

## A Drama of Love

### A Christian Educator's Guide to Creating Classes Where Everyone Belongs

*A courageous young couple had adopted a badly battered child. Tommy was 5 but could say only two words, "car" and "bye-bye."*

*Easter Sunday dawned with all the Sunday school gathered for the annual pageant. Every child would have a line to say.*

*The young couple sat stiffly, aching for Tommy to have a part but only too aware of that impossibility. Maybe they should have stayed home. They'd already discussed that idea but Tommy was so excited about coming to Sunday school.*

*The 5-year-olds meandered to the front of the church. Tommy's teacher knelt in front of her squirming pupils and began to describe the Palm Sunday triumphal procession.*

*"All the people lined the streets," she said. "They waved palm branches in the air and shouted...."*

*The children responded, "Hosanna! Hosanna!" Their enthusiasm more than matched that of bygone eras.*

*Then gently looking at little Tommy, she continued. "And Jesus rode through the gate on a white donkey because he had no..."*

*"Car!" shouted Tommy, with a grin that dimmed the Easter sunrise. His class marched off at the end of the story waving and shouting, "Bye-bye!"*

*-- by Lauraine Snelling*

**The purpose of this resource is to help Christian education teachers create classes and churches that include students with physical challenges, communication difficulties and/or intellectual disabilities so all members can share, care and nurture**

**each other. Christian education is the nurture of faith. This is understood to mean more than the intellectual acceptance of faith ideas, but also knowing God intuitively and experientially.**

### A Drama of Love--Synopsis

"So in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all others."

-- Romans 12:5 (NIV)

Our common ground in the community of Christ is sharing, caring and learning from all members without regard to gifts, wealth, heritage, race, gender or ability. To belong is to be accepted and valued because we are children of God.

Community is built through shared experiences. It is vitally important to have worship, education and social activities that include everyone, young and old, those with and without disabilities.

To this end we propose the following call:

1. We believe that the church is the body of Christ, a community of believers, inclusive of all people regardless of age, sex, race or ability. Our shared humanity and common Creator bring us together.
2. We believe the church is called to discern and utilize the gifts of all persons. The gifts of persons with disabilities bring wholeness and completion to the community.
3. We believe that churches should be barrier free, structurally and attitudinally. A church that is accessible to all provides appropriate

programming and seeks to break down misconceptions, prejudice, and stereotypes, truly loving others as ourselves.

4. We believe that the church stands as an example of acceptance, respect, honesty and empowerment, intentionally "standing with" persons with disabilities, their families, and friends. We seek to follow Jesus' example of loving relationships and interactions.

### Setting the Stage

We have learned over the last 20 years that people with physical challenges, communication difficulties, or intellectual disabilities have often been isolated unnecessarily in institutions, special schools, sheltered workshops, etc. Because of this history, we also are tempted to think that Christian education in a segregated setting is the only option.

Ideally, we think churches should begin with the goal of integrating its members into existing church school classes. Few modifications are needed for those with physical challenges or communication difficulties. Additional creativity is needed for integrating people with intellectual disabilities, but it is easier when started in childhood and youth. Some graduated possibilities for a student with a disability in a regular Sunday school class are:

- without supports
- with internal support, such as peer buddies or circle of friends
- with external support, such as an assistant teacher
- with supplemental instruction
- part time regular/part time segregated settings

--full time segregated setting with reverse mainstreaming.

Rather than requiring intellectually disabled persons to adjust to the regular classroom, reverse mainstreaming integrates non-disabled persons into the segregated class once or twice a month. In consultation with family, teachers and the person with a disability, a decision must be made on an individual basis as to what kind of setting meets the needs of that student. The decision needs constant review.

Some questions to ask as decisions are made:

- Does the individual feel comfortable and a part of what is occurring in the classroom?
- Is the individual's faith development being nurtured through experiences of being loved, belonging to the community, and learning to trust in God through experiencing trusting relationships with other Christians?
- Can the individual be enabled to participate in the regular class with the help of an assistant or by providing consultation to the teacher?

### Director's Notes

*"I have learned more about the Gospels from handicapped people, those in the margins of society, those who have been crushed and hurt, than I have from the wise and prudent." -- Jean Vanier.*

When persons with disabilities are excluded from the mainstream, we are all at risk. When we choose to live only with persons that look like us, think like us, and act like us, we gradually close off our acceptance of that which is different. We associate our physical beauty with spiritual beauty. But as

Mary Jane Owens, a disability advocate, writes, "What's so important about wrapping paper on our souls?"

