

2014 Light the Fire Conference, May 8th & 9th hosted by Dayton Theological Seminary & Ginghamburg U. Methodist Church in Tipp City, OH
(Conference for inclusion of ALL peoples in the church)

It is not that uncommon for congregations to be faced with the need to minister with individuals of varying abilities. Therefore I recently welcomed the opportunity to attend a conference for congregations striving to be welcoming and open to individuals with a variety of abilities. One workshop focused on ministering to those with autism. The workshop started with the showing of a video to raise awareness and understanding. ***Autism and Faith*** can be seen online at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sBScpLlleio>

One suggestion for helping those with attention disorders connect with a worship service is to take a plastic sheet (8 ½ x 11) that holds business cards. Print or draw a symbol for each part of the service on one side of a card. Place the cards in the business card holder and then turn them around as you go through the worship service.

Some of our congregations currently have members with autism and have found value in the resource ***Rhythms of Grace***
<http://www.cokesbury.com/forms/ProductDetail.aspx?pid=864039&rank=1&txtSearchQuery=Rhythms+of+grace> that outlines actual worship services to accommodate those with autism or other sensory issues. Many of these modifications are simple, easy to do and would be welcomed by many families with small children.

The booklet, ***Autism and Faith: A Journey into Community*** for congregations desiring to be a welcome place and support for those with autism and their families, is available for free in Spanish or English at
http://www.djfidlefoundation.org/autism_and_faith.cfm

Often times a conversation with the parent can help identify activities to help the student participate in learning settings. Recruit individuals **other** than family members to shadow, mentor or partner with the student in class or recreational settings, particularly when moving into higher level activities. [Side note: The Bethesda Lutheran Communities has printed materials (many downloadable) for those with developmental disabilities for communion education, catechism and general religious education.
<http://store.shopbethesda.org/curriculum-c26.aspx> You are encouraged to contact your regional ministry consultant
<http://bethesdalutherancommunities.org/page.aspx?pid=540#northeast> for tips on ways to integrate individuals into your faith community.]

An excellent resource for planners or leaders of activities is:

Play To Grow: Over 200 games designed to help your special child develop fundamental social skills by [Tali Field Berman](#) Excellent resource for anyone working with children that are developmentally delayed. http://www.amazon.com/Play-To-Grow-designed-fundamental/dp/1484143329/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1401807978&sr=8-1&keywords=Play+to+grow

And while you may not currently have anyone in your congregation affected with autism here are some resources to keep in mind when members ask for help for family and friends:

Understanding Death and Illness and What They Teach about Life: An Interactive Guide for Individuals with Autism or Asperger's and Their Loved Ones, author Catherine Faherty http://www.amazon.com/Understanding-Death-Illness-Teach-about/dp/1932565566/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1401808055&sr=1-1&keywords=understanding+death+and+illness+and+w

Please share your recommended resources for including individuals various abilities

Finding Your Own Way to Grieve: A Creative Activity Workbook for Kids and Teens on the Autism Spectrum by Karla Helbert (highly recommended for parents, too.) http://www.amazon.com/Finding-Your-Own-Way-Grieve-ebook/dp/B00DQBSK9I/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1401808120&sr=1-1&keywords=Finding+your+own+way+to+grieve