Internet.**

Appendix



**Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments
for Persons with Disabilities**

In November 1978, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops approved for publication a pastoral statement on persons with disabilities. Therein the bishops called for broader integration of persons with disabilities into the full life of the Church, through increased evangelization and catechesis and by participation in the Church's Sacramental life. In 1988, the bishops reaffirmed this call to participate fully and actively in the life of the Church in a resolution marking the tenth anniversary of the 1978 pastoral statement. The present document is a further contribution to the efforts of the Church to advocate for ministry to and with persons with disabilities. It was prepared by the Committee on Pastoral Practices in response to requests for further clarification and guidance about the means for providing fuller access to the Sacraments by persons with disabilities. The *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities* was approved by the general membership of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops on June 16, 1995. It is authorized for publication by the undersigned.

Reverend Monsignor Dennis M. Schnurr
General Secretary
NCCB/USCC

These guidelines are presented to all who are involved in pastoral ministry with persons with disabilities. They reaffirm the determination expressed by the bishops of the United States on the tenth anniversary of the pastoral statement on persons with disabilities "to promote accessibility of mind and heart, so that all persons with disabilities may be welcomed at worship and at every level of service as full members of the Body of Christ."

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Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments for Persons with Disabilities

It is essential that all forms of the liturgy be completely accessible to persons with disabilities, since these forms are the essence of the spiritual tie that binds the Christian community together. To exclude members of the parish from these celebrations of the life of the Church, even by passive omission, is to deny the reality of that community. Accessibility involves far more than physical alterations to parish buildings. Realistic provision must be made for persons with disabilities to participate fully in the Eucharist and other liturgical celebrations such as the Sacraments of reconciliation, confirmation, and anointing of the sick (*Pastoral Statement of U.S. Catholic Bishops on Persons with Disabilities, November 1978; revised 1989*).

Preface

Catholics with disabilities, as well as those who minister to or with them, often point out that pastoral practice with regard to the celebration of the Sacraments varies greatly from diocese to diocese, even from parish to parish. Inconsistencies arise in such areas as the provision of sign language interpreters for persons who are deaf, in the accessibility of church facilities for persons with mobility problems, and in the availability of catechetical programs for persons with developmental and mental disabilities. Pastoral inconsistencies may occur in other areas as well.

The inconsistencies in pastoral practice often arise from distinct yet overlapping causes. Some result from a misunderstanding about the nature of disabilities. Others arise from an uncertainty about the appropriate application of Church law towards persons with disabilities. Others are born out of fear or misunderstanding. Still others are the result of a studied and honest acceptance of the realistic limitations of a parish's or diocese's available resources.

These guidelines were developed to address many of the concerns raised by priests, pastoral ministers, other concerned Catholics, persons with disabilities, their advocates and their families for greater consistency in pastoral practice in the celebration of the Sacraments throughout the country. With this objective in view, the guidelines draw upon the Church's ritual books, its canonical tradition, and its experience in ministering to or with persons with disabilities in order to dispel any misunderstandings that may impede sound pastoral practice in the celebration of the Sacraments. It is our hope that the guidelines will complement diocesan policies already in existence.

The bishops of the United States offer the "*Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities*" in order to give a more concrete expression to our longstanding concern for "realistic provision" for the means of access to full Sacramental participation for Catholic persons with disabilities.

While they do not address every conceivable situation that may arise in pastoral practice, the guidelines present a set of general principles to provide access to the Sacraments for persons with disabilities. Diocesan staff, pastoral leaders, catechists, parishioners, health care workers, and all those who minister to or with Catholics with disabilities are invited and encouraged to reflect upon and accept these guidelines in their continuing effort to bring Christ's healing message and call to justice to the world.