Our value to God isn't determined by the nature of our physical wrapping paper. When we truly share our lives with others, our initial impressions of differentness and unusualness change. We begin to recognize that we ourselves are the barriers to wholeness in the lives of persons with disabilities. Our views limit, or handicap, others by not allowing them to try to succeed or even to fail.

Most people respond to persons with disabilities in four ways:

**Ignoring.** Afraid we will say or do the wrong thing, we may distance ourselves, rather than risk embarrassment or failure. Persons with disabilities tell us that to be ignored is the greatest punishment of all; it denies one's existence as a human being with spiritual, emotional, and social needs.

**Becoming too helpful.** Rushing to assist without asking permission can appear patronizing. Showering kindness and pity can make a person feel like a non-entity. The handicap becomes the focus rather than the person's unique abilities and individualness.

**Allocating "hero" status.** Putting persons with disabilities on pedestals, seeing them as superhuman individuals and sources of inspiration, places unrealistic expectations on individuals. While some individuals deserve recognition and praise, we create additional burdens for the average person with a disability when we expect all people with disabilities to be "superpeople."

**Treating all persons according to the Golden Rule.** Able-bodied and disabled people share the same range of personalities and behaviors. Persons with disabilities often need assistance from others, but when helpers ask permission before they assist, wait for an answer, and listen for direction, they show value and give the gift of respect. Eye contact, standing beside, and touch communicate as much as the content of our speech.

To learn to treat others according to the Golden rule, we must begin by asking ourselves, "What scares me most about a particular disability? Why do I retreat? What am I afraid of? How would I want to be treated?"

After feelings about disabilities are identified and named, we can gather accurate information and learn about the experiences of people with disabilities. By remembering our own experiences of being misunderstood, we will be more in tune to the isolation, misperceptions, or prejudices that persons with disabilities often experience.

Identifying feelings and remembering the pain from our own experiences readies us to reach out to persons with disabilities. Knowledge and direct contact with persons frequently alleviates fears that marginalize others.

By facing our fears, unleashing our feelings, and sharing our lives with others, we break the barriers that keep "us" from "them." We enter a "we" that is truly community, truly Christ-centered.

## **Characterizations**

Remember that at your students are first of all people. Most of their needs are like those of others even though physical

or mental ability is different. Also, acknowledge that all students are different from each other in their likes, dislikes, personalities, learning styles, and physical abilities. The following list of generalizations must be qualified by getting to know the individual.

**Developmental Disabilities** (learning occurs more slowly)

- a. Recognize that persons who have intellectual disabilities have varied characteristics. Approximately 80 percent of all persons affected are considered "mildly" impaired. They can read and write and use logical reasoning. Although those with "moderate" or "severe" impairments may not be able to read or write, these individuals learn and develop a sincere faith through concrete illustrations, experiences and imitating others.
- b. Treat students as you would others the same age. For example, diminutive forms of first names such as "Johnny" or "Susie" should be avoided when addressing adults.
- c. When teaching, begin with concrete examples, then move to more abstract.
- d. Use simple, concise sentences.
- e. Give individuals a chance to make their own decisions. Ask questions about wants or wishes if they are unable to express themselves in sentences.
- f. Praying can be taught by using short, simple phrases and asking persons to repeat each phrase after you.

**Learning Disabilities** (a hidden disability--intellectual ability is intact, difficulties occur in specific areas such as listening, remembering, reading, or expressing ideas)

- a. Speak with parents or teachers to find out the nature of the specific disability and the learning strategies and styles the student prefers. The student may need more time to complete work or alternate ways of learning such as using tapes, conducting interviews, hands-on activities.
- b. Focus on his/her abilities and provide classroom opportunities to share talents and develop self-confidence.
- c. Encourage organization by providing written schedules of activities.
- d. Persons with learning disabilities will often have creative ideas. Allow time to share ideas and opinions.
- e. Overt adaptations may sometimes seem demeaning to students with disabilities so refrain from round robin reading. Don't force students to read aloud if reading is difficult.

