

National Catholic Partnership on Disability

Catechesis with those with Disability Part II

May 6, 2008

>> Greetings, and welcome to the Catholic Partnership on Disability, catechesis for those with disability part 2. At this moment all participants are in listen only mode. A brief question and answer session will follow the presentation. If anyone should require operator assistance during the conference, please press star zero on your telephone keypad. As a reminder, this conference is being recorded.

It is now my pleasure to introduce your host, Mr. Lee Nagel, executive director for National Conference for Catechetical Leadership.

Thank you, Mr. Nagel, you may begin.

>> Thanks very much. Good afternoon, good day, and good morning, wherever you are across the United States. As she said, on behalf of those associated with this project, we welcome you to Catechesis for Children and Youth with Disabilities, part two, applying the vision.

This webinar is provided by the National Catholic Partnership on Disability in collaboration with the National Conference for Catechetical Leadership, the National Catholic Education Association's National Association of Parish Catechetical Directors, and the Religious Education Division of the Chief Administrator of Catholic Education, in consultation with the National Conference for Inclusion Ministry and the National Catholic Office for the Deaf. I hope you got that.

Anyway, we're proud to support you in your catechetical ministry with children and youth with disabilities in the second half of this two part series. Having created the foundation and framework and structure in part one, I know you're ready for the nuts and bolts.

With me this afternoon is Anne Masters, director of pastoral ministry for persons with disabilities for the archdiocese of Newark; and Sister Kathleen Schipani, administrator of the department for the pastoral care for persons with disabilities and the deaf apostolate for the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

Last time, you'll recall, we asked you to complete a survey and provide us with materials. If you haven't done that, we would appreciate if you do that sometime after this conference.

But right now we want you to know there are questions you can give to us anytime during this presentation, and we'll try to address them in the last 20 minutes of our time.

We do have some surveys or polls we're going to take throughout this thing, and the first one has to do with time zone you're in. I'd like you to look at your screen right now, I'd like you to take that survey as quickly as you can, because those that were with us before know that there's very little time. So you've got to do it right now, so here we go. Here's the results.

We want you to know that most of you have finished your lunch, you're with us on eastern daylight time. We also have one other question which will help us as we present and get ready for this time, and that really has to do with what's been your experience so far in this process. So why don't you look at this thing and kind of check those kinds of areas that you have had any experience with planning in which will give us some ideas as we move into our first talk this afternoon.

So I want to thank you for participating, but let's answer those questions right now, please.

And we've got a wide variety. If you look at the kind of input that people have given us, you'll see there's an awful lot of people that have had quite a bit of interest in some areas, but not so much in others.

Our first speaker, Anne Masters, has an MA in theology and a BA in social work and over 14 years in the field. So she seems highly qualified to address methods that can be used with children with autism spectrum disorder, and other intellectual or developmental disabilities.

Anne, take over.

>> Thanks, Lee. It's wonderful to be here today. The U.S. Bishops calls for Catholic education to provide the experience for the apprenticeship of faith which allows for the development of behavior that is informed by faith. This acknowledges the shared participation of all the baptized in the life and mission of the church, which includes worship and education to the extent that each is able.

In terms of our ministry of catechist, when we allow ourselves to serve and walk with those who have no status, who are vulnerable, we are truly walking with God. When we allow ourselves to become vulnerable, when we are willing to be open to new ways of doing things, even open to new depths of meaning of our call to serve and to who we are called to serve with, we are receiving Christ into ourselves, letting him work through us. We can then be Christ in our world.

As catechists we are the faith of Jesus. Please recall the slide that Nancy Thompson discussed in last webinar about the range of options indicated in the pyramid diagram. I am not trying to suggest that inclusion is a one size fits all solution, nor that is it a good thing to put someone with autism in a mainstream catechetical group, known support, and expect everything to be fine.

The loving response that Jesus calls us to is to pay attention to the particular needs of the child or teen, as well as the abilities of the catechist and the available support. However, if the needs cannot met today, the example of Jesus does challenge us to work toward being able to do so, and to work other solutions for the present as well.

