



## 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!



## 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.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

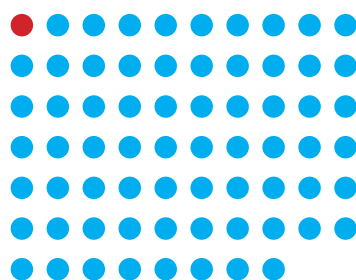
**Family:** What is our initial reaction to a person with Autism? How will we take time to get to know a person with Autism?

**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](http://www.autismspeaks.org)
- Autism Society of Ohio: [autismohio.org](http://autismohio.org)
- National Catholic Partnership on Disability: [www.ncpd.org](http://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](http://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.