

Prayer and Liturgical Opportunities

Made in the image and likeness of God, we believe that we are all sources of grace for each other. We welcome each other in love. 'Welcome' does not see disability: 'welcome' can bring a smile and feelings of belonging.

- Are all our Masses inclusive of people with learning difficulties? How often do we have special Masses?
- How do we include people with learning difficulties in our musical celebration? Do we know what special music resources are available?
- Do we consider the use of multi-sensory prayer sessions or take the chance to use all the senses during our liturgies?
- Do we know how we can amend the liturgy to suit people with learning difficulties?

Beatitudes for parishioners

Blessed are you when you smile at me
- for then I know I'm welcome

Blessed are you when you look at me with love
- for then I know I am special

Blessed are you when you wait for me
- for then I know I belong

Blessed are you when you walk with me in public places - for then I know you are proud of me

Blessed are you when you ask me for help
- for then I know I matter

Blessed are you when you are gentle with me
- for then I am sure that I am loved

Blessed are you when you believe in me
- for then I know that I am valued

Blessed are you when you hold my hand
- how else can I feel God's compassion?

More information and resources available at:
www.everybodyswelcome.org.uk/disability.html

For local information please contact:



This leaflet is one of a series devised to assist parishes to become more welcoming, friendly and family-sensitive.

For further information contact:

Marriage and Family Life Project Office, CBCEW
39 Eccleston Square, London, SW1V 1BX

Email: everybodyswelcome@celebratingfamily.org.uk



what is life like if you or
someone in your family
is *disabled or*
has learning
difficulties?
...and what can your
parish family do to make
a difference?

What is life like?

'Thomas has autism. He went to church for some time with his parents. However, as he got older he became more noisy and disruptive, usually during quiet periods at Mass. The discreet disapproval of the congregation made his parents reluctant to bring him to church and now he no longer comes.'

What can be done so that Thomas and his parents are not excluded?

'John is a person with Downs Syndrome and has been an altar server in his local parish for some time. The head altar server had to retire and the Parish Priest approached one of the other servers, Paul, to take his place. Seemingly unaware of John's disability Paul recommended John on the grounds that he was older.'

What was it that enabled Paul to see beyond John's disability?

How can a parish be enabled to see a person's abilities rather than disabilities?

'Fr. Jack was clearly uncomfortable around people with learning disabilities. A new family in the parish invited him around to discuss the possibility of confirmation for Jill, their disabled teenaged daughter. The experience of Jill's warmth and joy during that visit was the first step in Fr. Jack's transformation.'

How do we see the whole person and not just the disability?

Challenges for the Parish

The challenge lies not only in serving needs but in enabling people with learning difficulties to contribute to the life and mission of the parish as full members of the body of Christ.

- Do we succeed in including people with learning difficulties? Are they invited to all our social events?
- How can we make the liturgical celebration of the parish accessible to everyone and sensitive to all needs?
- Do we make the sacramental preparation for people with learning difficulties relevant and easily accessible? What resources are available to help us with this responsibility?
- How many people with learning difficulties have a ministry, for example altar server or reader, in our parishes?

Some Practical Strategies and Resources

Once people find a way of communicating with each other in a loving way which respects the dignity and gifts of each and every individual, many of the issues are able to be resolved.

The priest who welcomes the new baby with learning disabilities in a chat with the family after Mass, signals the celebration to new life even, perhaps, in the midst of grieving, which enables other parishioners find the words to speak to the family.

'Chris, father of Jimmy a brain-damaged boy, felt guilt and grief seeing no future for his son. The

example of love and hope from the priest led the parish to take Jimmy to their hearts, helping Chris to accept and rejoice in his son.'

The parish might be able to find an advocate for people with learning difficulties: a parish council member for example. This person could raise awareness in the parish by speaking occasionally at a service or events.

The parish could develop a database of information for families to include signers, car drivers, visitors, audio tape production etc. Deanery sharing of information on the database could multiply the opportunities.

Consideration for carers might include a 'phone in link to a live Mass each week for those unable to get to the church. Or even a video or computer link to Mass.

Useful Resources

www.throughtheroof.org Making the Christian message accessible

www.disabilitynow.org.uk Department for International Development

www.valuingpeople.gov.uk A governmental initiative.

www.drc-gb.org/index.asp Disability Rights Commission

www.larche.org.uk The L'Arche communities for people with learning difficulties and their friends and families

www.sensorytrust.org.uk The Sensory Trust

www.nas.org.uk National Autistic Society

Many dioceses have advisors on disability and learning difficulties. Check your local Catholic Directory and contact them for further advice and support.