My examples will mostly address children and teens with autism, because that is what peoples' questions are concerning. However, the same premise is intended for learners with other developmental disabilities. The child who will never be able to explain the abstract value of community will still be able to experience the embrace of inclusion.

So how does the faith community welcome and educate people with autism in its life and mission. The short answer is welcome one. Instead of worrying about starting an entire program to welcome people with autism and their families, begin by welcoming the child before you.

Many faith communities that have successful programs for inclusive religious education begin by determining the needs of the one child first presented to them. And child by child they learn how to respond to the needs, and after a period of time they had a program. Religious educators in particular have a unique opportunity to embrace a family and model effective inclusion for the whole community.

Families and teachers of autism can be the best source of information and ideas for you. However, please do not expect parents to be the solution; they often have needs to support in their own spiritual journey. In learning the needs of the child before you, begin with questions about his or her interests and gifts, what makes him or her unique, and then proceed to the particular needs for support. We are all people first. As Catholics, we affirm the dignity of the human person, and different abilities and disabilities do not determine our personhood, though they do influence what each person is able to do.

In this conversation, demonstrate an attitude of openness and support. In your handouts there's a list of questions to guide you in it. Assure the parents that your questions are motivated by a sincere desire to provide the most supportive environment for the child, and that privacy will be respected. The information will only be shared with whomever the parent and child allow, which should at least include the people working directly with him or her. This will help to explain different behaviors, leading to awareness and improved understanding in the parish.

After you have a good understanding of the child, determine what the parents want and the level of inclusion they hope for. There are many possibilities, which Nancy Thompson discussed in the last webinar, such as being incorporated into a mainstream religious education group with the appropriate supports in place, like a religious ed buddy, spending some with children in mainstream groups, and then sometimes in a more specialized setting, or in a totally separate group.

But please remember even when religious education occurs in a separate environment, the goal is always connection with the larger community in some way as often as possible, which includes their peers, and religious education, and the worship community.

Let's look at some characteristics of people with developmental disabilities and their impact on the catechetical process. Although it includes intellectual and/or physical disabilities, it does not include mental illness. And there are six areas of major life activities that are evaluated in their ability to take care of themselves, to communicate, to learn, to direct one's own activity, has mobility, and capacity for independent living and economic self-sufficiency.

The category developmental disability includes but is not limited to severe disabilities attributed to intellectual disability, autism, Downs syndrome, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, spina bifida, and other neurological impairments which meet the above criteria.

Intellectual disability is the preferred term for what was historically referred to as mental retardation. In using the reference intellectual disability, you won't offend anyone and it will show respect. Just be aware the use of the term mental retardation still exists.

Someone would be diagnosed with intellectual disability if there are significant limitations in both intellectual functioning and in adaptive behaviors in the areas of conceptual, social and practical adaptive skills, such as those above. Intelligence refers to the general mental capacity which involves the ability to reason, plan, solve problems, think abstractly, comprehend complex ideas, learn quickly, and learn from experience.

Autism or PDD. Although the common reference people use is autism, there is only one diagnosis under the classification of pervasive developmental disability, PDD, which is also a developmental disability.

You can find excellent definitions and discussion in the website for NJCOSAC, which is the New Jersey Center for Outreach and Services for the Autism Community listed on the slide. Of the five categories, the three most common are autism, Asperger's disorder, and pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified, commonly known as PDDNOS. These three are also referred to autism spectrum disorders.

A national study last year put the number of children with autism at one in 166. You will find variations in reported numbers in each state. In New Jersey it is one in 94 overall and one in 66 for boys

The other two subcategories are childhood disintegrative disorder and Rett's disorder, which are extremely rare.

Although it has been thought that intellectual disability typically coexists with autism in people, this is changing, because there is the realization that having delays in the ability to communicate does not necessarily reflect the level of intelligence. And with the inability to communicate, there is therefore an inability to measure intelligence accurately.

There are three main areas impacted in autism. Social skills, language skills, and behavior. Which includes the presence of restrictive, stereotypic behaviors that should be in evidence by age three. So diagnosis can occur as young as 18 months.

For a diagnosis of autism, the child would have at least two areas of delay in social skills. Which means, for example, the person may show limited interest in other people, engage in parallel versus interactive play, or not have age-appropriate awareness of what is considered socially appropriate behavior.

