



Welcoming All: Intergenerational Faith Formation for People with Disabilities

Sharon Urbaniak

Faith is the greatest gift a parent can offer to their child. The faith I witnessed of my parents as they loved Tommy, my brother with disabilities has given me a priceless gift. God has blessed me with the opportunity to share this gift with my diocesan family for the past 13 years. For two years, we held an annual family retreat for children with disabilities at a parish on a weekend afternoon which concluded with a celebration of Mass with an interactive homily. People traveled from all over our diocese to attend. The third year, we decided to offer to take the retreat on the road to various regions in the diocese. Only one or two families registered, so they were cancelled. The need to offer a program for families still remained. Since then, I have developed an intergenerational faith formation program for people of all ages with disabilities for nine years.

Parents of a child with a disability may find it difficult to trust people in caring for their child as often they experience unpleasant situations with the medical professionals and/or educational personnel. Out of their unconditional love, they often want to cast a protective net over their child. Often in religious education programs, they may be given a textbook and told to teach their child at home. Where is our support to parents on their spiritual journey? Sometimes parents are asked or expected to sit in the class with their child. How does that make the child feel?

The *General Directory for Catechesis* says: The love of the Father for the weakest of His children and the continuous presence of Jesus and His Spirit gives assurance that every person,

Sharon Urbaniak is associate director in the Department of Lifelong Faith Formation of the Catholic Diocese of Buffalo, NY where her ministry is catechesis of people with special needs. She provides consultation, collaboration, resources and training for pastors, catechetical leaders and parents. Sharon's gifts are experience with people with disabilities of all ages including a brother with disabilities. The program she created, *God's Family: Learning, Loving and Living Our Faith*—a monthly faith formation program for people of all ages with disabilities and their family and friends—was awarded the National Conference for Catechetical Leadership's 2012 New Wineskins Award and the Edward M. Shaughnessy III Inclusion Award for Serving All God's Children in July 2009.

however limited, is capable to growth in holiness. Education in the faith, which involves the family above all else, calls for personalized and adequate programs (189).

Unfortunately, the reality is that people with disabilities and their families often do not feel welcome in our church communities. Leaders often lack the proper training and insights to meet the diverse range of needs that a congregation presents.

Churches need to create an environment that welcomes families and where God's love can be felt? To that end we have created that environment in our program called, *God's Family: Living, Loving and Learning our Catholic Faith* (www.buffalodiocese.org/Evangelization/Disabilities.aspx). When a new model of intergenerational faith formation was introduced to our diocese, I was searching for a way to minister to young adults with intellectual disabilities that had made their confirmation, to adults injured from trauma, to children who just could not adjust to the regular classroom model, and to siblings and to parents. This model had great potential for meeting the needs of all, thus we began our journey to develop a diocesan program to address the catechetical needs of children and adults with physical and/or developmental disabilities.

We have created a model that emphasizes welcoming and respects each person's unique needs and abilities. For some this can be their only faith formation experience, for others this supplements their parish involvement, and for others this is a step toward membership in a local parish community.

Our team of five began with a year of training. We prayed that God would bring us His children to serve and a place to hold our monthly gathering. We are blessed to use a church facility named after Father Baker who welcomed homeless children into his facility in 1889. We began with a group of 30 participants, children, youth and adults.

The Diocese of Buffalo provided \$500 to begin and continues providing financial support. The team members are excellent

stewards of our resources and we have been blessed with a few generous benefactors. One year, a lady volunteered just to canvas business for donations which resulted in gift cards and discounts for our food and paper supplies. Now we have a parish donating paper supplies and allowing us to borrow their real silverware.

In our first year we used resources from the Generations of Faith Intergenerational Project (Center for Ministry Development) and met monthly for two hours to plan our three-hour program adapting resources to meet the needs of those we served. Usually, we combine resources from the children's program and adult program to achieve an interactive lesson at the fifth grade comprehension level.

Each month we transformed one large space into multiple activity areas. A large poster shares the day's routine with picture symbols. Our program is divided into four sections: **Gathering, Meal Time, Sharing Our Faith, and Prayer.**

Program Design

Part 1. Gathering

Since we meet monthly, **Gathering** is a time for us to reconnect with one another. We offer both structured activities and socialization time with beverages. We welcome people with colorful balloons on the door to indicate where to come. One team member decorates our welcome table with tablecloth, candles and seasonal items. Here families are greeted, given name tags, and sign greeting cards to celebrate our concern for one another—birthday, get well, thinking of you, and holiday cards.