**Mobility Challenges** (restricted body movements)

- a. Never move or take hold of a wheelchair or other assistive device without first asking permission. Unexpected movement can cause injury. Further, a person's wheelchair is an extension of his/her body space; respect it as you would have others respect yours.
- b. Look the person in the face when talking. Pull up a chair to maintain eye level contact during prolonged conversations. You won't be towering over the person and he/she won't get a strained neck from looking up.
- c. Initiate a friendly conversation. Acknowledge the person's presence by conversation and eye contact. Most persons using assistive devices can speak for themselves.

- d. Give the gift of time, allow persons to do things themselves, and allow time to do it.

**Communication Difficulties** (difficulty communicating clearly)

- a. Ask the individual to repeat statements you don't understand.
- b. Don't simplify your speech just because a person may have difficulty articulating.
- c. Be prepared to get to know alternative speech devices, such as communication boards, so you can converse meaningfully.
- d. Allow persons to finish what they have begun to say; don't finish for them.

**Visual Impairments** (partial to full loss of sight)

- a. Always say your name when addressing a person who is blind or visually impaired and indicate when you are leaving.
- b. When walking with a person with blindness, let him/her hold your arm rather than taking his/her arm. Walk alongside and slightly ahead.
- c. Seat persons to the side of a room or near some landmark so they can obtain a direction for travel. Open areas can be disconcerting.
- d. Don't pet a guide dog in harness. This can distract the dog.

**Hearing Impairments** (partial to full loss of hearing)

- a. In the presence of an interpreter, speak to and look directly at the person with hearing difficulties.
- b. When a person is lip-reading, look the person directly in the face when speaking, making sure you are in

appropriate lighting so the person can see your face.

- c. Avoid covering your mouth when speaking. Moustaches and beards make lip-reading more difficult as well.
- d. Shouting only makes words more difficult to understand since hearing aids make sounds louder, not clearer.
- e. Have paper and pen handy to provide alternative communication if speech falls.
- f. Persons relying heavily on lip-reading benefit if cued as new topics are introduced.
- g. In crowded, noisy rooms, partners can provide additional cuing when topics change, speakers begin or directions are introduced.
- h. Speaker notes given to individuals before presentations call facilitate communication. Listing songs in the bulletin helps prepare persons for singing.

**Emotional or Behavioral Disabilities** (unexpected behavior changes that interfere with dally functioning)

- a. Accept positive qualities; don't avoid interactions because of unpredictable behavior.
- b. Be aware that there may be quick changes, ups and downs that change quickly or remain for prolonged periods.
- c. Encourage conversation about feelings and relationships, but recognize when you and the individual have had enough and need a break from each other.
- d. Be open to the kind of relationship that the person currently can provide.

## Preparing the Actors

This section turns attention from the leader's personal awareness to the leader as an instrument of awareness with class members.

Walking in someone else's shoes arouses empathy, understanding, and makes persons with disabilities seem less threatening. When conducted in this spirit of awareness, simulation activities can promote further interest in disability issues. However, simulations have their limitations. They only represent a small, contrived sample of what it's like to have a disability since simulation participants can escape the "disability" whenever they wish. Therefore, the simulation tone should be one in which students explore 1) what it would be like to continue the simulation for a week or month 2) how the disability would influence behavior as well as 3) feelings and problem solving strategies that accompany simulations and real life situations.

Following simulation activities, encourage students to explore:

- How did I feel?
- What barriers did I encounter?
- What would have made a difference?
- How did other people help me?
- How did they treat me?
- What did I experience regarding patience, humility, dependence, joy, and success?
- In what ways did I change? Remain the same?
- What difference will this make in my relationship with others?

The following activities can be adapted for church members of all ages:

### **Mobility/dexterity simulations**

- a. Borrow a wheelchair, crutches or use masking tape to keep knees and

ankles together. Be careful to prevent injury by using tape that can be easily broken if balance is lost.

Assign students to visit selected areas of the church, i.e. restrooms, balcony, small classrooms, drinking fountains or enter from the parking lot. This is an excellent activity to follow for an accessibility check of your church's facilities. Students may now experience exclusion in their own churches.

- b. Place slings on dominant arms, socks on writing hands or tie rolled-up newspapers around a limb so bending is impossible. Ask students to eat snacks, tie shoes, put on a coat, comb hair, complete a puzzle or carry things to another room.

