

Catechesis in the Lives of Those With Learning Disabilities.



Introduction and aims

A life that is good and full of meaning

A great gift

New channels of communication

Called to the fullness of sacramental life

Conclusions



A life that is good
and
full of meaning



- The theme of disability is of great importance for evangelisation and Christian formation.
- Communities are called not only to take care of the most fragile, but to recognise the presence of Jesus.
- Two-fold attention: an awareness of the possibility to educate in the faith people with grave or very grave disabilities; and a willingness to consider them as active subjects in the community in which they live.
- Vulnerability belongs to the essence of humanity and does not prevent happiness and self-realisation.



A Great Gift





Persons with disabilities are a growth opportunity for the community.

Disability can create embarrassment because it draws attention to difficulties in welcoming diversity. It can elicit fear, because it is a reference to everyone's radical situation of fragility, which is suffering and ultimately death.

Because they are witnesses to the essential truths of human life, persons with disabilities must be welcomed as a great gift.



New Channels of Communication



It is the task of the local Churches to be open to the reception and ordinary presence of persons with disabilities within programmes of catechesis.

Persons with intellectual disabilities live out their relationship with God in the immediacy of their intuition.

This requires that catechists seek new channels of communication and methods more suitable for fostering the encounter with Jesus.



It is therefore useful to employ experiential dynamics and languages that involve the five senses and narrative methods.

Catechists should also be close to the families of persons with disabilities, accompanying them and fostering full incorporation into the community.



SPRED – SPecial RELigious Development

Born from a need for inclusion

Model of catechesis that moves away from that of teacher-pupil to that of a community of friends.

Active in: Australia
 Canada
 Ireland
 Malta
 Mexico
 Scotland
 South Africa
 USA



Initial concept was developed in the 1960s from three priests in France who recognised the need for accessible catechesis.

They recognised that rational, logical and wordy means of conveying the faith was not appropriate.

They developed an intuitive approach, paying more attention to the environment and the sense of sacred within the context of community.



Their ideas were developed by Fr James McCarthy, who was tasked with leading the formation of people with disabilities in the Archdiocese of Chicago.

Inspired further by the writings of Fr Jean Mesny and his insight into spirituality and those with learning disabilities, SPRED was formed.



A SPRED group usually consists of four groups –

Those aged 6- 10 years

11 – 16 years

17 – 21 years

22 years +

Offering lifelong support and catechesis

Each group has a catechist for each friend, meaning real accompaniment

Sessions consist of

Preparation

Celebration

Sharing of Food

Each part of the session takes place in a different room or zone.



Preparation Room –

Soft lighting

Quiet music

Objects of reference

Suitable activities to aid peacefulness

Celebration Room –

A semi-circle around the Word

Candle

Flowers

Sharing Room –

Area for social time with friends



How can we develop channels of communication in our parishes?



Symbols



AAC



Makaton



Creation: A Sensory Story

This sensory story is a short story made up of brief sentences that all children can enjoy. Invite children to sit in a circle with you and share the story. For each sentence of the story, a corresponding sensory experience is suggested. Use the list of suggested materials, or substitute other resources better suited for your group of learners. There is no limit to the stories you can share and the sensory experiences you can include in this activity, making it a memorable opportunity, experience and lesson.

Suggested supplies:

- Flashlight
- Calendar
- Globe
- Cup of water
- Pot of soil/ house plant
- Visual image of sun and moon
- Plush or toy fish/animals
- Dolls
- Small pillow

Suggested script and corresponding sensory experiences:

IN THE BEGINNING, there was no earth, no sky, and no animals. (Motion to the empty space inside your circle.)



God said "Let there be light." And there was. (Shine a flashlight.)

THIS WAS THE FIRST DAY. (Share a calendar.)



ON THE 2ND DAY, God made the earth and sky. (Share a globe, motion to the sky out the window.)



ON THE 3RD DAY, God put the water in one place. (Share a cup of water.)



God put the land in another place. (Share soil/plant.)

ON THE 4TH DAY, God made the Sun. (Show a visual image of the sun.)



And the moon. (Show a visual image of the moon.)

ON THE 5TH DAY, God made fish. (Share a toy fish.)



ON THE 6TH DAY, God made animals. (Share various toy animals)



And man and woman. (Share dolls.)

ON THE 7TH DAY, God took a rest. (Share a pillow and mime a yawn.)



God saw that it was good. (Share a smile.)

Sensory Stories



Called to the fullness of sacramental life



- Persons with disabilities are called to the fulness of sacramental life.

The sacraments are a gift from God.

Pastoral inclusion and involvement in liturgical action is important.

They are not only recipients of catechesis, but participants in evangelisation.



CARA (Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate)
Conducted a national study in 2011 of the inclusion of
people with learning disabilities in Catholic parishes

Importance of inviting parishioners with special needs into
positions of real leadership, including committee
membership and active participation in ministries.





A life that is good
and full of meaning



Key Texts:

Directory for Catechesis

Address to participants in the conference "Catechesis and persons with disabilities" 2017

Disability and the way of Jesus: Holistic Healing in the Gospels and the Church, McKinney-Fox B, 2019

National study of inclusion of people with disabilities in parish life: Georgetown Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, 2016

Developmental Disabilities and Sacramental Access, Foley E, 1994

Death and Life, McGill A, 1987

