



APRIL IS AUTISM AWARENESS MONTH

Embrace. Welcome. Participate.

Embracing Persons with Autism

During the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, Pope St. John Paul II addressed participants for the Jubilee of the Disabled with these stirring words:

"The Church, as my venerable Predecessor Paul VI liked to say, is 'a love that seeks out'. How I would like you all to feel welcomed and embraced in her love! First of all you, dear families: those who have children with disabilities and those who share their experience. I say again to you today that I am close to you. Thank you for the witness you bear by the fidelity, strength and patience of your love."

As Catholics, we are called to welcome all persons with disabilities and during the month of April, there is a particular emphasis on persons with Autism, also known as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Autism is a developmental disability that can cause significant social, communication and behavioral challenges.

There is nothing about the physical

appearance of a person with Autism that would set them apart from other people. Persons with Autism may learn, behave, react, and communicate in ways that are different than others. Some need very little or no assistance with their daily living; others require substantial supports. The intellectual abilities of persons with Autism can range from gifted to profoundly challenged. Autism affects every person differently, even among siblings who both have Autism.

Since there is a range of abilities and needs among persons with Autism, parishes should work with each person with Autism, their parents, and families to determine the best way to include them in the life of the Church. Some parents of children with Autism feel isolated and alone. They can be overwhelmed with the needs of their child and sadly, can feel stigmatized in their families and their communities. As missionary disciples, we are called to be a love that seeks out and embraces persons with Autism and their families!



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

PRAYER FOR AUTISM AWARENESS

God of Mercy,
We ask that you strengthen our resolve and inspire us to create places of welcome for persons with Autism and their families.

Help us to be compassionate to parents whose child has just been diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Help us to be advocates for and with children and adults who are seeking acceptance and access to education, work, services, and therapies.

Help us to be partners with caregivers and service providers to create a continuum of welcome and support for every person with Autism.

Help us to remember that every person is made in Your image and that every life is worth living. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

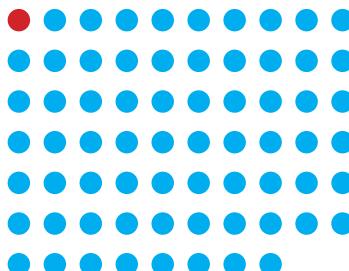
Family: What is our initial reaction to a person with Autism? How will we take time to get to know a person with Autism?

Personal: What can I do to be more welcoming of a person whose disability may make social interaction challenging?

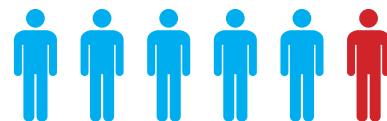
Parish: In what ways can we train our parish ministries to support the participation of families of persons with Autism in parish activities?

How does our parish promote available resources to help persons with Autism grow in the faith?

1% of the world population has autism spectrum disorder.



1 in 68 children are diagnosed with autism.



ASD is almost 5 times more common among boys (1 in 42) than among girls (1 in 189).



40% of children with autism do not speak.

Source: National Autism Association, Autism Speaks, Autism Society

LEARN MORE

- Autism Speaks: www.autismspeaks.org
- Autism Society of Ohio: autismohio.org
- National Catholic Partnership on Disability: www.ncpd.org
- *Ten Things Every Child With Autism Wishes You Knew* by Ellen Notbohm
- *Autism and Your Church: Nurturing the Spiritual Growth of People with Autism Spectrum Disorder* by Barbara J. Newman
- Special Needs Adaptive Learning Kits—www.loyolapress.com

Remember...Individuals with Autism may act differently, but they can participate in all aspects of life: school, work, church. Our differences manifest the greatness of God. Embracing and welcoming individuals with Autism enriches our lives and our communities.