### **Hearing simulations**

- a. Play Simon Says using earplugs or silently mouthing the directions.
- b. Put cotton balls or earplugs in both ears. Assign students to attend other classes and ask them to write down what the teacher or speaker is saying. What non-verbal behaviors helped or hindered the listening process? What did it feel like to miss out on what was being said? How did others treat you? What would you do differently if you didn't hear well? How could you help someone in your classroom with hearing problems?

### **Vision simulations**

- a. Tape several layers of plastic wrap or sandwich bags to old sunglasses. Ask students to read from their Sunday school materials or complete a "hands on" activity with peers. Try typing a verse in large, primary type and have students read this and compare it to small print. If you have a student with a learning or

developmental disability, allow him/her to be the only group member without glasses. By "disabling" others and allowing person with a disability to be more able, you are providing a reverse disability simulation. In this way, all learn what it's like to walk in another's shoes. This opportunity for leadership will be appreciated by peers and encourage greater sensitivity to all needs in the classroom and to the relative nature of disabilities.

- b. Ask a friend who is visually impaired to attend your class and teach students how to assist persons with visual difficulties. Then blindfold half the class, pair each with a student "guide" and complete activities written on cards such as wash hands in the bathroom, drink from the fountain, count out \$1 worth of change, secure a church bulletin, make a telephone call or find a seat in the auditorium. Encourage students to estimate where they are and how far they are from class. Note: keep student teams inside and away from stairs to avoid accidents.

### **Learning simulations**

- a. Students hold blank 3x5 index cards to their foreheads. They are then directed to write 2- 4-6-8-10 quickly onto the cards. They'll be surprised at the upside down, backwards nature of their writing. Now, in pairs, students will work together, learning how to write the numbers correctly on other cards pressed to their foreheads. Partners are encouraged to give directions, guide hands, fold cards for spacing and discover their own strategies for succeeding. As

groups discover helpful strategies, they can share them with peers. Follow up questions could include: What was the hardest part of the activity? What made it easier? Did you and your partner improve? Note how breaking down the activity into easier, smaller steps allows persons with learning difficulties to master the whole task.

- b. Conduct a "reverse" Simon Says. "Tell students you will give directions but they are to reverse them for their feet only (i.e., When I say, "Stand on your left foot," you should stand on your right foot). Further, reverse "over" and "under." When Simon asks you to put your right hand over your knee, you should put it under your knee. Proceed with simple directions, remembering to say " Simon Says" on a few occasions. Show your frustration with their inability to follow directions accurately. Encourage them to listen more carefully. Conclude the sessions with opportunities for students to vent their feelings concerning their inability to follow accurately and being the brunt of teacher frustration.

### **Personalizing disabilities**

- a. On paper, students will list their daily activities from time of awakening until bedtime. Select a visual, hearing, learning, emotional or mobility and identify activities a person would not be able to accomplish having the disability. List activities you could do and identify the specific help needed. Discuss with others sharing the same disability how your life would be affected, focusing especially on feelings experienced.

- b. Students draw scenes depicting persons with disabilities mid w rite stories about the drawings. Attitudes can be evaluated by examining and discussing the stories.

## Performance Tips

This section offers several tips for teachers to include Students in the classroom.

1. Become acquainted with all students in your class, especially those with disabilities. As a prospective teacher introduce yourself to parents or caretakers. Indicate your desire to communicate and get to know students. Request the following information:
  - As a parent, I would like my child to learn (in Sunday school) ...
  - Things she/he does well are...
  - Interests or hobbies she/he has are...
  - Areas in which she/he seems ready to grow are...
  - Things that support his/her growth are...
  - Medical or physical considerations a teacher should know are...These questions can be reformatted to obtain student input.
2. Give your students what you naturally give to all students--love, praise, acceptance and especially your faith.
3. When a student needs assistance, do things WITH rather than FOR him or her. Give assistance only when necessary or requested. Diminish the assistance as soon as possible.
4. You're the model for your non-disabled students. Demonstrate your respect for students with disabilities by using age appropriate activities, language and interactions. Value

