

### Accessible and inclusive

We celebrate every effort faith communities make to become more accessible to all. Yet a church that stops at accessibility is like a home-run hitter who stops running at first base, implies author Brett Webb-Mitchell. When a church installs a lift or ramp, we cheer. Getting in the door is essential. But once people with disabilities are inside, let's not stop until they are fully included in the body of Christ.

What does it mean for a faith community to fully include, welcome, and embrace persons with a variety of developmental and intellectual disabilities? While the scope of this question is large, every faith community can identify and move forward toward greater inclusion in specific, small ways. Consider one simple yet profound aspect of every congregation's life together: prayer.

### Worshipping alongside

"People with and without developmental disabilities should worship *alongside* each other," contends Erik Carter in *Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities: A Guide for Service Providers, Families, and Congregations*.

A new resource, *Rhythms of Grace: Worship and Faith Formation for Children and Families with Special Needs* offers worship materials to help make such worship a rich experience for all.

Its authors believe that anyone can benefit from **experienced-based worship**, and to that end, they offer a series of monthly, scripture-based sessions and worship resources. Together these comprise a curriculum for year one of a liturgical cycle. Episcopal in heritage and ecumenical in focus, the book outlines specific ideas for developmentally appropriate and experienced-based activities in worship to provide spiritual nurture and meaningful faith formation.

The authors take "a truly **full-bodied approach to worship and faith formation**," offering an invitation for participation for all members and welcome for the whole Body of Christ, with particular sensitivity to the needs of persons with disabilities.

### Slowing down

Whether we realize it or not, our traditions sometimes exclude certain persons. For example, think about how your congregation prays together the prayer that our Lord taught us to pray. Do the words, "Our Father," signal a NASCAR green flag to worshippers, who race through the lines of the prayer as fast as possible and get to that checkered flag "amen" in one breath? Many people get left behind when we rush through prayer.

Power and meaning may emerge from merely **slowing the pace of the Lord's Prayer** in a service.

Beyond allowing room for reflection and deeper meaning, putting away the green flag helps a congregation to involve those who may have a hearing impairment or who cannot speak or think rapidly. Simply slowing the pace creates **a moment of greater inclusion** in the worshiping community. This is to be celebrated!

### Praying with our bodies

A body prayer is another form that *Rhythms of Grace* suggests for experience-based worship. A **body prayer invites the whole body to be involved** in worship. We often think that using our bodies in worship is only for children (for example, using motions to a song, pointing to Heaven in the sky, etc.). But one can argue that movement is an increased meaning-maker for all of us.

Praying with our bodies is not something we do just for those without verbal communication ability; it is a step toward creating **deeper meaning for all**. (Granted, praying a body prayer in the presence of a person who is limited in the use of their body could create a different kind of exclusion; this is why implementing a variety of strategies is important within the life of a congregation.)

*Rhythms of Grace* provides clear visual aids for the Lord's Prayer with movement (page 113) that can easily be shared in a bulletin insert, or better yet, taught by a confident and encouraging worship leader. See the link below for a different version online. As your congregation shares in vulnerability through learning an unfamiliar form of prayer, **may the Spirit find an opportunity for sharing grace with all!**

Contributed by Kathy Dickson, ADNet Field Associate

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### Resource suggestions

The Lord's Prayer body prayer and additional prayer resources at [www.adnetonline.org/churches/prayer](http://www.adnetonline.org/churches/prayer).

*Rhythms of Grace: Worship and Faith Formation for Children and Families with Special Needs*. Audrey Scanlan and Linda Snyder. Morehouse Publishing.

*Beyond Accessibility: Toward Full Inclusion of People with Disabilities*. Brett Webb-Mitchell. Church Publishing.

*Prayer for People Who Can't Sit Still*. William Tenny-Brittian. Chalice Press.

*Dear Friend in Heaven: Prayers for Children and Adults*. Northwestern Publishing House

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