Language skills are impacted. The ability to understand what is heard is receptive language. The ability to speak and be understood is expressive language. Either or both of these language skills can be impacted, as well as the presence of awkward patterns of speech, or speaking that does not provide communication. The words aren't used with appropriate meaning in themselves, or within context.

Restrictive and stereotypic behaviors, interests, and activities refers to actions such as collecting large amounts of random objects like straws, or having repetitive behavior such as slapping hands, rocking, or staring at hands.

Asperger's disorder is similar to autism, though there aren't really the delays typically associated with it, and language skills are quite developed. Someone with Asperger's disorder would demonstrate the restrictive and stereotypic behaviors and could be diagnosed as late as five.

PDDNOS, pervasive developmental disability not otherwise specified, incorporates the same three areas of concern as autism -- social, language and stereotypic behaviors -- but not enough of them to have one of the other diagnoses under the PDD umbrella.

It is worthy to note that the only generalization about autism spectrum disorders that is generally accepted is to say when you know one person with autism, you know one person with autism. Because of variations even within particular disabilities, it is recommended to attempt to recognize, appreciate, and build on each child's relative strengths instead of trying to understand too deeply the unique learning development of each child.

Imagine you were teaching about the importance of the spout the steam engine comes out, and how it works. If the child or teen is focused on the spokes of the train wheel, he or she is not going to follow you at all. In the catechetical environment, you may be talking about the story portrayed within a stained glass window, but the child with autism is focused on the framing of the glass panes instead.

In a collection of flowers, an example of focusing on irrelevant stimuli would be looking at petals in one flower, the leaves in another, and the color in a third, and therefore not be able to generalize and notice that they're all flowers.

Learning the prayers of the mass in the catechetical setting, but not within the context of mass, may not help him or her participate.

Also people with autism have extreme sensory issues, where some of all of their senses feel bombarded with stimuli. For example, sound or scents. Better to make it a practice to use fragrance-free materials whenever possible. Magic markers that smell like strawberries are not a good idea.

Often catechists and directors of religious education want to be inclusive and welcome all children and teens, yet they are concerned with all the possible different types of disabilities there are. Learning, developmental, including all the possible expressions of PDD. However, the advice that I have been given is to focus on two critical pieces of learning: Communication and behavior. This is the concern with all learners.

What will also become apparent to you the more you do this is that the strategies you learn here on how to walk in faith with learners with developmental disabilities will help with you all the children and teens you work with. Some of the strategies listed on this slide may seem simplistic, but they are easy to overlook, and may be and are very helpful when used.

For example, knowing what is coming next in the activities helps the learner to prepare for what will be expected of him or her. The reason there is a suggestion to wait before repeating yourself is because often someone with a developmental disability needs time to process what you have said before reacting. If you repeat yourself they have to restart the process, and will only be more confused.

We could also explore the types of communications more deeply, but for now it is enough to realize the role of communication in the catechetical process, know what supports its occurrence, the types, and when it isn't happening. Realize that communication happens within the context of a relationship. Both or all parties need to be engaged for communication to happen, and it requires effort.

Behaviors communicate much about what a person is feeling; there are some that are inappropriate for catechetical setting. However, if you understand their root cause, you can become more effective in dealing with them. This is also a good time to point out that we always focus on the behavior, not the person, when we are talking about problems or challenges. When speaking with a parent, I tell him or her that I love their son or daughter, but the behavior is a problem. What can we do about it. You may have to repeat this a few times, because parents so often hear any negative information, no matter how constructively stated, as criticism of their son or daughter, and possibly them as parents.

This behavior usually happens for four reasons. Wanting to escape, meaning I don't understand, please help me, or I need a break. Wanting attention. Am I doing good work, look at what I've done. Perhaps I want something. The crayons over on that other side of the room. Or sensory reasons. There's a particular action that is enjoyable, like hand slapping.

To illustrate an example of escape motivation, a child may try to escape when the environment feels overwhelming. If there is a celebration of some sort today, and the child was not prepared for the change in routine, they can become anxious. And if they are not able to calm themselves, their behavior could become agitated and either try to escape or do one of the symptomatic repetitive behaviors associated with autism, like hand slapping, or even more physically inappropriate, potentially hurting themselves or someone else.