Next our members put a sticker on an attendance chart. At the end of the year, we will put all the names of the people with perfect attendance into a basket and select one to receive a special religious gift to symbolize our year.

Items for our prayer procession are displayed as a team member signs people up for this ministry. There are routine items and special items added to correlate to our day's lesson. We utilize a 16 x 20 inch banner of Hook's portrait of Jesus. We can talk about Jesus being present, but with the people seeing Jesus or putting Jesus' picture on a chair as makes Jesus' presence seem more real. Routine items include our altar cloth, two battery operated candles, the Children's Lectionary, our prayer request notebook, and a squishy large red soft heart pillow. Our altar cloth was made from a hand print of each person with his or her first name on it. One of our children with autism has made the heart pillow their own as the texture calms him. He is often heard telling us that the pillow reminds us that "Jesus Loves Us." (Children with autism have an increased need for sensory stimulation. A box with sensory items such as squishy balls, hand lotion, Beanie babies and plastic animals is available for our family members who may need to hold onto an item as they learn.)

Our prayer request book is a white three-ring binder with a picture of a person praying and the words "Prayer Requests" on it. These prayers will be shared during our prayer time, and e-mailed to absent members. People are encouraged to write down their requests as we gather and a team member transcribes requests for those unable to write.

Participants make a craft that coordinates with the theme of the faith lesson to take home. The tables are placed in a large closed rectangle which allows for sharing supplies and facilitating group conversation.

Part 2. Meal Time

Sharing a meal is an important element of our gathering. We arrange tables so there are two or three together end to end to encourage people to sit with new people and to accommodate larger groups like group homes. Each table has a centerpiece that coordinates with the season or our theme for the day. On

special occasions, we connect the tables to form an open "U" and at Christmas time when we have visitors, we arrange the tables in larger squares. As people arrive, they assist in placing silverware and napkins at the place settings which is a simple way to get them involved and feel excited about helping.

One of our members leads us in grace, extending his arms out over the food to bless it and over the people to bless us. Then we join in the traditional grace. "Bless Us O Lord for These Thy Gifts" as our group likes routine.

Food preparation has been a learning experience. We began with a caterer who generously donated her time. Another year, the team planned and prepared the meals. One year an ambitious dad with a big heart began preparing us a gourmet lunch, but his schedule got too busy to continue. Now, we are gifted with a father who enjoys preparing delicious lunches. Twice a year, usually in December and the Easter season, families share in a pot luck meal. Favorite meals include chili, egg casseroles, turkey a la king, Lent soup and bread, pre-made party subs and grilled hot dogs. Most meals are served buffet style. One remarkable meal was the time a family of six prepared and served us plates of spaghetti. Another special time was an Easter breakfast complete with sausage, eggs and pastries. We have had a St. Joseph Table adorned with flowers and a statute of St. Joseph.

Identifying people's gifts and providing an opportunity for them to share it is an essential part of creating our special community. One of our young family members shares her love for baking by preparing cupcakes for our birthdays. Another young adult prepares dessert for our members with diabetes.

We added a ritual where the table with the birthday closest to the program date gets to eat first. Along with singing Happy Birthday, each person can select a birthday gift from our gift basket. One young boy selected a beautiful picture of Jesus which his family hung in the staircase and the boy now says:

“Good Morning, Jesus” as he comes down the stairs each day and says “Good Night, Jesus” on his way to bed. The mother asked if we could make sure his brother gets a Mary picture on his birthday, which we did. Now they say “Good Morning and Good Evening to Mary and Jesus.” The mom proclaimed this action has made a difference in their family and their faith.

Part 3. Sharing Our Faith

In our learning area, chairs are placed in a large oval with a table for our lesson materials. Our lessons incorporate interactive activities to engage people at all times. Our participants enjoy acting stories out, especially with costumes. Children volunteer to carry symbols of our faith around to each person. Flannel board pieces are utilized for storytelling. YouTube videos are used for their shortness and ability to take us back to biblical times. We have cooked bread in bread machines for the aroma when learning about Jesus’ special bread, Eucharist. We have closed our eyes and imagined meeting Jesus. We do small group work, make posters and create stories. Engaging people and repeating the key points in different way involving different senses enhances the learning.