I. General Principles

1. By reason of their baptism, all Catholics are equal in dignity in the sight of God, and have the same divine calling.
2. Catholics with disabilities have a right to participate in the Sacraments as full functioning members of the local ecclesial community (Cf. canon 213). Ministers are not to refuse the Sacraments to those who ask for them at appropriate times, who are properly disposed, and who are not prohibited by law from receiving them (Cf. canon 843, sect. 1).
3. Parish Sacramental celebrations should be accessible to persons with disabilities and open to their full, active and conscious participation, according to their capacity. Pastoral ministers should not presume to know the needs of persons with disabilities, but rather they should consult with them or their advocates before making determinations about the accessibility of a parish's facilities and the availability of its programs, policies, and ministries. These adaptations are an ordinary part of the liturgical life of the parish. While full accessibility may not always be possible for every parish, it is desirable that at least one fully accessible community be available in a given area. Parishes may, in fact, decide to collaborate in the provision of services to persons with disabilities.
4. Since the parish is the center of the Christian experience for most Catholics, pastoral ministers should make every effort to determine the presence of all Catholics with disabilities who reside within a parish's boundaries. Special effort should be made to welcome those parishioners with disabilities who live in institutions or group homes and are unable to frequent their parish churches or participate in parish activities. However, pastoral ministers should remember that many persons with disabilities still reside with their families. Pastoral visitation, the parish census, and the diverse forms of parish and diocesan social communication are just a few of the many ways in which the pastoral staff can work towards the inclusion of all parishioners in the parish's Sacramental life.
5. In accord with canon 777, n.4, pastors are responsible to be as inclusive as possible in providing evangelization, catechetical formation, and Sacramental preparation for parishioners with disabilities. Persons with disabilities, their advocates and their families, as well as those knowledgeable in serving disabled

persons can make a most valuable contribution to these programs. Parish catechetical and Sacramental preparation programs may need to be adapted for some parishioners with disabilities. Further, parishes should encourage persons with disabilities to participate in all levels of pastoral ministry (e.g., as care ministers, catechists, etc.). Dioceses are encouraged to establish appropriate support services for pastors to facilitate the evangelization, catechetical formation, and Sacramental preparation for parishioners with disabilities.

6. The creation of a fully accessible parish reaches beyond mere physical accommodation to encompass the attitudes of all parishioners towards persons with disabilities. Pastoral ministers are encouraged to develop specific programs aimed at forming a community of believers known for its joyful inclusion of all of God's people around the table of the Lord.

7. In the course of making pastoral decisions, it is inevitable that pastoral care workers will encounter difficult cases. Dioceses are encouraged to establish appropriate policies for handling such cases which respect the procedural and substantive rights of all involved, and which ensure the necessary provision of consultation.

II. Particular Sacraments

Baptism

8. Through the Sacrament of baptism the faithful are incorporated into Christ and into his Church. They are formed into God's people and obtain forgiveness of all their sins. They become a new creation and are called, rightly, the children of God. (*Rite of Christian Initiation*, General Introduction, n. 1).

9. Because it is the Sacrament of universal salvation, baptism is to be made available to all who freely ask for it, are properly disposed, and are not prohibited by law from receiving it. Baptism may be deferred only when there is no reason for hoping that the person will be brought up in the Catholic religion (Canon 868, sect. 1, n. 2). Disability, of itself, is never a reason for deferring baptism. Persons who lack the use of reason are to be baptized provided at least one parent or guardian consents to it (Canons 868, sect. 1, n. 1 and 852).

10. So that baptism may be seen as a Sacrament of the Church's faith and of admittance into the people of God, it should be celebrated ordinarily in the parish church on a Sunday or, if possible, at the Easter Vigil (Canons 856 and 857). The Church, made present in the local community, has an important role to play in the baptism of all of its members. Before and after the celebration of the Sacrament, the baptized have the right to the love and help of the community (Cf. *Rite of Baptism for Children*, nn. 4, 10).