- input from all students. Greet students with disabilities as you do others. Point out success and positive changes for all to celebrate.
5. Position the student with a disability so he/she can participate actively in classroom activities and you are free to lend a supportive physical presence if necessary.
  6. Know your student's communication preferences and teach them to the others so all can interact. If signing or alternative communication systems are used, learn enough to give basic directions and positive feedback. If this isn't feasible, draft adult volunteers skilled in a particular system to come at least one Sunday a month.
  7. Comment specifically and positively on cooperative relationships between disabled and non-disabled students.
  8. Don't assume that all students will respond negatively to specific characteristics that make you uneasy. Don't underestimate the sensitivity of students.
  9. Set firm, clearly outlined limits. Give regular feedback with concrete suggestions for appropriate behavior. Move freely during class to keep students attending and receiving attention frequently (touch, eye contact, use of name).
  10. For students having difficulty with seat work, alternate activities at tables, on the floor or while standing.
  11. Be sure directions are given in at least two modalities. Spoken directions can be accompanied with pictures, printed directions or demonstrations. State directions simply, one step at a time and with a minimum of distractions.
  12. Speak privately to misbehaving students. In extreme cases

- "contracts" can be negotiated with appropriate behaviors defined and rewards and consequences outlined.
13. Don't shelter or limit classroom involvement for students with disabilities. Give them meaningful jobs within the classroom. If they cannot complete them independently, plan to allow for partial participation. The student might be able to say "Amen" after prayer, but not plan an entire prayer. Or, she/he could learn the first verse rather than the entire chapter.
  14. Train a buddy to assist with materials management and to complete difficult tasks. Teach the buddy to ask permission before assisting and to praise effort and persistence.
  15. Whenever possible, have classmates interview each other for similar interests and feelings. Work on designing win-win tasks where all persons are needed in order to succeed. Allow students time to think and respond. Become comfortable with long pauses.
  16. Organize a "floating teacher" program in which adults or high school students assist in the classroom on a rotating basis. Such teachers could adapt activities and give additional assistance.
  17. Actively teach friendship and social skills to all students. Non-disabled students need practice creating friendships without fostering dependence. Progress should be charted and celebrated by the entire class, just as class goals are celebrated.
  18. Students can be heterogeneously grouped for projects and activities to include individuals with diverse physical, academic and social talents. Cooperation is enhanced if each

student is given a specific job contribution to the group goal. For example, a time monitor tells groups how much time they have to work. The time monitor can inform the group when they are halfway through the time allotment and alert them when five minutes remain. For students who can't tell time, a kitchen timer can be used with a piece of tape indicating where to set the buzzer.

## **Writing and Directing the Script**

Consider the following steps in planning for individuals with disabilities being integrated into regular Sunday school classrooms.

1. Examine your teacher's guide and pupil materials with specific students in mind.
2. For students with learning difficulties, select one or two objectives upon which you will focus.
3. Choose activities that appear appropriate for the chosen objectives, plan multi-sensory and experiential activities using vision hearing and "hands-on" presentation modes.
4. With a highlighter pen mark main points in selected student books as needed. Rewrite Bible stories that are difficult for students to read or secure simpler versions of the story from a lower grade level and retype them. Retyping is all age-appropriate mode for older students. In rewriting stories, use shorter sentences and fewer multi-syllable words.
5. Provide choices in activities for students by developing assignment cards for independent or small group

work. Activities presented in teacher guides can be readily adapted to assignment cards for independent or small group work. Each assignment can be tailored to the strengths of individual students without calling attention to disabilities. For example, some students can be reading an alternative version of the lesson, some can be drawing pictures to accompany the story presented, some could be completing verse puzzles and some could be listening to stories on tape.

6. For students with learning difficulties, lesson content could be audio taped and sent home with students on the Sunday before the lesson is scheduled. Songs and verses can also be taped and presented to students before being introduced in class. Further, caregivers could introduce the lesson before the Sunday session. Pre-teaching allows students additional practice and familiarity which can enhance their in-class participation and enjoyment. Youth groups could tape an entire year of content in one evening together.

#### **When Reading Becomes a Barrier**

7. Pair facile and emerging readers together to work on puzzles of memory verses, matching colors or shapes. When completed, puzzle texts should be read aloud.
8. Mark a Bible or song book with colored pieces of paper. When it's time to turn to the text, hold up the appropriate color so the correct passage is found.
9. Provide opportunity for students to draw pictures about a Bible story or its application. Encourage students to write or dictate information about

their pictures. Accept their misspellings, work for communicating meaning.

