

## *Bridging the Gap: Liturgical Catechesis for Special Needs*

Synopsis: We worship a 'disabled God.' The twisted, distorted, disfigured image of Jesus on the cross shows how God allowed himself to become disabled and at the same time completely accessible to human beings in need of healing. We can see the disabled child or adult in God's likeness. "All persons with disabilities have the capacity to its truth within the community of faith and offer valuable gifts. Their participation enriches every aspect of Church life. They are not just recipients of catechesis—they are its agents." *National Catechetical Directory* 49. This workshop will provide insights into special needs in your parish and how we can welcome these individuals, catechize them, and grow from those encounters.

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Credentials: Director of the Office of Faith Formation for the Diocese of Tyler since 1994. She earned a Masters in Theology Studies from the School of Ministry University of Dallas and serves on the Diocesan Liturgical Commission. Linda has an autistic grandson who is 20 years old and another grandson who is 10 with Sensory Processing Disorder. She has both personal and professional experience with special needs. The Diocese of Tyler has launched a program for special needs by formation of clergy and laity.



Gathering Prayer: That I might not become too elated, a thorn in my flesh was given to me...three times I begged the Lord about this, that it might leave me, but he said to me. 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' I will rather boast most gladly of my weaknesses, in order that the power of Christ may dwell with me...for when I am weak, then I am strong. 2 Corinthians 12:7-9, 10b

1. The National Partnership on Disability tells us that 20% of our parishes are individuals with disabilities.
2. Let's turn to Scripture – can you think of anyone in scripture who would have a disability?
3. God often works through our weaknesses to enable us to accomplish his mission.
4. Patron Saints of Those with special needs. (WHITE handout)
5. Let's look at some various disabilities:

Case Studies/ (Yellow Handout) on Diagnosis

6. What does the Church say about disabilities?
  - a. Pastoral Statement of U.S. Catholic Bishops on People with Disabilities (1978)
  - b. Welcome and Justice for Persons with Disabilities (1998) (handout pamphlet)
  - c. National Catechetical Directory for Catechesis (2005) NDC and GCD
    - i. adapt language and pace for ability of individuals
    - ii. Integrate rather than isolate in as much as possible
    - iii. Encourage them to participate in lay ministry in the parish whenever possible
  - d. Guidelines for Celebrations of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities (1995) being revised 2015
  - e. National Catholic Partnership on Disability (NCPD) – 1 in 5 has some disability. 50% of marriages in this country end up in divorce; that number goes up to 85% for couples with children with disabilities. So we have a call to reach out to these families, the couples, the siblings.
7. Meet my grandson, Jordan Huffman, 20 years old with severe autism.

8. As Church we have to try to create a welcoming environment for these families, and an opportunity for them to grow spiritually. They are not spiritually disabled though their bodies or minds may be.
9. It takes a special kind of person to work with these families. Characteristics?
10. How can our parishes accommodate these families?
  - a. Parish liturgical space and ministries (surveys BLUE handouts)
  - b. Education and formation of the parish to teach tolerance and acceptance
  - c. Modified Liturgies Welcome and Inclusion liturgies (example)
    - a. Modified
    - b. Parishes rotate in the diocese to host the liturgy
    - c. Children gather around the baptismal font to welcome parishioners
    - d. Children process in with the priest during the entrance hymn
    - e. Celebration is shorter and quieter than a typical mass
    - f. Strict 4 minute homily limit
    - g. Children's lectionary is used
    - h. Renewal of baptismal vows instead of the creed
    - i. Group masses are held five times a year

Perhaps a reception following Mass for families to gather to begin networking and feeling supported. Then in the future we will begin to plan formation sessions for them.

(TIPS for MASS white handout to copy for families)
  - d. Invitation to participate in ministries in the church: liturgical, catechetical, pastoral
11. What do these special individuals need to celebrate the Sacraments validly? ( CASCADE handout )
12. Concluding remarks: Helping children with special needs affect others:
  1. Having a child with a disability brings about an unselfishness that is crucial for spiritual growth.
  2. They help us love beyond our previous ability to love.
  3. They are catalysts for change in the lives of people who come in contact with them.
  4. The sacrifices involved in raising a child with a disability can be a route to holiness.

Thank you for attending and May God bless you and your loved ones.

**Closing Prayer: Beatitude Prayer of Acceptance (WHITE handout)**