

The dictionary defines disability as “lack of competent power, strength or physical or mental ability.” Some people, like Matthew, have a physical disability. They might use a wheelchair, crutches or other aids to move about. Some people have difficulty with vision or hearing. Most physical disabilities are visible, ones that we can see. Other disabilities are invisible, like cancer, diabetes, arthritis, depression and others.

A YOUNG GIRL’S GIFTS

Paige brought many gifts to her parish community during her battle with leukemia, a kind of cancer. She shared gifts of love, hope, joy and courage.

A few days before starting first grade, Paige was diagnosed with cancer. Sometimes people don’t think of cancer as a disability, but it can be very disabling. Often Paige used a wheelchair when she was too weak to walk. It was difficult for her to remember things she learned. During her whole first grade year, she was only able to make it to school for a total of seven days.

While Paige was away, all the children in her school were taught about different types of cancer, the treatments Paige was going through and the effects from these treatments. They learned that Paige would be wearing a mask when she returned to school. This was not because the other students would catch her disease, but rather to prevent Paige from getting any germs. When Paige

finally was able to join her classmates for the last few days of first grade, they all wore masks with her so she wouldn’t feel out of place.

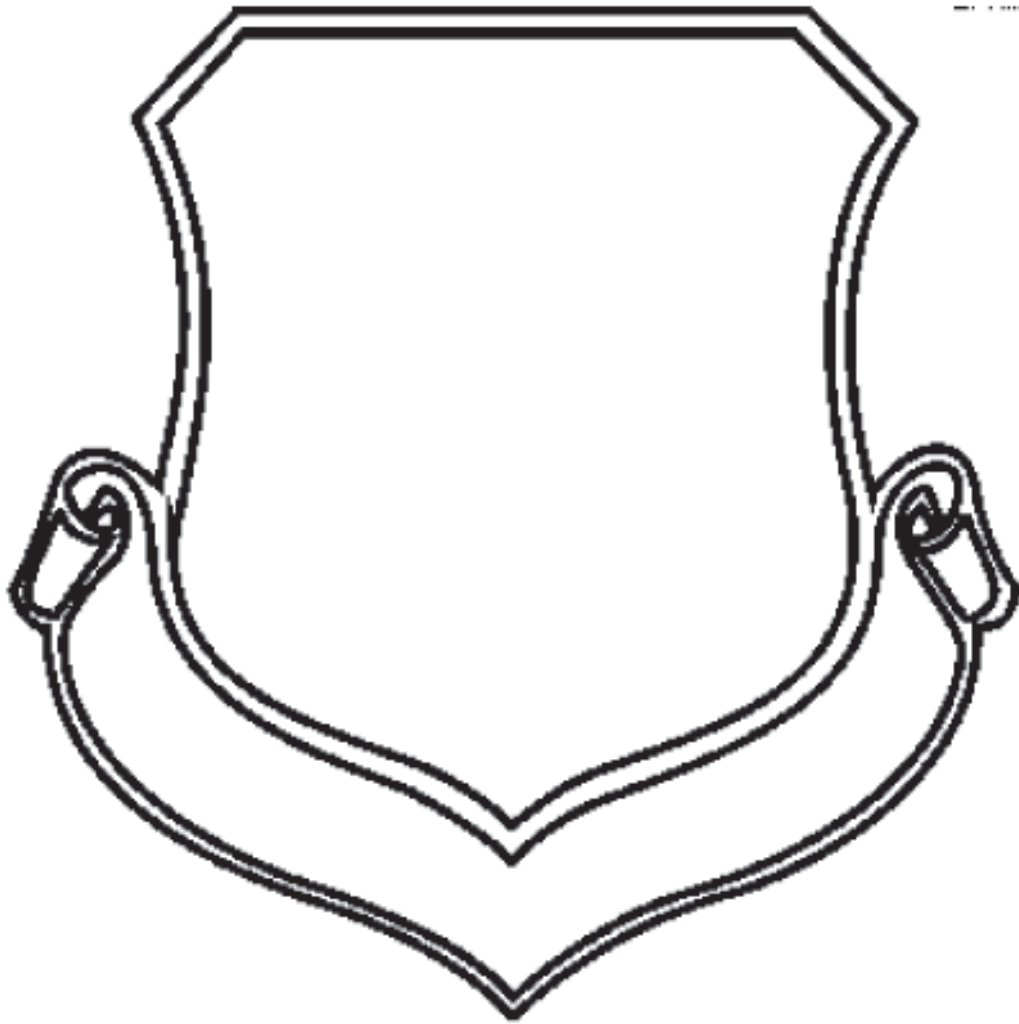


The following year, Cardinal Bernardin went on television to tell the people of Chicago about his cancer. Paige immediately wrote him a letter because she didn’t want him to be sad. She sent him pictures of herself when she was bald from her chemotherapy treatments, and after the treatments as her hair began to grow back. Paige wanted the Cardinal to know that his hair would grow back, too. He sent her a letter back thanking her for her concern and delighting in the fact that someone had hope for his hair growing back.

Paige’s battle with cancer ended when she was 9 years old. Elizabeth, a high school student and a friend, wrote this about her, “Even though she was only 9, Paige’s strong spirit gave me inspiration. She still gives me hope in knowing that I can face anything because Paige did.”

ACTIVITY – MEDIEVAL SHIELD

In medieval times, knights used shields as protection when they went into battle and also so others would know who they were. These shields had family crests and other important symbols on them. Write your family name on your shield. Add three symbols to your shield: one symbol for what gives you hope, another symbol for something that you've done that took courage, and finally, a symbol for something that you've seen someone else do that took courage.



One in five Americans has a disability. Most of us probably know someone like Matthew or Paige. Cardinal Bernardin invited the churches in the Archdiocese of Chicago to begin “Inclusion Awareness Days” to heighten our awareness to how welcoming we are in our churches to those with disabilities. The Cardinal said, “When we open our hearts and our community to the gifts each person brings, we are all strengthened.”

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

In the New Testament, St. Paul challenged the Corinthians to look at the different gifts that each person was bringing to the Body of Christ.

Read Chapter 12, verses 4 through 11.

All the gifts we have are for the good of all in the community. Jesus takes us as we are. He recognizes all of us as his brothers and sisters. We bring our different gifts to our parish community. We gather each Sunday as this Body of Christ as we celebrate Eucharist.

For example, Chuck is the head usher at his church. He is 54 years old. He had a stroke this past year, which left his right side partially paralyzed. After extended therapy, he can walk with a leg brace and a cane. Some days he still uses his wheelchair. When he was able to come back to church, he resumed his position as usher. He is still the captain of the team, greeting the people at the doors before Mass and distributing bulletins.

- Does your parish invite people with disabilities to be ministers at the Eucharist or to hold other leadership positions? Why or why not?

CHALLENGE

Take a walk around your parish grounds and note how accessible the buildings are.

- What do you find that is accessible?
- What do you find that needs to be changed for those who have disabilities?
- How can you as an individual or as a class work to make your parish more open for those people who have disabilities?

PRAYER

Join together in a prayer!

Dear Lord,
We thank you for the many different gifts you have given to all of us.
We thank you for inviting all to your table.
Help us to have open hearts to reach all those who want to join us.
Help us to have open minds to begin to know better the gifts that each person brings to our family.
Help us to open the doors of your church for all people.
We know your love is for each and every one of us!
AMEN

Written by Lois DeFelice

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