

Different Gifts, Same Spirit

Creating a Learning Community Where Everyone Belongs

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT



THE MOST VALUABLE PLAYER

I think it's a shame they gave that kid the MVP award," said Steve.

"Everyone knows you're the best basketball player on the team, Jack. I guess he got it because the coaches felt sorry for him."

Jack frowned as he answered. "His name is Mark, he has Down Syndrome and the coaches did not feel sorry for him. Mark is our friend."

Darren joined the conversation, saying "Mark has a disability, but he also has capability. He's our team manager and he IS the most valuable guy any of us know! He won't let any player get down on himself. If a guy fouls out or misses a shot, Mark's always right there with a dry towel and a pat on the back. He cheers us on and he cheers us up. He IS valuable! Our team wouldn't have the same spirit without him."

DIFFERENT GIFTS, ALL NEEDED

"There are different gifts, but the same Spirit," we read in the First Letter to the Corinthians (12:4). Then Paul lists a few of the gifts he saw around him:

"wisdom in discourse, power to express knowledge, faith, healing, prophecy..." (1 Cor. 12:8-10).

Perhaps Paul was writing about a particular group of people as he listed these gifts. He didn't list all the gifts people can have! Do you have any of the gifts he listed? Do you know anyone who has one or more of them? What are some of your other gifts?

MY GIFTS

What gifts do you admire when you see them in others?

OTHERS' GIFTS I ADMIRE



Paul was making the point that all gifts come from God, but no one person receives them all. We put our individual gifts together and we form, Paul says, “one body” (1 Cor. 12:12). We might say we form “one team,” “one family,” or “one class.” No matter which image we use, the message is: We need every person, each with his or her particular gifts.

WE ALL HAVE GIFTS

There is one group of people who, for a long time, seemed to be viewed as having no gifts. At best, they were looked upon as needy receivers of other people’s gifts. Even the word that was used to describe them, “handicapped,” came from the idea of a receiver, a person with “cap in hand” holding it out for a donation.

Today we call this group, “people with disabilities,” a very large group with many different sub-groups. Some disabilities are visible and others, like

learning disorders, are invisible. What are some of the disabilities about which you know?

When you think about it, we all have things we can do well, things we can do “well enough,” and things we can’t do at all. Usually we don’t list the things we cannot do at all as “disabilities,” but in a way they are!

And what about the things we really can do? Do we think of them as mere abilities, or are they really gifts? Which is true? Are we all gifted or are we all disabled? The answer to both parts of the question is “Yes!”

How could a boy with a disability, like Mark in our opening story, be voted a team’s Most Valuable Player? You can probably list some disabilities Mark is likely to have: he might have trouble reading; his speech might be difficult to understand. List some of the abilities or gifts that possibly led him to be voted MVP.

MORE ABLE THAN WE THINK

People with disabilities often tell those who do not have their disability that they are able to do a lot more than people think they can. Sometimes they can accomplish things with no extra help or adaptations. Other times a simple adaptation or a bit of assistance is all they need.

Because the U.S. Congress passed the Americans with Disabilities Act (or ADA) in 1990, it is more common to see people with disabilities taking part in everyday life. A few simple adaptations have made this much more possible. How has your parish provided for the needs of people with disabilities? What about your school and your town or city? What more could be done?

On your own or with one or two classmates, survey your parish, school and neighborhood. **Use the check list provided as an easy guide for identifying adaptations and areas for accessibility improvement.**

What about you? Imagine you have neighbors or classmates who have a disability. How would you welcome them? What more could you do to affirm their gifts? When you meet someone new who has a disability, keep the following things in mind:

- **Be yourself.** Approach a kid with a disability the same as you would any other kid. Don't be afraid you'll say the wrong thing or that the person can't understand you—he'll understand your offer of friendship. See pages 5-7 for tips.

- **Be interested, but not pushy.** Ask about their disability if you're curious – it would be silly to pretend it doesn't exist. Let the person tell you what they want about it. If the person uses special equipment, like a wheelchair or a computer or some other device, show an interest and ask for a demonstration.

CHECK LIST

- Ramp onto the alter
- Large print prayer books, missals, music and bulletins (Braille available)
- Accessibility logo
- Ramps into buildings
- An amplifying sound system such as an FM wireless
- Good lighting, lights on speakers faces
- Livestreamed Mass
- Automatic Door Opener
- Sign-language interpreters
- Curb cuts
- Accessible restrooms
- Front-kneelers removed for persons with walkers, canes, etc.

- **Include the person with a disability in conversation.** Don't talk about him as if he isn't there or keep him on the sidelines feeling left out. People who cannot speak or don't speak clearly can say a lot by gestures, nods and eye contact.
- **Offer to help if the person seems to need assistance.** But always ask first.

A SIMULATION ACTIVITY

Simulating a disability is never the same as actually having a disability, but it can give you an idea of what it is like to live without full use of one of your senses.

