

**FOR A SYNODAL CHURCH**  
COMMUNION ● PARTICIPATION ● MISSION

# ***Supporting Learners with Disabilities – Where to Begin?***

Catechist Convocation 2022  
***Moving Forward in Catechetical Ministry***

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[www.rcan.org/disabilities](http://www.rcan.org/disabilities)



# Within the Christian Community



*Formation* is an ongoing process that,  
**under the guidance of the Spirit**  
and **in the living womb** of the  
Christian community ...



*New Directory for Catechesis, 2020. 131.*



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# Human Flourishing

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# Human Dignity



# ... Begins With Expectations for Potential, Learning & Growth

See the potential ...

Foster the potential

From the beginning!



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# Disability Is ...



Part of Life

Part of Being Human

Focus on the Person



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# Diversity Within Disability

## Occurs at different times.

- In utero
- At birth
- Acquired sometime during life
- Disabling effects of medical conditions

## Different types

- Intellectual and/or Developmental (I/DD)
- Mobility
- Sensory
- Learning
- Emotional
- Mental Health Concerns



# Not Special – Not Gifts

"My needs are not 'special' just because they're not met in ways identical to the needs of nondisabled people. I need a ramp; you need steps. Not special, just facts ...." Emily Ladau

"We are not gifts ~to teach abled people about love~." Kayla Whaley



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Emily Ladau, "Four Disability Euphemisms that Need to Bite the Dust." in *Guide to Jewish Values and Disability Rights*, Jewish Funders Network. March 2016. [www.jfunders.org](http://www.jfunders.org); Kayla Whaley, "Disabled People Are People: A Message to the Pope" tweet @PunkinOnWheels (2016);



# Human Needs or Special Needs?

- Roof over head – A home
- Safety
- Education
- Clothing
- Food
- Health care
- Communicating with others
- Relationships
- Intimacy
- Community participation
- Belonging
- Love
- Respect
- Needed
- Understood
- Positive expectations
- Learning From Mistakes
- Making decisions in one's life
- Challenged to Stretch
- Meaningful employment
- Taking Risks
- Supported





# Supports Provide Access to Needs

## Supports

- Stairs
- Ramp
- Picture Exchange System
- Learning strategies
- Picture Schedules
- To get into Worship
- To get into Home
- To get into Work
- ...
- To Communicate - be Understood
- To Learn
- To Learn & Participate



# The Growing End of Human Dignity



Basic Physical	Security	Emotional	Esteem	Potential & Transcendence
Food Clothing Shelter Medical care	Home Family Sheltered programs Basic education Sheltered work Predictability	Dignity Belonging Relationships Intimacy Trust Affection Love Friendship	Growth expectations Education Diverse Relationships? Social/Political Activity Respect Intimacy Privacy Employment	Exercising rights Making decisions Responsibilities Making mistakes Beauty Values beyond oneself

# *Experience of ‘Hidden Exiles’*

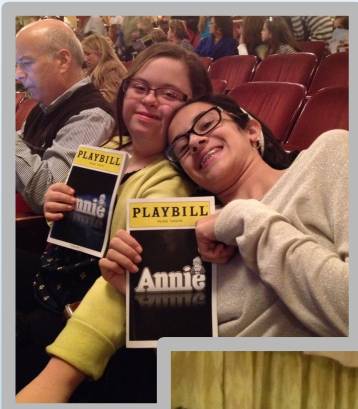
Many persons with disabilities ‘feel that they exist without belonging and participating.’ ... Our concerns should be not only to care for them but ***to ensure their ‘active participation’*** in the civil and ecclesial community. That ...

will gradually contribute to ***the formation of consciences capable of acknowledging*** each individual as a unique and unrepeatable person.

Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti* (2020), 98



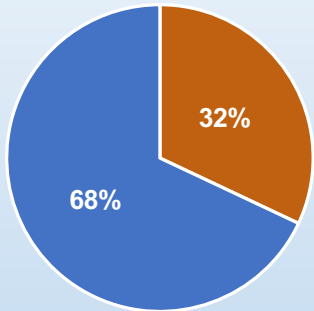
# The Belonging



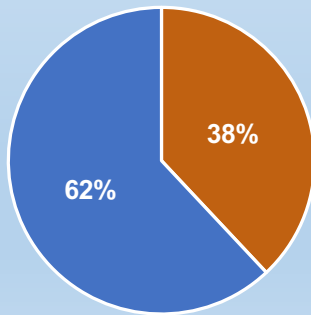
Carter, Biggs, & Boehm, *Being Present Verses Having a Presence: Dimensions of Belonging for Young People with Disabilities and Their Families*. *Christian Education Journal*, Series 3, Volume 13, No. 1 . 2016.



# Families, Disability and Faith Communities



32% left their congregation because of how their son or daughter with disabilities was not included.



38% considered switching congregations because of how their son/daughter with disability was treated.



# ***Consider ... Manifestations of the Spirit Not a Finite List***



Now, there are **varieties of gifts**, but the **same Spirit**; and there are **varieties of services**, but the **same Lord**; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the **manifestation** of the Spirit for the common good.