This is why it is important to have a relationship with all the children or teens that you share your faith with. You will recognize when something isn't right and will have the relationship within which you can work out a solution.

The preferred action in the above case of changed routine would be preventative, by telling the parent and the person ahead of time, and explain what will be happening. It should be perfectly acceptable for them to decide not to come that day, and you can let them know what you'll be covering. Or by being prepared for the change, they can anticipate it and will feel prepared instead of anxious.

Here is an example of a picture schedule. It offers a suggestion about the organization of the catechetical session which would work for a mainstream group as well as a group of learners with developmental disabilities. The pictures are laminated and are attached to the schedule with Velcro. When a task is completed, the picture is removed to indicate the passing of time and what is next on the schedule.

This is extremely helpful for fostering comfort with the routine by making it predictable, which is important for this type of learner in particular. But with all learners, particularly, but also with learning disabilities.

This could be considered an example of low-tech alternative form of communication known as AAC, augmentative alternative communication. Other low-tech options would be

picture exchange communication system, PEC; picture board or picture binders; photographs; sign language and gestures. Some high-tech ones allow you to push a button and a prerecorded message is said. For example, one that is easy to program with limited messages and also simple to operate would say things like, "Big Mac, please," or, "Peace be with you." There are also some very comprehensive systems. But you don't need to worry about them ahead of time, just know that they exist, and the parents will tell you about them if they are used.

These communication aids should not only include vocabulary and expressions for what you're learning, they should also include a working vocabulary for general communication, for interaction, needing help, I feel confused, I'm happy, sad, I would like to share.

A great technique for thinking alongside the person is to write a one page introduction of the child in question, incorporating all that you know about his or her special learning and social needs, as it applies to the catechetical setting. This will help you spot challenging situations ahead of time, thereby hopefully preventing the disruption. However, I will also say that at times despite our best intentions and practices, stuff happens. And then the best response is to remember what you know about the person and reach out in relationship.

Setting routines and providing the structure and cues to make them comfortable cannot be overemphasized, but I hope you don't think this is only important for children with developmental disabilities. When any child knows what is expected of him or her and what is coming up in the schedule, then he or she can relax and focus on the task at hand.

Faith-at-home work, not homework, provides reinforcement as well as facilitates parent involvement and helps them to know what their child is learning. Saying basic prayers every night, listening to religious songs, playing matching games with pictures of important people in your parish. You can take photographs of places in your church and make flash cards out of them. There are more ideas on your handout as well for this.

Here is a picture of adapting and developing your own resources. By starting with a picture from a coloring book from the gospel, you then color it and duplicate it. On the duplicated sheet you cut out the importance pieces in the picture, laminate them, attach Velcro, and then you can use this as an interactive way of sharing the gospel.

Another example of adaptive materials is here shown with using pictures. What you want to do is to make sure that you're basing the needs on the learner. As a general rule, materials should be kept simple. Few words on a page, and pictures to explain them.

In addition to the materials and resources on our bibliography, your mainstream material can be adapted. Similarly to what was done with the coloring book, you just don't need to color.

This is much simpler than you might think, particularly with the technology that is readily available. Digital cameras, software, copiers and color copiers, laminating machines, sheet protectors, computer technology, and Velcro. Lots of Velcro.

Once you have the design, you don't need to do everything yourself. Whether it be adults in your parish who are happy to be involved but don't want to be a catechist, or confirmation candidates looking for opportunities for Christian service, the implementation

doesn't have to be up to you. More examples for ways people can be involved in this ministry again are included in your handout.

These behaviors are a part of what's called ABA, applied behavior analysis, which is extremely effective for teaching children with autism and attention disorders to learn behaviors that are important for participating in mass and in the parish life.

In using them you must first identify the specific behavior to be learned, such as receiving the host. What are all the steps necessary for that specific behavior. This would not include reception of the cup, which has its own different set of behaviors, though there is some shared. In task analysis you would identify all the mini steps involved, like leaving the pew, walking in a line behind people, being able to hold hands for reception, consume the host, and then there may be the need to adjust for food tolerance. Perhaps a very small piece, or it may not be issue. After reception of the host he or she then needs to return to the correct pew.

