



## News from the Autism Conference at the Vatican



Janice Benton and Nancy Thompson participated in the recent international conference on autism sponsored by the Vatican Pontifical Council on Health Care Workers, "Animating Hope..."



Janice Benton at Presentation

Jan's presentation on pastoral supports in the continent of America was gratefully received from participants throughout the world. She reported on responses received from parents and pastoral workers to an NCPD survey seeking both positive and negative experiences of parish life for individuals with autism.



Jan affirmed how hope is being animated in parishes where pastors and pastoral leaders welcome and affirm the gifts that parishioners with autism and their families bring to the parish.

Jan noted the positive support that catechetical leaders and families are receiving from publishers.

Below is a section or two from Janice's presentation.

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This Dec. 2nd on Giving Tuesday NCPD is looking for support on projects such as ParishNet.

This project will offer a searchable online database identifying how parishes throughout the nation meet the needs of Catholics with disabilities.

ParishNet will as well offer online training sessions for parishioners and staff to meet those needs after consultation with diocesan disability ministers.



ParishNet will be a significant



## **Support for Families**

Every parish has families that include members with autism, and their presence holds significant implications for the New Evangelization.

We must acknowledge the emotional trauma that families encounter when a child has been diagnosed with autism. Having anticipated a healthy, happy child, parents encountering a diagnosis of autism now face a life-changing reality. At this moment the parish community has the opportunity to respond to this pain in a Christ-like manner. How the parish responds determines whether that family will feel embraced by the community, or cast out to cope alone.



## **Hope Animated**

Thankfully there is much more to the story. Hope is being animated throughout the Americas in parishes that recognize the gifts and potential of each person. When parishes are open to responding to the real and perceived challenges raised by parishioners with autism and their families, the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit are poured out in countless ways. When the parishioner with autism is seen as a valued member of the community rather than a problem to be solved, the entire parish is blessed and experiences anew the infinite love of God.

The families and pastoral workers who answered NCPD's survey shared examples of positive experiences as well: "Our son has always been welcomed by the choir director and members. There is always a place for him."

"The editor of our diocesan newspaper has a son with autism. Each week she features positive stories of individuals



step toward realizing NCPD's mission of ensuring the meaningful participation of Catholics with disabilities in parish life.

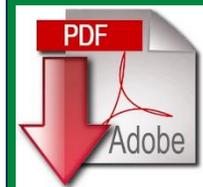
But of course as in all ministry, it requires funds to initiate projects, and so we are looking for your support.



Participate in Giving Tuesday on December 2, 2014 and help NCPD raise \$10K to help in advancing its ministry for Catholics with disabilities.

Giving Tuesday is a day where people across the globe make a commitment to financially support a charity or non-profit organization they believe in.

To participate in Giving Tuesday click the donate buttons above.



Click the PDF icon for more information about ParishNet.

with autism and other disabilities, which is building awareness throughout our diocese.”

“In our parish we experience people sharing their gifts of music and other talents.”

“We accepted into our religious education program a young boy who had been rejected by another parish. On the day of his first communion he walked with his parents to receive Jesus for the first time. His dad looked over at me, with tears in his eyes. What a beautiful moment.”

“Our parish hosted listening sessions from which grew ideas for improving ministry.”

“Through adapted liturgies (both English and Spanish) whole families are returning to Church. One family said, ‘Church is the only place we can go as a family.’”



“My son is 16 but mentally 2 or 3, on the autism spectrum, needs to be bathed, diapered, dressed and mostly fed....But his laugh lights the room and he has taught me the meaning of unconditional love, faith that there is a reason for all that comes to us, grace and the sanctity and glory of all life. Regular Mass was too much for him—the number of people, the volume of the singing, the length, the looks of disapproval for making involuntary sounds from the other parishioners...but we found the Adapted Liturgy at a parish in Portland, OR and we were forever

changed. Once a month a special Mass is held—lights are low, singing and music are beautiful but not overwhelming, it is a small group of people—and most magically of all...our special loved ones can be themselves. If they speak out or yell or move strangely people smile and don't judge. We can celebrate difference and pray for strength without pity but with smiles. Garrett goes to this liturgy and SMILES—he lays his head quietly on my shoulder and just \*is\* and in that moment I know God is with us.”



In addition, we are witnessing creative efforts and dedicated service on the part of many pastoral leaders to ensure meaningful participation in a life of faith.

Catechists and catechetical leaders are trained to meet the individual needs of each child. When preparing a child for the Sacrament of Eucharist, a catechist

will work with the child to learn to distinguish between the Eucharist and ordinary bread.

Publishers are increasingly creating practical and beautiful tools, offering hands-on kits, catechist guides and website tips to help children on the spectrum attend mass and prepare to receive the sacraments. One kit for preparation for the Sacrament of Eucharist was originally designed by a young Boy Scout as part of his Eagle Scout project. This young man wanted to design a way for his sister with autism to be prepared to make her first communion.

Catholic universities offer courses of study to train future teachers and catechists to work with students with disabilities.

Numerous dioceses and parishes offer programs for individuals and sometimes families, including week-long camps, days of prayer, annual retreats, and respite evenings or days.

Throughout the continent, and indeed the world, L'Arche provides faith-filled homes while Faith & Light invites individuals with autism and other developmental disabilities, their families and friends into loving communities of faith.

In continents throughout the world, the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is an approach to faith formation which engages all of the senses. The sacred environment, known as the atrium, is particularly suited for children on the autism spectrum as they grow in their relationship with God.

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The National Catholic Partnership on Disability (NCPD) was established in 1982 to implement in parishes and dioceses throughout the United States the 1978 *Pastoral Statement of U.S. Catholic Bishops on Persons with Disabilities*. NCPD is guided by the following mission:

*Rooted in Gospel values that affirm the dignity of every person, the National Catholic Partnership on Disability (NCPD) works collaboratively to ensure meaningful participation of people with disabilities in all aspects of the life of the Church and society.*

[www.ncpd.org](http://www.ncpd.org)