# Compare and Contrast

## Manifestations of the Spirit

- Something that develops
- Through the activities of the Spirit
- Within *interpersonal activity*
- God calling to each of us
- *Through* each other

## Gifts

- Singular
- Individualistic
- Lacks interpersonal nature
- Lacks interpersonal dynamic



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# Solidarity & Concern For the Common Good

## “US” not “THEM”!

### Relatability: One Human Family

- CRITICAL for Relatability
- Essential for compassion\*
- Church uniquely placed to support

### Preparing the Community

- Build on shared value: respect for human dignity
- Partner in process



\* "motivated empathy"





# Subsidiarity: IN and FOR Community Life

- Developing the sense of belonging through interaction, relationships and participation
- A "laboratory" - Small Christian Community (SCC)
- Trust in graced moments.

Pervades the New *Directory*, but esp: 29, 31, 35, 59, 60, 75-89, 139-149, 179, 195, 199, 218



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# Simply Focus – Person Centered

- Begin with the **person/family** in front of you.
- **Relationship** is central to who we are.
- **Communication** and **Behavior** are critical considerations across **all** abilities.
- Parents, teachers & the person are a great source of insight and guidance.



# Person First

- See the PERSON before the disability.
- Focus on RELATIONSHIP.
- What are her STRENGTHS?
- What are his INTERESTS?
- How does she COMMUNICATE?
- Any helpful BEHAVIOR supports?
- What makes him UNCOMFORTABLE?
- What is HELPFUL in difficult moments?
- What is HELPFUL to prevent these?
- OBSERVE in different settings.



# Communication

- It is an **active process** of exchanging information and ideas among people.
- It includes speech, sign language, tactile sign language, gestures, picture systems, augmentative devices, writing, and or the use of visual symbols.





# Clarity in Communication

- Use shorter phrases.
- State instructions in the affirmative.
- Use Concrete language
- Wait before repeating yourself.
- Visualize sequenced directions (pictures/text schedules).
- Avoid misunderstandings or confusing questions



# Why We Do What We Do

All behavior serves a function: **NEVER ASSUME**

- I don't feel well (**M**edical)
- I want to get out of here OR I don't want to do what you want me to do (**E**scape or **A**voidance)
- Look at me OR what I want you to look at (**A**ttention)
- I want ... (access to **T**angibles or **A**ctivities)
- This feels good (**S**ensory stimulation)

*ABCs*  
*Antecedent*  
*Behavior*  
*Consequence*



# Structure And Consistency

- Follow routines
- Be Prepared
- Prepare for transitions
- Verbal countdown
- Picture or word schedule
- Prepare for a new environment.



# General Guidelines

- Speak in the AFFIRMATIVE
- Provide ONLY ACCEPTABLE alternatives
- Ask ONCE and follow through
- Limit “down time.”
- Stress POSITIVE – catch being good – be specific



# Some Strategies

- Repetition of concepts in a variety of ways
- Active Engagement
- Involve as many modalities as possible.
- Music – live and recorded
- Communicating with parents as appropriate
- Recognize need for age-appropriate desire for separation from parents
- Peer Mentors - same age, ‘typically-developing’
- Teen mentors - for individual or general support





# Individual – Pastoral Support Plan

- Goals
  - Long Term
  - Short Term
  - Next Step
- Pastoral Plan: Objectives, Strategies and Resources
  - General learning support strategies
  - Objectives
  - Weekly time estimates
  - Review: establish timelines/dates
  - Who is involved?



# Came for the Juice Boxes Stayed for the Soul Food

A story about a group of children learning compassion and concern for each other within the parish catechetical setting, a small Christian community.

[Click here for link to video](#)



## As you listen consider:

- What moments really strike you in this story? Why?
- How are quotes from the *New Directory for Catechesis* and *Fratelli Tutti* reflected?
- What ideas does it generate for your own ministry?

# Notice and Consider ...

- Beginning process?
- Motivating commitment?
- Planning for success?
- Difference between “small Christian community” & “class”
- Role of ‘juice box hander outer’ vs ‘handing out juice boxes’?
- Assessing and adjusting
- Learning a lived faith by all



# The Growing End of Human Dignity

“Exceptional treatment isn’t an exceptional life, its an exception *from* life.”

~Edie Cusack, College of Charleston



What's Next?



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## **Inclusive Postsecondary Education (IPSE) Vision**



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- Provide college aged students with intellectual and developmental disabilities the opportunity to engage in authentic college experiences.
- Participate in all facets of campus
- Preparation for post-college work experiences through internships and jobs.
- Take courses for college credit or audit

With gratitude to Ann Marie Licata, Ph.D. of Millersville & Alia M. Pustorino-Clevenger, Ed.D. of Duquesne



# Some Closing Thoughts: Human Dignity and Interpersonal Spaces

- Developmental
- We thrive interacting with each other
- Typical and Ordinary Ways
- Informal supports
- Maximize positive
- Valued Roles
- Dignity of Risk
- Call and Response: God's activity within and through each of us to each other



# What Is Next?

- What are you doing well?
- What would you like to do better?
- If you were given the power to change one thing, what would it be?
- What is your next step at your parish?
- What help do you need to do this?



# THANK YOU!

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# Pastoral Videos & Resources

*Came for the Juice Boxes, Stayed for the Soul Food* [Click here for link.](#)

*One Pastor Reaches Out In His Own Way* [Click here for link.](#)

*Believing in Possibilities: Raising a Son or Daughter with a Disability*  
[Click here for link.](#)

Pastoral Ministry with Persons with Disabilities, Archdiocese of Newark  
website: [www.rcan.org/disabilities](http://www.rcan.org/disabilities)

*Living Fully 2016 Statement and Charter* [Click here for link.](#)



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#### Photos and Graphics

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