

**INVOLVING CHILDREN, TEENS, AND FAMILIES
IN TEAM BELONG MONTH**

Use the following activities to engage children, teens and families in creating a place of belonging for parishioners and students of all abilities.

STUDENT DISPLAY AND JUNIOR TEAM BELONG AWARD NOMINATION

Invite students 5 to 18 years old to prepare and display videos, artwork or essays with photos about how the congregation welcomes worshippers of all abilities. Use the *Different Gifts, Same Spirit* lesson plan series with the students K-12 before they create their projects. The *Different Gifts, Same Spirit* lesson plans series is available from Loyola Press or download a free version from www.TEAMBelong.org.

Display the student's work in the vestibule or at a reception in the social hall after services during TEAM Belong Month. You may choose to submit the best work, with a completed nomination form, to Pathways.org for a Junior TEAM Belong Award grant of up to \$1,000 to help fund an access or belonging project at your house of faith or religious school.



Student's artwork displayed in the vestibule of the church during TEAM Belong Month at St. Catherine Laboure parish, Glenview, IL, a Junior TEAM Belong Award winning congregation.

TEEN GREETERS DURING TEAM BELONG MONTH

Invite teens in your youth group to greet and distribute prayer cards or special bulletins during TEAM Belong Month. Download a bulletin cover and articles or Prayer Cards for printing from www.TEAMBelong.org.

Train the teens to be sensitive to and respectful of worshippers of all abilities. Read *Know Your Disability Etiquette* and *How You Can Make a Difference*, available at www.TEAMBelong.org, with the teens. Have teens practice, smiling, making eye contact and saying “Welcome!” as they hand out cards or bulletins.

Make greeter badges and have teens pick up their badges and prayer cards or bulletins at a greeters table at your liturgies during TEAM Belong Month. Supervise the teens and thank them for their service.

EVERYONE IS “THUMBODY” PRECIOUS



Materials:

- Large sheets of banner paper
- Stamp pads in various colors
(or create your own using small sponges and food colors)
- Black thin tipped felt markers
- Disposable wipes to clean thumbs

Spread the large sheets of banner paper on tables at a reception after services or in the vestibule during TEAM Belong Month. Write “Everyone is ‘Thumbody’ Precious in the Eyes of the Lord” in the center of each banner in large letters. Invite congregants and families to coat their thumbs lightly on the stamp pads and press their prints onto the large banner paper to make a head and a body. Use the markers to draw eyes, nose, mouth, hair, arms, legs, clothes etc. on your thumbprint portrait. Sign your name below your thumbprint portrait.

FAMILY COUNCIL MEETING

Gather your family together and discuss the following:

1. Identify each family member's gifts and abilities.
2. Talk about the different gifts that we have been given. What are our gifts? How well do you use them for the good of all? How well do we recognize the gifts of others, especially the gifts of people with disabilities?
3. Discuss "people first" language to use when talking about or writing about individuals who have disabilities. Name the person first – a boy who is deaf, a girl who is blind – and emphasize what a person can do as opposed to can't do – a person uses a wheelchair or walks with crutches. Practice using the correct words as you are reinforcing the lesson of inclusion.
4. Talk with your children about how they would play with a person who is blind or deaf. For instance, a person who is blind may have a dog that helps them. To communicate with a person who has a hearing loss, you will have to speak clearly and directly to the person so that he can read your lips.
5. Talk about how your congregation is equipped (or not equipped) to meet the needs of ALL its members.
 - Do you have a ramp into church or onto the altar for the people who use a wheelchair or walk with crutches?
 - Do you have signs to show where the accessible ramps are?
 - Are those with disabilities invited to be ministers at worship services?
 - Can people who use wheelchairs or walkers sit with their families throughout the church?
6. Write your pastor or leadership council and suggest forming a *That Every Ability May Belong Ministry*.

Source: *Different Gifts, Same Spirit Family Guide* by Mary Sue Wielgus