

Different Gifts, But the Same Spirit



LIFE EXPERIENCE

Jamie is 10 years old and has used a wheelchair since she was a toddler. Her family just moved here from another part of the country where she attended a school just for children with disabilities. Now Jamie is in Blackwell School with the other children in her neighborhood and will be attending religious education classes for the first time in her life.

Today is Jamie's first day. Her mother parks the van in the accessible space near the church entrance. She wheels Jamie down the ramp and out into the parking lot. Jamie's heart beats very fast as she and her mother get to the entrance of the school building where the classes are held. Jamie remembers when she was little and the other children in her backyard wouldn't let her play in her own sandbox. She remembers when she went back to her

locker last week and found taco sauce poured all over her books.

She wants to make friends like everyone else, but sometimes the other kids don't give her a chance. What will it be like in religious education class? Jamie looks up and sees a picture of Jesus laughing and holding the children on his lap. She hopes that she will find the welcoming love of Jesus in her new class.

Imagine that you and your friends are waiting in the classroom to meet Jamie.

- How do you feel?
- What do you say to your friends about Jamie's coming?
- What questions do you ask your catechist about Jamie and how she will fit into your class?



FAITH AND SCRIPTURE

St. Paul tells us in his first letter to the Corinthians, “There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same spirit...one and the same Spirit produces all of these, distributing them individually to each person as he wishes.” (1 Corinthians 12)

In our classrooms, there may be many children of many ability levels. Sometimes we can feel uncomfortable with people who look or act differently than we do. We are not sure what to say, so we say nothing. We do not know how to act, so we ignore that other person.

Let's look at what Jesus did. Jesus spent a lot of time with people who were different and not included in society. Jesus saw the strength and goodness – the power of the Spirit and the remarkable gifts and talents – in each person. He saw others for what they could do – not what they could not do. Jesus refused to focus on differences in walk, in speech, in sight, or in behavior. Also, Jesus knew that people who have unusual physical or mental challenges can teach us about the power of the Spirit within each of us.

METHODS OF INCLUSION

We can welcome children who have disabilities in many ways:

- by smiling and talking normally to them when we meet them
- by sitting down to be on their eye level if they use a wheelchair

- by learning American Sign Language
- by making sure that people who use wheelchairs can get to and from the classroom without difficulty
- by being patient and firm, yet kind with those who find it hard to stay in their seats and who distract others during class
- by using “people-first” language**

** **“People-first”** language means we always put the person (people are most important) first: a boy who is deaf, a girl who uses a wheelchair, a man who is blind. Let's emphasize the person whenever we can and find ways to be like Jesus when we interact with people of different abilities.

Each of us is a unique creation of God, a blessed and holy person who is part of one body with its community of members. Remember the beautiful



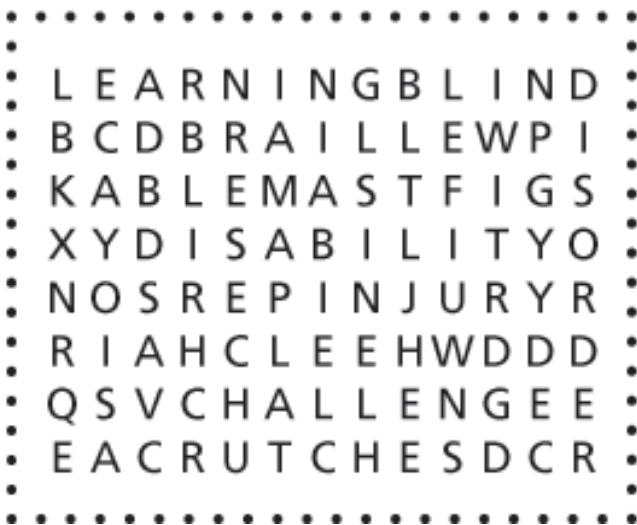
beatitude of acceptance, "Blessed are you who walk by my side, for in your friendship I feel good to be myself."

ACTIVITIES

1. Word Search. One way to get to know more about children of all abilities is to use correct language. The word search below will help remind us of some of the terms that we learned today.

Find the following words:

able	blind	Braille
challenge	crutches	disability
disorder	gifts	injury
learning	person	wheelchair



2. Greeting Card. A way to connect with children who may have to spend time at home or in a hospital is to send them a card. Using your crayons or markers and construction paper, design a card

for a classmate or parish member who needs to receive some cheer or encouragement. Hint: Include your favorite riddle or joke. How about a sticker or bookmark?

3. Gift Wrap Exercise. A way to learn about the challenges facing people with different abilities is to try to experience the world the way they do. Using these materials, try this activity:

- two long-sleeved shirts (large)
- two arm slings
- large box for wrapping
- wrapping paper, tape, ribbon
- scissors

First, set out all wrapping materials on a table. Then, tie the end of one sleeve on each shirt.

Now, two students put on the long-sleeved shirts. With one hand tied in the sleeve and the other arm immobilized by a sling, try to wrap a gift.

PRAYER SERVICE

At the end of your class, gather around your prayer table. Open the Bible and read 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 with your teacher.



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