We encourage learning and routines to continue throughout the month in the home with the materials provided in our take home kits. We also include flyers about social events for people with disabilities offered in parishes. Often materials are placed in clear plastic bags, lunch bags or bags color coordinated to the liturgical season.

Part 4. Prayer

We conclude with a prayer service which begins with a procession as the group needs the routine of ritual. We try to engage everyone in carrying an item or doing an action of reverence at the prayer table. We have blessed ourselves with holy water in a bowl that looks like a wave of water. Someone

made a large life size cross with an iron heart in the middle which we have bowed before as we added our pictures to the cross. Our theme song is “God has Made us a Family” by Carey Landry. The words are simple and states our purpose: “God has made us a family and together we will grow in love.” We are blessed with a guitarist and flutist to led our music ministry. The leader offers a simple spontaneous opening prayer.

Originally , we incorporated a reading and a psalm, but for our active group this made the service too long. We sign the three crosses as we sing “Your Word, O Lord is on our minds and on our lips and in our hearts”. We had several parents inform us that they never knew there were words or thoughts to go along with this gesture they have done for years. Singing the words as we do the action helps to guide our people into the correct action. We have added the words “Alleluia. Alleluia, Alleluia. Alleluia” and the simple sign for this word before and after our signing.

The Gospel is proclaimed from the Children’s Lectionary as this translation is easiest for our group to understand. The reading is usually selected to correlate with our lesson. The readings for the week may be downloaded at Pflaum’s website (www.pflaum.com/readings). Treehaus publications (www.treehaus1.com) has lectionaries adapted for children for all three cycles available.

Participants are guided through an interactive reflection of what they heard in the Gospel and are encouraged to share what they think Jesus is calling them to do. Our prayers are offered with us singing “Lord, hear our prayer” to the tune of the five golden rings from the 12 days of Christmas. We recite the Lord’s Prayer and offer each other a sign of peace. Sometimes after the Lord’s prayer, we all take a few steps inside our oval to do a group hug to feel our love for one another and end with a loud “Amen” in response to “And the Lord’s said”. We conclude with a spontaneous closing prayer asking God to send us forth to do whatever our lesson calls

us to do. We conclude in song. Announcements are made including when we will meet again.

Program Content

Liturgical Year

Our first year topic was the liturgical year. We encouraged families to find a place in their home to create a prayer space where they could spend time with their friend Jesus either alone or as a family. Each received a piece of felt to coordinate with the color of the liturgical season. We decorated glass votive candle holders and gave each person a battery operated tea light to put in it. We purchased stand up acrylic 5x7 picture frames for each family and provided a picture for their prayer space that changed monthly.. When a new Bishop arrived, we gave out his picture for the frame. We cut out pictures from old program covers such as Jesus, the shepherd pictures from reconciliation programs, Eucharist pictures from First Communion programs, and Holy Spirit pictures from Confirmation. For other seasons, we utilized calendar pictures, greeting cards, and pictures downloaded from the internet. We concluded the year with each person receiving a special picture of Jesus and a personalized message on the back.

Each year during various liturgical season, we still engage in routine opportunities. During Advent, we reach out to new groups. We invited a parish group to lead us in carols which were intertwined with our own nativity pageant. The backdrop for the stable was made from paper bags outlined with empty wrapping paper rolls. Our angels wore used First Communion dresses and our kings wore beautiful robes borrowed from a parish. When the tallest of the kings had a crown placed on his head, the large smile he had told us he felt like a king! The person who played Joseph was cursing and talking to imaginary voices until he was given baby Jesus

and a special grace feel upon him. The young lady who was Mary became a single mom the following year and we had a baby shower for her. A 65-year-old woman was an angel and carried a star in the procession that we lit when all were in place. She exclaimed "What an honor it is for me to be part of this." Someone asked who are we doing the pageant for and I answered "for us." The parents were overjoyed as their children were given the opportunity to be in these roles, something that never happened in their parish pageants. We taped the pageant and when one family relocated, we sent them a copy the next Christmas to remember the joy we shared together.

