

Welcome to Opening Doors!

Prayer for people with disabilities

Loving God,
You make each living person in your image and likeness
And present us as a gift and seed of love to the human race.
We praise you, Lord, for all of your gifts.

Lord, we see you in all those living with disabilities
And give you thanks for loving parents
Who welcome and nurture them
Even in the face of obstacles or rejection.

Guide our hands to build access and welcome
Guide our minds to understand the power and wisdom of human vulnerability
Guide our actions to create communities
Open to the gifts of each individual.
May we understand that your body is incomplete
When people are left behind.
We pray through Christ, Our Lord. Amen

(Adapted from <http://www.ncpd.org>)

I. *Did You Know?*

Summary of the Disability Fall Formation

The keynote speaker for the Nov. 14th workshop was Sister Kathleen Schipani, IHM, Director of the Office for Persons with Disabilities of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

Sister Kathleen stated that one of the goals in the Archdiocese of New Orleans 9th General Synod stated that all people are to encounter Jesus and witness His love with joy. When Jesus encountered people with disabilities, He welcomed them, asked their names, and consoled them. We Need to do the same.

Sister Kathleen reminded us that If the participation of persons with disabilities and their families is to be real and meaningful the parish must prepare itself to receive them. (1978 Pastoral Statement #19)

There are many categories of disabilities and Sister Kathleen provided a number of resources to accommodate for inclusion.

Belonging is more than just showing up. People need to be welcomed, present, engaged, known, able to use gifts, have sacramental access, faith formation, opportunities for socializing, and able to provide service in order to give back. Barriers to inclusion include structural, communicative, and attitudinal.

The parish advocate serves as a liaison between persons and families with disabilities and the parish **and** between the parish and the Archdiocese Office of Persons with Disabilities. The advocate raises awareness, helps identify individuals and families with disabilities, invites, builds access, increases participation and service, and helps make persons with disabilities part of decision making.

The workshop was interactive, and Sister Kathleen encouraged participation and questions. Handouts and numerous resources were made available.

To learn more please visit Sister Kathleen's website www.opdarchphilly.org

What Is Your Barrier? by David and Mercedes Rizzo

The other night we attended the required meeting at our church for parents of children in the religious formation program. The guest speaker asked the parents in attendance this question: *What are the barriers we face when trying to provide religious instruction to our children?*

One mother of seven children immediately responded that her barrier was financial. She meant that the cost to educate all seven of her children is high. Another parent spoke of how the weekly homilies, although beneficial to adults, were not always presented at a level that children understand. A third parent said that nowadays there are so many activities kids are involved in that finding the time with jammed-packed schedules is a barrier. We knew without a doubt what our barrier was. Our barrier was having a child who is profoundly affected by autism. When we attend Mass as a family each week, we are constantly monitoring and assisting our almost 13-year-old daughter Danielle. Often children with autism have behaviors that are potentially disruptive. Our minds are bombarded by the following questions as we enter the church:

- Will she make it through the entire Mass before one of us feels obligated to step out to give her a break?
- Will she be excessively noisy?
- Will today be the day that at the moment of consecration she loudly shrieks?
- Will we make the correct seat selection? We are visually scanning the pews looking for kind and compassionate faces hoping to find people who look like they will understand.
- Are we too close to the organ? Danielle is hypersensitive to certain sounds so this is another challenge.

While we are thinking of all these potential problems we are reminded of how far we have come.

- Danielle receives Communion so reverently.
- She now ingests a full host and *receives in her hands*.
- On many Sundays she has sat through the entire Mass.
- She is signing “music” in anticipation of the hymns.
- She is using the baptismal font to bless herself now *and not to splash in it!*

As parents we all have barriers in our lives. Being the parents of a child with a severe disability has been one of the greatest obstacles but also one of the most inspiring challenges we have known. We have found that the secret to overcoming such a barrier is continuing to attend Mass regularly and not giving up. Since children with autism often thrive on routine, practice and repetition are a must. So is finding the right religious special education program. If one doesn't already exist, then consult with parish leaders to start a program. The final secret is knowing that some days are simply not going to go as planned, but keep coming back and trust God as you do. <https://www.loyolapress.com/catholic-resources/parish-ministry/special-needs/for-parents-and-families/what-is-your-barrier/>

God's Special Children's Friend Fr. Jim Wehner, Rector/President of Notre Dame Seminary sent us the following link containing an article about remarks Pope Francis made this morning stating that disabled persons have a right to the sacraments.

Thanks to Fr. Jim for sharing this article with us.

<https://cruxnow.com/vatican/2020/12/pope-says-disabled-persons-have-a-right-to-the-sacraments/>

II. What's Happening!

Mass for God's Special Children, their families and friends is held every month at 2:00 p.m. at St Francis Xavier Church, 444 Metairie Road, Metairie, LA on the following dates:

December 6, 2020
January 3 2021
February 7, 2021
March 7, 2021

AUTISM SOCIETY OF GREATER NEW ORLEANS VIRTUAL PROGRAMS



Virtual Online Social Group for Adults with Autism

When: Thursday, December
17th at 7:00 pm
Where: On Zoom

Description: The Online Social Group is designed to help reduce feelings of isolation and increase the opportunity for social interaction with peers as well as connect with people who understand you! ASGNO Board member and Self-Advocate Cory Lang will be facilitating the social group.

For more information and to sign up, click the "Register Now" Button Below

[REGISTER](#)



Virtual Parent Support Group

Caregivers for children
aged 0-15

When: TBA
Time: TBA
Where: Online on Zoom

Caregivers for teens and
adults aged 15 and up

When: TBA
Time: TBA
Where: Online on Zoom

For more information and to sign up, click the "Find out More!" button below

[FIND OUT MORE](#)



Teen Time Hangouts with the Autism Society of Cincinnati

In partnership with the Autism Society of Cincinnati. Teen Time Hangouts are designed to give teens with autism opportunities to interact with peers, play games, practice social skills, build friendships, and have FUN, while maintaining social distancing rules.

Every Friday from
5:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

Open to teens ages 13-18
with autism

[REGISTER](#)

We welcome and encourage you to share any information or questions or you would like to see in Opening Doors e-Newsletter to klivauda@bellsouth.net. Please use Opening Doors in the subject line. We encourage you to share some of what is in ***Opening Doors*** with your parish by publishing some info in your church bulletins.