WELCOMING THOSE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Several years ago, our congregation received three adult regular visitors with special needs, who were referred to us from another LCMS church. That congregation had too many steps to their sanctuary, and our congregation would be able to provide transportation from the group homes where these individuals lived to church.

Members of our congregation accepted the presence of these visitors, but they did not know how to interact in a welcoming way with these “strangers” who had different skills, different needs, and different ways of communicating.

Our special visitors came to church because they wanted to worship with us and learn more about Jesus. But, they were unable to manage the mechanics of following the order of service. So we made largeprint three-ring binders with the words of the liturgy printed out, and I started sitting with them to help them find their pages for the hymns. Soon my children were assisting me. Congregation members became accustomed to seeing us in the front pew.

Then, one Sunday our regular organist needed a substitute. I was scheduled to play the organ, so we would need help in the front pew. By that time, others had seen the routine and were willing to move up to help out. Gradually, people got to know Sara and Jackie and Francis, and would say hello to them before or after church. They were becoming part of the congregation.

These special adults stayed late after church for their own Bible class with the pastor and were later baptized and/or confirmed. Once we were used to seeing them around and having them as a part of our worship and activities, they were folded into our church family.

Part of welcoming people with special needs is actually getting to know them, and getting to know how to interact in a positive and helpful way. The deaconess, then, can serve, not only by getting to know those with special needs personally, helping and welcoming them, but she can also be the model for others to follow so that they too can personally welcome people in our congregations.

Submitted Anonymously

ANNOUNCEMENTS

We pray God’s blessing on the deaconess training program at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and on Deaconess Gillian Bond, as she begins her work as the Director of Deaconess Studies at the seminary.

Congratulations to Cheryl D. Naumann who received a Concordia Historical Institute (CHI) Award of Commendation for her article titled “Lutheran Deaconesses in North America: Assessing Lohe’s Influence.” The article appeared in Currents in Theology and Mission, Feb. 2012, Vo. 39, No. 1, and was selected by the CHI Awards Committee “as an award-winning example of material produced to further the understanding of American Lutheranism.”

The 2014 CDC Annual Conference will be held Thursday through Friday, June 19-20, at the Sheraton Orlando Downtown, in Orlando, Florida. The cost will be $250 (double room) or $275 (single room), including registration, room and board. Note: Spouses register to attend, but do not need to pay the registration fee.
What is Asperger’s Syndrome?
What does it have to do with Kansas?
Asperger’s syndrome: asparagus, noun
1. a developmental disorder related to autism and characterized by an average to higher than average intellectual ability coupled with impaired social skills and restrictive, repetitive patterns of interest and activity.

Aaron Likens might state, “If you’ve met one person with Asperger’s syndrome, you’ve met one person with Asperger’s syndrome.”
The diagnosis above sounds so complete, but the variations among individuals on this high functioning end of the autism spectrum require teacher, friend, dearthiness, pastor, or parents to listen carefully and seek to understand. And this book by Aaron Likens, the son of an LCMS pastor, is not a how-to or a guide to getting everything right in the daily living of someone new without pretending the person is not there as a whole person. The focus of this book is on something that has long fascinated the author: the social cues is garbled as he considers the myriad of conversation, usually disabling when a third person enters the zone, I am like that man in Lawrence Konners. He says “To be me? What about Kansas? With some chapters starting with an insert by his dad, which creatively describes the need of Aaron’s self-revealing, it is not a book about faith, yet you can’t miss his LCMS-ness as he talks about meeting a special girl who really only listened to him at a church convention where his dad had a booth, and one chapter is titled “What does it mean?” He muses, “Things really do work out. Most of the time, however, it’s not like we think they should. But then, since when did God start asking his creation how to do things?”

In an easy-to-read, engaging writing style, he presents his theories about how introverts approach life, based on real situations in which he must either confront or adapt: girls, work, family, friends, loss, love, and well as his theories like Game Theory, Film Theory, the Theory of Priests. Depending on being on stage vs. being in the audience of life.

A few quotes will give you an overview of what he’s thinking and hopefully woo you to learn more. “Even the early years of Aaron’s life, his way was a bit different.” “It is a book expressing pain and a book of hope with the window of hope opened by understanding.”

Conversation can be difficult. Every introvert has experienced this, but it is magnified for Aaron as he thrives in conversations with people who are more extroverted than he is. The experiences of life once then influence how he remembers the event and how his record of it. If you have ever discovered a journal or diary from your youth, you will marvel at the voice coming from the page was once yours. You might even wonder why a particular event was worth writing about, since you have no recollection of it now.

When I realized I would not find helpful hints for helping my 12 year old grandson, I also realized this book is not for me or anyone else to know what to do. Aaron writes with the honesty of what it is like to live from the inside. The book is a journal of Aaron’s reflections of himself, and his hopes and pleads that readers try to understand him.

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FROM OUR SPIRITUAL COUNSELOR

Rev. Kevin Loughran

Dear Sisters in Christ, When I first learned about the topic for this month’s BLUES News, I thought, “What can I contribute here?” You see, even though my parish leases space to an ABA academy, we occasionally have children on the mild end of the Autism spectrum attend our Day School, and of course I serve families that have children who are autistic, I’m embarrassed to admit I know very little about Autism and its associated strata of disorders. However, in reflection I do know what it is like to parent a disabled child and so I write from that perspective.

Of course, many of you met our darling Penelope at this summer’s conference. Certainly she is a delight, a blessing that at times leaves my wife and I befuddled as to why the Lord would entrust her into our care. But you must also understand that she does have special needs and those needs have drastically changed our family dynamic.

We had three teenagers when Penny was born. Much like Autism her disability of cerebral palsy was silent, until the time she started to miss certain milestones. It was then that we began to recognize that our daughter was “different.” Predictably it was at that point that all sorts of thoughts—bad thoughts—began to crop up. For many years, my wife was bothered by “what ifs”: “what if I had gotten more rest during my pregnancy,” “what if I had eaten different food” and so on and so forth. Such thoughts often accompany mothers of special needs children as the reality of how life has changed continues to set in.

As time has gone by, we have had any number of well-meaning friends and parishioners offer their help. Frankly, what most parents of special needs children need is support in the form of prayers, a connection to other like-situated parents and respite care of some sort. The latter is more problematic than one might think, as all special needs children require an extra level of care that is often not thought of by those offering to help. We’ve had any number of false starts where people have offered to help with Penny only to find that her needs were greater than they first imagined. This led to disappointment on the part of the friends trying to help as they felt they had failed us, as well as our disappointment that hoped for relief did not materialize.

This is where carefully directed diaconal care might truly benefit a parish where special needs children and their families reside. Depending upon the community, resources may be discovered and provided for the family in the form of support groups. Also a few key congregants who are gifted in providing care might be identified and trained in the disability afflicting that particular child and family. This will provide support that the family needs.

Above all, families with disabled children require what all other people do: your prayers, your love, and your support. As we pray for you, please pray for us!

Your servant in Christ,
Rev Kevin R Loughran
Spiritual Counselor