Another year, a Lutheran church's bell choir performed Christmas songs for us in between our holiday lessons. We were prayer partners to retired priests with disabilities one year. A musical group called Shepherd's Troupe comprised with members with disabilities performed Christian music through vocal singing, gesturing and liturgical expression another year. A Catholic elementary school chorus sang for us and we gave them bell ornaments as a remembrance of the blind child listening for the bells ringing to find baby Jesus. A team from a neighboring church presented a "Journey through Bethlehem" where we purchased items of Biblical time from the candle maker, the potter, the food market and the bread maker, and concluded at the stable with the Holy Family. In a simpler celebration, we passed out pieces to the manger scene and read the nativity story. When we discussed the gifts the kings brought, one very spirited energetic girl danced around saying "I have God's love to bring to everyone!" The joy she shared still lives on as each year she shares that comment with us. Each year, we welcome the opportunity to celebrate in a different way.

For Lent, we talked about the crucifix as our Lent symbol and asked each family to bring in a cross or a crucifix from their home to share. We purchased extras for those who

did not have one. The stories people shared of the history of their symbols bonded us in a very special way. When studying Scripture, families shared how family Bibles were passed down from generation to generation. An essential aspect of our program is allowing people the opportunity to share their faith stories. We role-played Palm Sunday with paper bags taped to the floor to make a brick road and coats lining the way. Everyone had a real palm to wave, which they took home and put in their prayer space. The person who played Jesus was a 38-year-old quiet gentleman in a wheelchair. After he celebrated Palm Sunday at his parish, he was eager to share how different this Palm Sunday was for him after playing this role and how it has transformed his faith.

In May, one of our team members died unexpectedly and because of transportation and work issues, few of our family members attended her service. We held our own service in a chapel at our next session. As we were sharing our memories, we noticed that the altar had inscribed all the qualities of Our Lady of Victory and these words were the expressed qualities Joanne had shared with us. We truly felt Jesus' loving presence with us. Joanne's mother joined our program the next year until her health kept her from being with us physically. She remained connected to us by making our phone calls. Seven years later, she converted to Catholicism celebrating her initiation at our closing liturgy.

The first year, the parents did not want to take the summer off, but our team needed time to plan the following year. So we found a parish to host a picnic for all the groups in our diocese who serve people with disabilities in July. This yearly event has grown from 30 people to 300 attending. In 2012 year we added an additional site for an August picnic. For some, we are their family and they attended both picnics.

Sacraments

Our second year focused on the seven sacraments. The most memorable experience was our celebration of the sacrament of Reconciliation. We brought from our homes table lamps, end tables, and velvet blankets which were placed over the chairs for the priest and participants. We set up a corner of our large room as the Reconciliation room. Some of our brothers and sisters from the group home did not have the comprehension level to know when they are choosing to do wrong, but our loving priest suggested they come to the reconciliation area and say prayers with him so that they would feel included. When we gathered back in our prayer area, the sun shined through our glass doors reflecting the painted words "Welcome to God's Family" on two walls for all of us to see and know God's love was with us. One of our high school volunteer's aunt, with disabilities and living in a group home, received the sacrament of Confirmation at our year-end Mass.

When we talked about the sacrament of Anointing of the Sick, we talked about our call to comfort people who are sick, which initiated a prayer scarf ministry in our group. Two ladies with developmental disabilities eagerly volunteered to knit our prayer scarves. At our monthly prayer service, we pray for those who are sick by touching the scarf while praying for the person hoping they will feel our love.

We also had homemade interactive spiral books for each sacrament that explained the sacrament in language all our members understood with pictures and movable pieces.

Prayer

Prayer was our theme for year three. We gave each person a photo box labeled "prayer items" to collect items to pray with. As new families joined us we would bless them and present them with a box with the liturgical colored felt pieces and plastic frame with

pictures. We have members who do not read, so we needed to rethink our take home materials. We were blessed to have a volunteer make us items to take home. We received finger rosaries, small hand painted Mary statues, Jesse tree ornaments, Advent pins, love rocks, cross necklaces, paper flower corsages for mothers day, Advent candles, crowns of thorns and spirit key chains.

Justice & Service

The fourth year focused on justice and service. The highlight was a presentation from a family of six refugees where we shared in the pain of their past as they fled from Burma and in the joy of their new life in America. We collected hygiene and cleaning supplies during Advent for refugees. A local animal shelter was recipient of our collection of blankets. We concluded the year with our session at a beautiful retreat center which many of our group had never experienced. When they entered the chapel, they were walking on holy ground and a glow of peace and comfort arose in them.