The value of inclusion to families is huge. Here's a picture of Ben on the day he celebrated First Communion. Ben's mother shared that for some families this may be the only place where the children are included with typically developing peers. The church's paradigm of the place where those of disabilities are accepted as they are, and valued in their uniqueness, is huge for the entire family.

Ben goes to a school for children with autism. He may never be able to say what it means to have a personal relationship with Jesus, but he will still come to know Christ through his inclusion in the body of Christ. He's in the mainstream catechetical program of his parish. When his behavior is off task at mass, his mother just needs to ask if he wants to go to religious education that day, and his behavior is back on task. Ben likes to be there. What struck me in particular about this is that it contradicts the impression that people with autism are focused in on themselves.

Participation in the youth group as part of the community is central to our identity as Catholics. If we accept that all people have a right to be welcomed in parish life because they're all created by God, then we really must support the education that leads to participation in the full life of the community. In fact, learning how to participate in the mass could be considered as the beginning curriculum.

We are piloting a concept in Newark with one child now that we are teaching to attend mass using ABA strategy called backward chaining. After determining how long John, which isn't his name, could be at mass before his behavior exceeded what was acceptable, which was 20 minutes, he began -- he next came at the last 15 minutes of the mass. In backward chaining, you begin with the end of the task, the end of mass, and gradually work back to the beginning.

Right now the focus is attending mass. Once John is successful at attending mass he will be taught to participate in mass. This is not the only method, though. Ben began attending mass when he was able to sit comfortably for an hour.

Sometimes people ask me or wonder if a child or teen with autism or other developmental disabilities, what they will learn, and so what's really the point of inclusion.

This picture, child with dog, is a charcoal drawing by Justin Conna, a young man with autism. What is so striking here is this picture is oozing with relationships, which is something that people with autism were thought not to have the ability to do.

Ben's mom, Dr. Mary Beth Welsh, suggests that autism implies the spectrum of what it means to be human. She asks, what can be learned from people with autism. What can be shared.

>> Thanks, Kathleen. I think you have a survey or a strategy that you're going to have to look at, right? Anne, sorry.

>> Yes, if you would please take a few moments and just look at the list of strategies that were talked about today, and just what ones that are new to you, or ones that maybe you'll be able to adapt based on what you've heard today, to incorporate in what you were doing.

>> Thanks, Anne. Your passion was very clear, and your practical ideas for catechist should be extremely important. So you guys could start filling that out right now, I'm waiting, I don't see anyone -- anybody responding except for two people. So let's get cracking, let's get on that survey and see what you can tell us. Because it's almost time for sister Kathleen, but we're looking for some information. So take that survey right now, please.

While we're waiting for that to come up, I don't know what's going on at your end, and maybe I'm stuck at my end, I'm not getting anything to publish at this point. So we're going to move on, and we'll come back to it if we have time later.

So I'd like to now invite Sister Kathleen, who has over 30 years of hands-on experience in this field to present some effective methods for teaching children with hearing loss, deafness, and other sensory disabilities.

>> Thanks, Lee.

>> Oh, we do have it, sorry. I'm going to cut you off one second, Kathleen. Here's our survey results, I'll publish them for you right now so you can see the kinds of ideas people are interested in, what they'd like to do. So I say we hit a high score, folks. We even hit over 100 percent, that's got to be an A plus, plus, plus. I love those pictures, as well, I thought it was a great way. Kathleen, you're on.

>> Thanks, Lee. It's really my pleasure to discuss with so many across the nation how we meet the religious education needs of children who are blind, have low vision, who have hearing loss, or who are profoundly deaf and may use American Sign Language.

I hope to share with you some of the strategies I have learned over the years, and some that parents and children themselves have taught me. Before we get into the specifics, it has always helped me to recall what the central focus of our mission of catechist is. The general directory of catechesis reminds us that the specific aim of catechesis is to put people in touch and also in communion with Jesus.