10. Use litanies with single, repetitive phrases that all can learn with practice.
11. Become a storyteller rather than always reading Sunday school stories. All ages enjoy well-told stories.
12. Above all else, look at the content of your lesson through a different lens. Use these opportunities to create awareness and understanding of God's vision for one body of reconciled and reconciling believers.

#### **Staging: Managing Classroom Behavior**

Above all else, church is a place modeling unconditional love for all persons, authentically open to sharing resources in problem solving. Blaming someone for disruptive behavior only builds barriers to real learning and love. Ask parents or caretakers what works at home. Consult with other educators in your church. Getting to know students better is the first step toward solving problems. Over 80 percent of misbehavior is motivated by attention. Therefore, give attention for appropriate behavior, catch people being good. "Thank you for doing..." works. Up to 70 percent of all behavior problems can be prevented through non-verbal communication. Just moving closer to someone provides needed attention and structure. Similarly, misbehavior often occurs when persons experience frustration in communicating their needs and desires. Being knowledgeable about individual communication preferences will result in less aggressive behavior and more appropriate group functioning.

Value each persons' gifts and unique contributions verbally and non-verbally. Consider the following hierarchical sequence (moving from non verbal to verbal modes in managing behavior as needed):

### **Non-verbal Interventions**

1. **Ignoring.** For chronic, mild disruptions such as interrupting, calling out or whining, plan to ignore the behavior. However, as soon as appropriate behavior is evidenced, provide attention.
2. **Signaling.** Just as you develop group signs or signals that let students know when to come to attention or stop an activity, develop individual signals such as clear your throat, point to a seat, make eye contact with raised eyebrows, or shake your head "no." Pausing, waiting while remaining silent, can also bring students to attention. Facial expressions convey more information than words, tone, volume or positioning. Winks, smiles or nods go a long way in signaling shared values and behaviors. A calm, even tone of voice signals a safe environment. Lowering voice volume encourages attention and models a quieter tone for all. Similarly, an enthusiastic rise in voice pitch and volume signals active participation and energetic involvement. Singing a hymn whenever groups or individuals become too rambunctious can bring students attention back as well as taped music chosen by students.
3. **Standing/Sitting Nearby.** Move freely among students. Anticipate problems and needs and move toward students. Being a half-step away can encourage cooperative

group involvement. Close proximity also allows teachers opportunities to monitor students understanding and remove nearby materials that may be distracting.

4. **Touching.** Light, gentle physical touch can direct students towards appropriate tasks. Be aware though, that some do not want to be touched and other methods will be more effective.

### **Verbal Interventions**

1. **Modeling.** Identify social values you think are important such as being polite, sharing materials, offering assistance, etc. Complete a self analysis. If I want students to share materials, how am I sharing? Teachers who share have sharing students. If sharing is important, talk about it in class and recognize it publicly when others practice it.
2. **Name dropping.** Address persons by their names when asking questions, commenting, giving examples, or telling stories. Just saying the person's name and pausing can cue him/her to stop an activity. Further conversations about the inappropriateness of a behavior should be done in private conversations, not in front of a class.
3. **Communicating expectations.** For elementary age students misusing property or materials, for example say, "Pencils are not for hitting, pencils are for writing." The positively phrased ending tells students what they should do, not just what is not accepted. A variation of this strategy can be used with all ages. Clearly identify the person, the inappropriate behavior and then the appropriate response.

"Jason stop teasing Sarah and help us sing."

4. **Rule reminders.** If rules are clearly understood, reminding students by repeating the rule when an infraction occurs can curb negative behaviors. If the behavior continues, consequences should follow.
5. **Reinforcing positive behaviors.** Clearly define an appropriate behavior that could be evidenced more frequently by a student. Following its occurrence, provide positive comments, smiles, pat on the back or other social reinforcement. Sometimes teachers will need to provide activity rewards such as time for games, plays, videos or art activities. As a first resort, use smiley faces, stickers, award buttons, magazines or points/tokens that can be traded for concrete objects. Move to more social rewards as soon as possible.
6. **Consequences.** Work to keep all students in the classroom. Occasionally, teachers may "regroup" students by asking individuals to move to another area or seating position. These times should be of brief duration (less than two minutes) and should be viewed as positive times for students. A calm, serious, yet caring manner provides respect and dignity for the person being disciplined and motivates self-control.