Year Five: Ten Commandments

In year five we focused on the Ten Commandments. We approached the commandments from a positive view of what we are called to do, and utilized shared presentations, role playing, small groups, and interactive activities with movement. We had a costume for Moses—a white hair Santa wig, black bathrobe with twine belt; the silver cardboard posters—one for each commandment. We would review each month what we had already learned because repetition is great for our participants. Our song for the year was “This Is My Commandment.”

The Bible

Through the generosity of the girls at a Catholic high school, each person received a Bible at their comprehension level for our sixth year on the “Proclamation of the Word.” Our theme song was “The B-I-B-L-E” and we made posters with each letter to engage our lively youth in our prayer service. We learned about the various parts of the Bible, especially the stories found in the Gospels. For Holy Week, we visited a learning station for each day of Holy Week where we listened to the Scripture readings and completed a ritual or activity associated with the day.

Year Seven: The Creed

For the year of the Creed, each person made a felt banner that said “I believe” and each month we placed a different card in the banner with a phrase and picture from the Apostles Creed book from the NICE at University of Dayton http://ipi.udayton.edu/nice_books.html. The Creed was recited in each prayer service. We utilized PowerPoint presentations and video clips as the foundations of our lessons.

Sharing the Good News

This year our theme is “Sharing the Good News.” We began the year with an adapted version of the parents, grandparents, and siblings as evangelizers retreat from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops website: www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/catechesis/catechetical-sunday/new-evangelization/index.cfm. We made evangelizer banners with the words “Know,” “Love and Serve” and picture symbols of Jesus. We are all called to be evangelizers who spread the message of God. We viewed Jesus choosing the twelve apostles at www.youtube.com/watch?v=XhuioVEiIQc and learned about six of the apostles. Team

members distributed stripes with apostle facts. Attentive listeners added the facts to the apostles picture poster as stories were told. The following month, the story is retold using flannel board pieces and people learn about the other six apostles. Each person is given cards with a holographic Jesus picture and the words, “Know, Love and Serve Jesus,” on one side and information about our program on the other side to share with their friends as we reach out to evangelize.

Sacramental Preparation

Catholics with disabilities have a right to participate in the sacraments as full functioning members of the local ecclesial community (Canon 213). People have celebrated First Reconciliation, First Eucharist, Confirmation, and one person was initiated into the Catholic Church. Our Masses are held in our beautiful Basilica. Our music ministry accompanies us. Our celebrants have welcomed us and accommodated the variety of needs of our group. Afterwards, we host an elegant luncheon reception for our group and the family and friends of those celebrating reception of the sacrament

Last year, parents used the Adaptive Kit for sacramental preparation from Loyola Press with very positive results (www.loyolapress.com/special-needs-eucharist-products.htm). We gathered as a community in each person’s home for review sessions. At these session we practiced receiving Eucharist in both forms, we sang refrains to songs, we talked about Jesus’ special meal with his friends, and his special food to feed out hearts and we prayed. We set a regular table and then reset it with the items at the altar. The families shared what a gift it was for us to meet in their home as often people choose not to visit them. For their child to be a host (and make cookies for us), has become a treasured moment on the journey.

Reflections on Our Journey

We have held 10 sessions yearly, for a total of 80. Over the past eight years, we have served 161 people (71 with disabilities, 53 parents, 25 siblings and 14 team members). This year (2012-2013) we have added 23 more participants

In our nine years, we have had many graduates from our program. The first was a shy 15-year-old young man with Down Syndrome who was preparing for Confirmation and joined us for his regular religious education program. After a couple of years, he was initiating interaction with others and his family began ministry in our kitchen. After a year, the mom mentioned their church was going to a soup kitchen on the same Saturday of the month that we met and would like to try this with their son. A year later, the mom who is an Extraordinary Minister of Eucharist was at mass with her child and told him she needed to do her ministry and would leave him to be on the altar. Her son said to her “Mom, I would like to pass out the Jesus food.” She told me they never had called Communion Jesus food. My reply was “He wants to share Jesus with his church family—what greater act of love could he ask to do!” Another member has become a greeter at their parish.

We have seen families join a traditional parish after developing a relationship with our program. They needed a place to be welcomed, feel God’s love, and be empowered to become part of the larger church community. We have witnessed parents become more accepting of their child’s abilities and leave behind the feelings of guilt or anger. Our adults with disabilities, which include mental, physical and developmental and our parents, have an opportunity to minister to each other and not feel isolated from others.