11. Either personally or through others, the pastor is to see to it that the parents of an infant who is disabled, or those who take the place of the parents, are properly instructed as to the meaning of the Sacrament of baptism and the obligations attached to it. If possible, either the pastor or a member of the parish community should visit with the family, offering them the strength and support of the community which rejoices at the gift of new life, and which promises to nurture the faith of its newest member. It is recommended that preparation programs for baptism gather several families together so that they may commonly be formed by pastoral direction and prayer, and so that they may be strengthened by mutual support (Canon 851, n. 2).

12. If the person to be baptized is of catechetical age, the Rite of Christian Initiation may be adapted according to need (Cf. canons 851, n. 1 and 852, sect. 1).

13. A sponsor is to be chosen who will assist the newly baptized in Christian initiation. Sponsors have a special role in fostering the faith life of the baptized person. As such, they are to be chosen and prepared accordingly. Persons with disabilities may be sponsors for these Sacraments of initiation.

Confirmation

14. Those who have been baptized continue on the path of Christian initiation through the Sacrament of confirmation. In this way, they receive the Holy Spirit, conforming them more perfectly to Christ and strengthening them so that they may bear witness to Christ for the building up of his body in faith and love (*Rite of Confirmation*, nn. 1-2).

15. Parents, those who care for persons with disabilities, and shepherds of souls--especially pastors--are to see to it that the faithful who have been baptized are properly instructed to receive the Sacrament of confirmation and to approach it at the appropriate time (Cf. canon 890). The diocesan bishop is obliged to see that the Sacrament of confirmation is conferred on his subjects who properly and reasonably request it (Canon 885, sect. 1).

16. All baptized, unconfirmed Catholics who possess the use of reason may receive the Sacrament of confirmation if they are suitably instructed, properly disposed and able to renew their baptismal promises (Canon 889). Persons who because of developmental or mental disabilities may never attain the use of reason are to be encouraged either directly or, if necessary, through their parents or guardian, to receive the Sacrament of confirmation at the appropriate time.

17. Confirmation is to be conferred on the faithful between the age of discretion (which is about the age of seven) and eighteen years of age, within the limits determined by the diocesan bishop, or when there is a danger of death, or in the judgment of the minister a grave cause urges otherwise.

18. A sponsor for the one to be confirmed should be present. The sponsor assists the confirmed person on the continuing path of Christian initiation (Cf. canon 892). For this reason, it is desirable that the one who undertook the role of sponsor at baptism be the sponsor for confirmation (Canon 893, sect. 2).

Eucharist

19. The Eucharist is the most august Sacrament, in which Christ the Lord himself is contained, offered, and received, and by which the Church constantly lives and grows. It is the summit and the source of all Christian worship and life, signifying and effecting the unity of the people of God, providing spiritual nourishment for the recipient, and achieving the building up of the Body of Christ. The celebration of the Eucharist is the center of the entire Christian life (Canon 897).

20. Parents, those who take the place of parents, and pastors are to see to it that children who have reached the use of reason are correctly prepared and are nourished by the Eucharist as early as possible. Pastors are to be vigilant lest any children come to the Holy Banquet who have not reached the use of reason or whom they judge are not sufficiently disposed (Canon 914). It is important to note, however, that the criterion for reception of holy communion is the same for persons with developmental and mental disabilities as for all persons, namely, that the person be able to distinguish the Body of Christ from ordinary food, even if this recognition is evidenced through manner, gesture, or reverential silence rather than verbally. Pastors are encouraged to consult with parents, those who take the place of parents, diocesan personnel involved with disability issues, psychologists, religious educators, and other experts in making their judgment. If it is determined that a parishioner who is disabled is not ready to receive the Sacrament, great care is to be taken in explaining the reasons for this decision. Cases of doubt should be resolved in favor of the right of the baptized person to receive the Sacrament. The existence of a disability is not considered in and of itself as disqualifying a person from receiving the Eucharist.

21. Eucharistic celebrations are often enhanced by the exercise of the diverse forms of ministry open to the laity. In choosing those who will be invited to use their gifts in service to the parish community, the parish pastoral staff should be mindful of extending Christ's welcoming invitation to qualified parishioners with disabilities.