Put cotton or ear plugs in your ears. Have a partner quietly read a list of printed commands your teacher will give you. Trade places, and read the second list to your partner after his or her ears are plugged.

Questions to consider:

- How well did you understand and follow directions?
- What could your partner have done to help you understand more commands?
- Why is hearing loss a disability?
- What abilities and gifts might a deaf or hearing impaired person bring to a group?

Think about other disabilities. What gifts might a person with one of these disabilities bring to a group?

A PRAYER THAT ALL PEOPLE MAY BELONG

To prepare for this prayer, write a petition that reflects something about this lesson. Work alone or with a partner.

Use this response:

“Lord, help us to see each other with your eyes.”

Gather in a circle for this time of prayer.

Teacher or Leader: We pray that we may remember that each of us has both gifts and disabilities, and that all are needed in God's family.

All: “Lord, help us to see each other with your eyes.”

Take turns reading your written petitions.

After each one, respond:

“Lord, help us to see each other with your eyes.”

End your time of prayer by saying together: Our Father, who art in heaven...

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KNOW YOUR DISABILITY ETIQUETTE

Use the tips below so that you know how to comfortably interact with classmates and parishioners of all abilities.

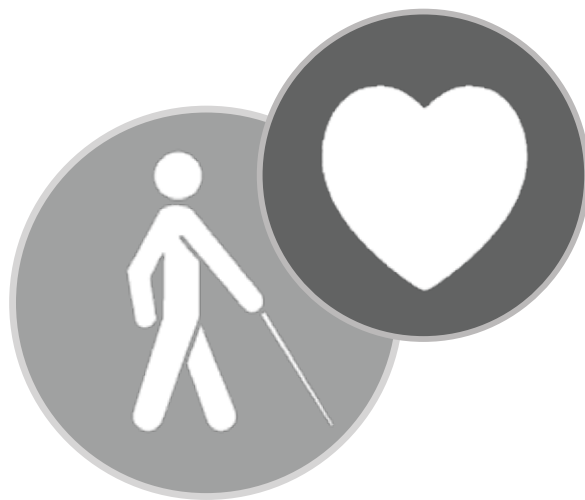
GENERAL INFORMATION

1. What do you say when you meet a person with a disability? How about, “Hello?”
2. A warm smile and friendly conversation are very welcoming.
3. Speak directly to the person with a disability, not only to the family member, companion, interpreter or canine companion.
4. Use people-first language such as “people with disabilities” NOT “the disabled” and “a parishioner who is blind” NOT “a blind parishioner.”
5. Ask the person with the disability HOW you can help. Respect any refusal.
6. Offer accessible seating, large-print bulletins, missalettes, or assistive listening devices. Know where accessible washrooms are.
7. Recognize that each person has gifts and abilities. Ask parishioners with disabilities if they would like to usher, bring up the gifts, proclaim the word, etc. and provide any accommodations needed.
8. Be sensitive to where a person wishes to receive communion – at their seat or at the altar – and make sure they are accommodated.
9. Feel comfortable using words like see, walk, and listen with persons with disabilities.
10. Use accessibility logos in print materials and on signage.



WELCOMING PEOPLE WHO ARE BLIND OR HAVE VISION LOSS

1. Identify yourself when you greet the person. Tell the person when you are about to leave.
2. Talk normally, using your customary voice and typical expressions like “See you later.”
3. Offer your arm when assisting, the same way an usher does at a wedding.
4. Give verbal cues such as “We are going through a doorway.” Explain the traffic pattern with clear, calm instructions such as “Go up the center aisle.”



WELCOMING PEOPLE WITH MOBILITY DIFFERENCES

1. Speak directly to the person.
2. Offer assistance, but accept a “No, thank you.”
3. Sit down so that you are at eye-level if the conversation will last more than a few minutes.
4. Shake hands or lightly touch a shoulder in the same way you would with others.
5. Keep a person’s wheelchair or walker near the person.

WELCOMING PEOPLE WHO ARE DEAF OR HARD OF HEARING

1. Face the person. He/she will appreciate seeing your facial expression and may read your lips. Your face, gestures, and body movements help in understanding.
2. Move closer rather than shout.
3. Speak clearly and slowly. Writing may be necessary. →

WELCOMING PEOPLE WITH SPEECH DIFFERENCES

1. Be patient. Let a person talk at his/her own pace.
2. Remember a person may have communication means other than speech, such as writing.
3. Ask questions that require short answers or a shake of the head. If you cannot understand, rephrase the question.
4. Repeat or paraphrase what was said in order to confirm that you understand.



WELCOMING PEOPLE WITH COGNITIVE DIFFERENCES

1. Greet the person and interact normally.
2. Keep things simple and uncomplicated.
3. Treat people equally regardless of participation level; give prayer books or hymnals to all; allow everyone a chance to speak.