Participants have offered these comments about the program and their experiences:

We love the day. Everyone made us feel welcomed and valued. We are so impressed with the loving care and attention to detail that is evident in every one of our meetings. The spirit of true Christianity is distilled wonderfully.

The residents of our group home truly enjoy attending. They have a place where they can go, learn about religion, share with others, and feel they belong here.

I feel encouraged and enriched after participating in the sessions. My memory was refreshed with the insights given on Catholic teachings.

We look forward very much to our gatherings. They review for us in a very vivid way the essence of Christianity.

We enjoy the lasting friendships we have made—with Christ as the center of our prayer.

Our team has changed throughout the years. We began with five members. Kathy, a lady who had served people with disabilities and now found herself disabled and unable to work offered her time and talent. She utilized her knowledge of the needs of those served with her creative skills and experiences as a den mother to prepare our take home kits and craft projects. She spent hours surfing the internet for ideas and more hours preparing what she found. Stephanie, a catechetical leader who had assisted with the two family retreats joined the team along with Sr. Margaret who was a chaplain with an agency serving people with disabilities. Joanne, a faith-filled teacher with a deep spirituality coordinated our prayer services. My husband was recruited to lead our music ministry. After Joanne's sudden death, Father Ray joined our team for two years, after we had

sent a brochure about our program with our Christmas cards to our retired priests. His reflections on our Gospel were inspirational for our adults and his gentle spirit helped our members with mental illness feel the gift of peace. He was honored when our Bishop granted him permission to confirm one of our members.

We have had youth provide service as part of their requirement for Confirmation with some transitioning to jobs in their field. We have had five parents and two of our participants join our team. The leader who hosted our first family retreats retired and now serves on our team. We had a deacon lead our prayer services for a year and now we have a deacon candidate on our team. Another member who cared for her brother with disabilities until his return to the Lord, donates her time in his memory. She often brings her grandchildren to assist. God has blessed us with the people we need.

Our team meets in July for a pot luck meal and to evaluate the year. We identify the topic for our next year and begin our brainstorming. In August, we meet to plan our first gathering. Then we meet monthly for two hours to plan our sessions.

Concluding Reflections

Participants are welcomed and seen as our brothers and sisters. At our meetings, we learn about their disabilities, but all are seen for their abilities. We truly see the person first and then their disability. Our group has included people of all ages with Down Syndrome, adults with physical disabilities due to aging and accidents, adults with mental illness and children with Autism, ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity disorder) OCD (obsessive compulsion disorder) or cognitive disabilities.

The role that group homes play in creating and maintaining a healthy environment for their clients includes spiritual care. Agencies have expressed gratitude for a place for their Catholic residents to go because they may not

feel welcomed in parishes or do not have the support system to get to know parishioners. We have seen group homes becoming involved in their local parishes as a result of our program. Even the hearts of some of the case workers and aides have been touched.

This experience and the feedback from the parents has empowered us to become stronger advocates for people with disabilities. We have initiated an "Open Doors Disability Awareness Mass" in our parishes where we highlight the inclusion of people with disabilities in the ministries of the Mass. Our program has been featured on our syndicated television program, *Our Daily Bread*, hosted by a diocesan priest who mixes faith and cooking. Last year, our Office of Communications received a grant to create both public service announcements and a disability awareness video highlighting the role of our brothers and sisters with disabilities within the church.

When we began nine years ago, we opened a door to a new program. By listening to the Holy Spirit, we have transformed the spiritual life of people with disabilities empowering them to be the church God calls us to be. Joys

are doubled and pains are halved in our community. New people are welcomed and others find their wings and move onto new horizons always carrying Christ's love to all they meet.

Our church must bring Christ's compassion to each of our brothers and sisters with disabilities and their families. Each person was baptized into our Catholic faith and has a gift to share to build our church. We must see through Jesus' loving eyes, meet them where they are, and journey with them. They must be given the opportunity to share their abilities. Parents need our loving support and siblings need to witness our acceptance and love of their sibling in our community.

Our Lord has called me to encourage you to open the doors in your congregation to create new programs to welcome and serve your brothers and sisters with disabilities. Listen not only with your ears, but with your heart. Our Lord will bring you team members, participants, and the means to develop this ministry. Hopefully this article will plant the seed to inspire you in this important ministry.