Reconciliation

22. In the Sacrament of reconciliation, the Christian faithful obtain from the mercy of God pardon for their sins. At the same time, they are reconciled with the Church, which they have wounded by their sins and which works for their conversion by charity, example, and prayer (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 11).

23. Only those who have the use of reason are capable of committing serious sin. Nevertheless, even young children and persons with mental disabilities often are conscious of committing acts that are sinful to some degree and may experience a sense of guilt and sorrow. As long as the individual is capable of having a sense of contrition for having committed sin, even if he or she cannot describe the sin precisely in words, the person may receive Sacramental absolution. Those with profound mental disabilities, who cannot experience even minimal contrition, may be invited to participate in penitential services with the rest of the community to the extent of their ability.

24. Catholics who are deaf should have the opportunity to confess to a priest able to communicate with them in sign language, if sign language is their primary means of communication. They may also confess through an approved sign language interpreter of their choice (Canon 990). The interpreter is strictly bound to respect the seal of confession (Canons 983, sect. 2 and 1388, sect. 2). When no priest with signing skills is available, nor sign language interpreter requested, Catholics who are deaf should be permitted to make their confession in writing. The written materials are to be returned to the penitent or otherwise properly destroyed.

25. In the case of individuals with poor communication skills, sorrow for sin is to be accepted even if this repentance is expressed through some gesture rather than verbally. In posing questions and in the assignment of penances the confessor is to proceed with prudence and discretion, mindful that he is at once judge and healer, minister of justice as well as of mercy (Canons 978, sect. 1; 979; 981).

Anointing of the Sick

26. Through the anointing of the sick, the Church commends to the suffering and glorified Lord the faithful who are seriously ill, so that they may be relieved of their suffering and be saved (Canon 998).

27. Those who have the care of souls and those who are close to the sick are to see to it that the faithful who are in danger due to sickness or old age are supported by the Sacrament of anointing at the appropriate time (Canon 1001).

28. Since disability does not necessarily indicate an illness, Catholics with disabilities should receive the Sacrament of anointing on the same basis and under the same circumstances as any other member of the Christian faithful (Cf. canon 1004).

29. The anointing of the sick may be conferred if the recipient has sufficient use of reason to be strengthened by the Sacrament, or if the sick person has lost the use of reason and would have asked for the Sacrament while in control of his or her faculties (*Rite of Anointing*, nn. 12, 14). If there is doubt as to whether the

sick person has attained the use of reason, the Sacrament is to be conferred (Canon 1005). Persons with disabilities may at times be served best through inclusion in communal celebrations of the Sacrament of anointing (Cf. canon 1002).

Holy Orders

30. By divine institution, some among the Christian faithful are constituted sacred ministers through the Sacrament of orders. They are consecrated and deputed to shepherd the people of God, each in accord with his own grade of orders, by fulfilling in the person of Christ the functions of teaching, sanctifying, and governing (Canon 1008).

31. The existence of a physical disability is not considered in and of itself as disqualifying a person from holy orders. However, candidates for ordination must possess the necessary spiritual, physical, intellectual, emotional, and psychological qualities and abilities to fulfill the ministerial functions of the order they receive (Canons 1029 and 1041, n. 1). The proper bishop or competent major superior makes the judgment that candidates are suited for the ministry of the Church (Canons 241, sect. 1; 1025, sect. 2; 1051, n. 1). Cases are to be decided on an individual basis and in light of pastoral judgment and the opinions of diocesan personnel and other experts involved with disability issues.

32. Diocesan vocations offices and offices for ministry with persons with disabilities should provide counseling and informational resources for men with disabilities who are discerning a vocation to serve the Church through one of the ordained ministries.

33. In preparation for responsible leadership in ordained ministry, the diocesan bishop or major superior is to see to it that the formation of all students in the seminary provides for their service to the disabled community, and for their possible ministry to or with persons with disabilities. Formation personnel should consult with parents, psychologists, religious educators, and other experts in the adaptation of programs for ministerial formation.