The National Directory of Catechesis gives us the mandate that as religious educators, we must seek out families with children with disabilities to ensure that they have ready access to a catechetical program suited to their needs and abilities. To do this, we must prepare. We must learn strategies, and most of all, become familiar and comfortable with

children with disabilities. Let them and their parents and guardians teach us what best works for them.

We have only to look at Jesus for a model of catechesis for individuals with disabilities, and in particular, for those with sensory disabilities. In the scripture stories we see that for sure, Jesus noticed individuals with disabilities. He noticed them. Jesus often commented on their strong faith. When Jesus encountered the man who was blind, Bartimaeus, his words can be a model for us. Jesus asked, "What do you want me to do for you?" A great question to keep in mind as we prepare to integrate children with sensory disabilities into our religious education classes.

When Jesus interacted with a man who was deaf, it seemed that he had an innate understanding of how to communicate with people with hearing loss. Jesus communicated with him in private, using gestures. Again and again when Jesus was teaching, it is good for us to take note that there was the presence of people with disabilities among those who came to learn from Jesus.

In considering preparing ourselves so that we can meet the needs of children with sensory disabilities, it is good to remember first of all that they are children. And just like all the children you meet, they have a diversity of characteristics, personalities, and abilities.

Children who are blind or have low vision of school age number approximately 93,600 in the U.S., as counted on last year's school census. Of these, 90 percent have some functional vision. This would be about 5 in every 1,000 children who are functionally blind, and a little over one in every 100 who have some vision loss.

Children who are blind or have low vision vary in their intellectual ability, as do the other children you meet in catechetical formation. It is good to keep in mind that the sense of sight is an organizing sense, enabling us to perceive objects, and make connections. Much of what we learn about our world is learned incidentally through our vision.

Because of this, it is important for children with low vision to directly experience their world and to receive augmented instruction so that they can sense and understand what is happening around them.

So how do we get started when we are receiving a child who is blind or has low vision into our program or class?

We have a wonderful resource. Parents and guardians are often our experts in knowing how their child learns. Asking the parent or guardian for a detailed description of the setting and methods of learning being used in a child's daily general education classroom can help us in making decisions about placement, about materials, about alternative format.

Inviting the child to the classroom prior to class to have a tactile tour with a visual description can be very helpful to orientate the child, but to orientate the teacher to the needs of the child.

Prior to class, enlist possible sighted guides from classmates, from teen assistants, and other volunteers. Asking what do you want us to do for you may help you to know exactly the type of assistance is needed in navigating the school and classroom.

Using these auditory and tactile cues listed here will make a big difference for a child who is blind, and may also benefit all the children in your classroom. Giving visual descriptions of all visual teaching aids will take some practice. However, using the technique of asking the other learners to take turns in giving visual descriptions of pictures and graphs will assist the child who is blind and has low vision, but will also reinforce the daily learning for all children.

Being inventive by thinking of a tactile way of learning a concept will be effective for the child with low vision, and will be a memory aid for all the children. These tactile graphics can be simple. I often try to think of a tactile experience when teaching. A simple example would be beginning a class by giving each child a dab of hand cream, have them rub it in, and discuss the soothing, healing feeling that oil or cream gives to the body.

This can be a link when learning about the rich symbol of oil and its meaning in the sacrament of confirmation. It can assist children in grasping the effect of the presence of the Holy Spirit in a tactile, concrete way.

Thinking of tactile experiences can match the sometimes abstract realities we teach, will engage the child with low vision, and all children, and provide them with yet another memory link to learning. It's important, though, always to be aware that some tactile experiences may not be successful with learners, especially those who may have sensory integration difficulties.

Hopefully, for the child who is blind or low-sighted, you will be able to access the religion book in the format the child uses. That may be Braille, large print, or a spaced version. Figure out what is effective for worksheets and handout. Often children are using technology that will amplify or read for them. Sending text files to their home through e-mail could be an easy and efficient strategy.

When adjusting and providing alternate formats gets more overwhelming than I can deal with, I often ask a volunteer, possibly a computer geek who might not want to be a weekly teacher but may love the opportunity to assist by scanning and reformatting handouts to be provided to a child or children with low vision. Sometimes these formats are also suited to a child with ADD or dyslexia.