### **Teacher Planning**

Preventing behavior problems in the classroom is largely a function of effective planning.

1. **Knowing students.** Make a list of activities your students enjoy and use them to teach Bible content. Win

over negative leaders by offering them choices in the classroom or assistant teacher opportunities. Access to content prior to the lesson date can allow a student to be an "expert" the following Sunday. Pairing students to work together requires careful understanding of student needs and skills.

2. **Classroom rules.** Analyze the environment to determine the need for rules. With student assistance develop rules (no more than five), state them in positive terms (i.e., listen when others speak), post them and teach them. Define limits and determine natural logical consequences. For some students, one-to-one practice, examples and role playing are needed. Reviewing rules at the beginning of each class can signal appropriate behavior.
3. **Classroom routines.** Teach students what is expected upon arrival, during transition between activities and in preparing to leave. Many students need structure and routine to feel safe enough to share and learn. Plan to alternate low energy activities such as reading with high energy activities like role playing.
4. **Appoint a buddy.** "Buddies" or "team members" can take a student on a walk, for a break or help students refocus. Occasionally these could be volunteer adult "partners" in primary classrooms. Persons with disabilities can also be partners in other age group classrooms.

### **Specific Behaviors**

Most behaviors evidenced by persons with disabilities are no different than those non-disabled persons. Occasionally the timing of specific behaviors appears inappropriate or

causes discomfort to others. Consider the following behaviors and responses.

1. **Hugging.** Some people prefer to be hugged only by close friends or family members. Embraces can be avoided by anticipating the possibility and extending a handshake along with a greeting. Frequently, family or caregivers are working to discourage indiscriminate hugging, and by entering into the hugging you may be going against their wishes. If hugging is an ongoing issue, ask families and caregivers concerning suggestions about hugging and touching. Sometimes touching occurs that is inappropriate, such as stroking someone's hair or touching private parts. Again, ask caregivers for advice. Often it is okay to say in a serious tone, "No, I don't want you to touch me there." Follow with a suggestion concerning where they may touch you, such as, "You may touch my shoulder." or "You may shake my hand."
2. **Verbal outbursts.** Churches and Sunday schools have quiet times when groups are listening or reflecting. Sometimes individuals with learning and communication difficulties will interrupt these times with verbal outbursts, noises or singing. Note when these occur, what preceded the outbursts and what is followed. This information can help teachers prevent such behaviors by providing for their needs more appropriately. On occasions where outbursts can not be predicted, an advocate can sit nearby to distract or otherwise engage the individual. Occasionally, a short walk around the outer sanctuary will calm the person. However, removal

is not the ultimate solution and should rarely be used. Awareness that the behavior may be symptomatic of a disability or reflecting developmental age can increase understanding and patience in working toward changing our attitudes. Changing our way of looking at outbursts will enhance our understanding of God's love and grace. Outbursts call trigger thoughts of thanksgiving and joy that we are all included in the body of Christ. No one is excluded. God's love is inclusive.

## Sharing the Drama

Persons with disabilities can contribute to church ministry in meaningful and worthwhile ways. Think about every aspect of your church's mission--what jobs need to be done? Keep in mind:

1. All individuals have preferences. What one person thinks appropriate for another may not be of interest to that person. Ask, listen and collaborate.
2. Be sure the jobs chosen are worthwhile, important and productive. Token jobs can demean rather than empower. Ask the question, "If this job isn't done, will it be missed? Will the church suffer?"
3. Part of the discernment process is developing skills and interests. Persons may not be able to complete all aspects of an activity. Let them do the parts they can. Develop and practice the skills needed. Don't be afraid to adapt a job and have it done in a way that it has never been done before.

