

April is Autism Awareness Month

In April, we recognize the gifts of persons with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs), and show how our faith leads us to create communities where all are welcome.

Everybody Belongs...

In Baptism, we become *equal in dignity* as necessary members of the Body of Christ. Because everybody belongs, we provide support and accommodations so that all may worship, grow in faith and celebrate the sacraments. Such access is a baptismal right of every Catholic, including persons with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

Info on Autism Spectrum Disorders

- It is a developmental disability related to varying differences in brain development
- Learning abilities can range from extremely gifted to very challenging
- It will often significantly affect a person's communication, behavior and social skills
- Rates continue to rise; currently estimated at 1 in 68 births
- Some persons are nonverbal
- Autism is 5 times more common in boys
- Persons with autism are most likely in every community, including faith communities

Catholic Resources

Catholics with Autism

www.CatholicswithAutism.org

Adapted Sacramental Prep Kits

www.loyolapress.com/special-needs.htm

USCCB Pastoral Statement

<http://tinyurl.com/m4l43bb>

USCCB Welcome and Justice

<http://tinyurl.com/my6gn9v>

USCCB Sacramental Guidelines

<http://tinyurl.com/m9se6hc>

We are one Church, with a single Shepherd.



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Tips for Creating Faith Communities Where All Are Welcome

Every person bears God's image. Every person is a unique gift from God. And everyone has a need to express their spiritual nature, nurtured by faith in Jesus.

- Practice Christ-like hospitality, as autism can create social isolation for the whole family; networking with others builds stronger communities.
- Every human being is a person *first*, not a diagnosis; use *people first* language by referring to a "person with autism," rather than "an autistic person."
- Some individuals may not be able to attend an entire Mass; they may need extra space in the pew or to take a break.
- Walking around a room or having an object to hold can often provide a person the ability to focus and feel calm.
- Some persons may be more affected by lights, sounds and scents; respect their sensitivities.
- Persons who are non-verbal can receive the Sacraments of Reconciliation, Eucharist and Confirmation, as they can express their spiritual understanding through gestures or signs of reverence.

"Respect for persons with disabilities and including them equally in the life of the Church is crucial for our understanding of the human person."

"Every parish should seek out its parishioners with... disabilities, support them with love and concern, and ensure that they have ready access to a catechetical program suited to their needs and abilities."

- National Directory for Catechesis, 61

Other Resources

Autism Society of America

<http://www.autism-society.org/>

Autism Spectrum Disorders at cdc.gov

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/index.html>

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