Marriage

34. By the Sacrament of marriage, Christians signify and share in the mystery of the unity and fruitful love which exists between Christ and his Church. They help each other to attain holiness in their married life and in the rearing and education of their children (*Rite of Marriage*, n. 1).

35. All persons not prohibited by law can contract marriage (Canon 1058).

36. The local ordinary should make the necessary provisions to ensure the inclusion of persons with disabilities in marriage preparation programs. Through

this preparation all couples may become predisposed toward holiness and to the duties of their new state. In developing diocesan policies, the local ordinary should consult with men and women of proven experience and skill in understanding the emotional, physical, spiritual, and psychological needs of persons with disabilities (Canons 1063, n. 2 and 1064). The inclusion of persons with disabilities in sponsoring couple programs is an especially effective way of supporting both the needs and the gifts of couples preparing for marriage.

37. For matrimonial consent to be valid, it is necessary that the contracting parties possess a sufficient use of reason; that they be free of any grave lack of discretion affecting their judgment about the rights and duties to which they are committing themselves; and that they be capable of assuming the essential obligations of the married state (Canon 1095). It is also necessary that the parties understand that marriage is a permanent union and is ordered to the good of the spouses, and the procreation and education of children (Canon 1096). Pastors and other clergy are to decide cases on an individual basis and in light of pastoral judgment based upon consultation with diocesan personnel involved with disability issues, and canonical, medical, and other experts. Medical and canonical opinions should be sought in determining the presence of any impediments to marriage. It should be noted, however, that paraplegia in itself does not always imply impotence, nor the permanence of such a condition, and it is not in itself an impediment. In case of doubt with regard to impotence, marriage may not be impeded (Canon 1084, sect. 2).

38. Catholics who are deaf are to be offered the opportunity to express their matrimonial consent in sign language, if sign language is their primary means of communication (Canon 1104, sect. 2). Marriage may also be contracted through a sign language interpreter whose trustworthiness has been certified by the pastor (Canon 1106).

39. Pastoral care for married persons extends throughout the married couples' lives. By their care and example, the entire ecclesial community bears witness to the fact that the matrimonial state may be maintained in a Christian spirit and make progress toward perfection. Special care is to be taken to include parishioners with disabilities in parish programs aimed at assisting and nourishing married couples in leading holier and fuller lives within their families (Canon 1063, n.4).

Catechetical Resources for those with Special Needs

A Place for All

Mary Therese Harrington (S. H. Liturgical Press, 1992) Reflections on the lived experience of catechesis, liturgy and Sacramental initiation with those who have significant developmental disabilities.

Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities

(US Conference of Catholic Bishops) ISBN 1-57455-027-6

Catechists for All Children

(Our Sunday Visitor Publishing, 2002) ISBN 1-931709-37-8

Celebrating the Sacraments with those with Developmental Disabilities: Sacramental/Liturgical

Reflections', Foley, Edward (ed.) Developmental Disabilities and Sacramental Access. Liturgical Press, 1994.

Let the Children Come to Me

Pauline Books and Media, 2003 Guidebook and laminated cut-out figures to teach Scripture stories and parables.

God's House

Ellen Javernick (Pauline Books and Media, 1999) Small child size book of the objects we see in church. Simple explanations and pictures.

Who is Jesus?

Institute for Pastoral Initiatives University of Dayton, Dayton, OH 1 888 532 3389

Share the Light (Bernadette Farrell, 2000)

Includes CD-ROM with Quick Time video showing sign language gestures to use with songs.

Baptism-A Promise to Disabled People

Institute for Pastoral Initiatives
University of Dayton, Dayton OH
1-888-532-3389

Kennedy Program: The Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Program to Improve Catholic Religious Education for Children and Adults with Mental Retardation

Department for Persons with Disabilities
Diocese of Pittsburgh
48 South 14th Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15203