4. Working together can get the job done nicely and build friendship, respect and a common bond.
5. Members with physical disabilities can contribute in most church positions, with appropriate adaptations. Individuals with developmental disabilities could be considered for the following:
  - Turn overhead transparencies for singing or sermon outlines
  - Greeter
  - Usher
  - Nursery or Sunday school assistant
  - Participate as honorary pallbearer
  - Assist librarian
  - Fold bulletins, stuff inserts
  - Set tables, clean up for senior luncheons or fellowship meals
  - Recite or read scripture
  - Say a prayer
  - Choose all opening song
  - Place music or songbooks in pews
  - Assist sound person
  - Give testimony or announcement
  - Hold microphone for church sharing time
  - Ring bell at end of Sunday school
  - Pick up attendance records
  - Water church plants
  - Contribute to church banner production
  - Provide speaker with water during service
  - Stuff mailboxes
  - Assist grounds keepers
  - Send birthday cards to church members
  - Sing with choir when familiar songs are sung
6. Start a Support group for individuals with disabilities and their caregivers in your church or community.
7. For persons with visual difficulties use Bibles, hymns or litanies in Braille or large print. Offer persons entering your congregation a tour of your church, describing rooms, programs and activities as you go.
8. Develop a respite care program for families with severe disabilities so parents can have some time for themselves. Volunteer to provide such child or adult care services.
9. Start a mentor program in which persons with developmental disabilities are matched with church members who spend time together each month, sit in the same pew and join in managing efforts for autonomy and independent living.
10. Make sure bulletin boards show pictures of persons with disabilities as well as other minority groups. By considering disabilities to be a "minority" persons are often more aware of how they discriminate unintentionally. Include disability issues in all studies of minorities, cultural diversity and pluralism.
11. Use accessibility checklists and spearhead fundraising for items your church needs such as ramps or amplifying devices.

## **Curtain Call**

Christian education teachers have the great privilege of nurturing the faith of students. But the faith of the teacher will also be nurtured through the insights and experience of the students in the class. This is the Drama of Love

## Resources

### Books and Materials

Berkowitz, Poill. *Community dreams: ideas for enriching neighborhood and community life*. San Luis Obispo: Impact Publishers, 1989.

Blackford, Philip and Audrey King. *Count me in!: A guide to teaching disabled and able-bodied children together*. Toronto: Is Five Dress, 1985.

Dielman, Dale. *Stop staring start sharing: A leaders guide to barrier-breaking youth ministry*. Grand Rapids: The Young Calvinists Federation, 1992.

Exley, Helen. *What it is like to be me*. New York: Friendship Press, 1984.

Goving, Stewart. *Strong at the broken places: Persons with disabilities and the church*, 1989.

Neufeldt, Aldred H. *Celebrating differences*. Newton: Faith and Life Press, 1984.

Perske Robert. *Circle of friends*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988.

Preheim-Bartel, Dean and Neufeldt, Aldred H. *Supportive care in the congregation*, Akron, PA: Mennonite Central Committee, 1986.

Religion Division, AAMR. *Dimensions of faith and congregational ministries with persons with developmental disabilities and their families*. AAMR Religion Division, 1991.

Vanier, Jean. *The broken body*. Mahweh: Paulist Press, 1988.

Willems, Jane. *Including persons with handicaps: A Sunday school teacher's guide*. Scottsdale: Mennonite Publishing House, 1984.

### Video/Film

*Blessed Be*. 8 minutes. Paulist Publications. The beatitudes, as lived in the lives of individuals with developmental disabilities.

*Everyone Counts*. 20 minutes. Highlights ways 5 congregations are including people with developmental disabilities.

*Welcome One, Welcome All*. 30 minutes. Ministry Of Disabled People. Demonstrates the teaching of the gospel to children with disabilities.

### Puppets

*The Kids on the Block*. Troupe of non disabled and disabled puppets that teach children what it's like to have a disability. The Kids on the Block, 3509 M Street NW, Washington, DC 20007

### Writers

This resource was developed by Judy H. Mullet, Ph.D. candidate, Assistant Professor of Education, at Eastern Mennonite College (EMC), and Paula Snyder, a special education teacher certification student at EMC

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Church of the Brethren  
Church and Persons with Disabilities  
Network  
1451 Dundee Avenue  
Elgin, IL 60120  
Phone: 708-742-5100

Mental Health & Disability Program  
MCC Canada  
134 Plaza Drive  
Winnipeg, MB R3T 5K9  
Phone: 204-261-6381

Anabaptist Disabilities Network  
(ADNet)  
PO Box 959  
Goshen, IN 46527-0959  
Phone/Fax: 1-877-214-9838  
Web: <http://www.adnetonline.org>  
Email: [adnet@adnetonline.org](mailto:adnet@adnetonline.org)