Getting religion books in alternate formats is a possibility. The Xavier Society is one resource for this. Your handouts list other resources for Braille and audio books. Your local area may have some type of associated services for the blind that could be of help. These agencies can be a wonderful resource for materials, for assistive technology, and also for strategies.

Using a reading buddy can be very helpful, and also provide a teen or young adult an avenue for service and relationship.

Some statistics, you see on this screen, are for children with profound hearing loss. If we consider the number of children with moderate hearing loss, that number doubles. As you can see, the diversity within the deaf and hard of hearing population is evident. Currently, for children with profound hearing loss, statistics show that in the educational setting, about one half use speech and the other half use lipreading -- excuse me, one half use speech and lipreading, and the other half use American Sign Language. For some, assistive hearing technology helps, and for others it does not.

Along with hearing loss, some deaf and hard of hearing children have other disabilities. And as you can note on the slide, about 12 percent of children who have hearing loss have cochlear implants that may or may not assist them in augmenting their hearing.

I would like to consider some strategies to use with children who would be considered hard of hearing or having a hearing loss.

Since most of us as teachers rely very heavily, or almost 100 percent, on our auditory teaching, it is important to think visually. And augment what we say with writing on the board, with posting signs, and sharing written notes. Little things like being mindful not to cover your mouth or talk when you are turned toward the board is essential to a child who has a hearing loss.

Usually, if you ask a child with a hearing loss, "Can you hear me," they will often say yes. It is more helpful to ask them in subtle ways to repeat what you have just said, or ask them what you're talking about.

Seating placement should be discussed to optimize listening and lipreading. Not only listening and lipreading for the teacher, but also for the other children in the class. Providing a note-taker for learners can be very useful, especially for upper grades.

The pictures on these slides show some very helpful technologies available for the classroom. If you look very close at the teacher at the top, we see a student and a teacher using an FM system, or auditory trainer as it has sometimes been called.

Sometimes these may be borrowed from the intermediate unit or other agencies that are already supporting the child with a hearing loss. Ask parents and guardians if their FM can be used in the religious ed setting.

While using the FM, the teacher needs to remember that when the transmitter is on, everything the teacher says will be heard by the student, even private conversations with another teacher.

Another very effective assistive listening device is a sound field amplification system. This consists of a microphone and FM transmitter and one or more loudspeakers strategically placed in the classroom, as you see in the pictures located at the bottom of the screen.

I know of a school in our area that has installed these in all their primary classrooms with amazing results for children with hearing loss, for children with attention deficit disorder and other learning difficulties.

Some general education classrooms use another technique called CART, computer assisted realtime captioning. Which means that a support staff person is using a computer to caption as the lesson is being presented. This may seem like something out of our limit, but I've used this with volunteer realtime captioners, retired persons who are great typists who can sit next to the child and type on a large screen computer, can assist a child who has hearing loss.

Teaching children who are profoundly deaf is yet another story. It's not about enhancing sound and using assistive listening devices, it is about using the language of the deaf community, American Sign Language.

There are two possible approaches to teaching children who are profoundly deaf and use American Sign Language. One is to use the use of an interpreter in the classroom within the parish religious education program. This approach has positive and negative aspects. It does provide a level of communication access; however, since there is a language difference, the learner does not have the opportunity to fully interact with other children. Classroom techniques may be overly hearing dependent, and often the cost and availability of qualified interpreters may be difficult to do on a long term basis. And it is not as effective as having a catechist who teaches in American Sign Language.

The most ideal strategy for teaching deaf children who use American Sign Language is to be fluent in that language. Often, deaf adults tell me of their minimal background in the faith because they were attempting to lipread, and in fact, lipreaders can understand about 6 to 25 percent of the communication. Or they tell me their teachers knew only minimal sign language. They had to persevere with what looked to them like baby talk.

So back to the best strategies. Using good ASL, keeping the lessons visual, having the ability to sign with other children, and the opportunity to learn and pray with deaf adults who connect with the life experience of the learner who is deaf.

Having catechists who are skilled in American Sign Language is not within the ordinary experience of most parishes. However, many diocese have deaf ministries that you can call upon to assist in coordinating religious education for deaf children. Or these ministries can assist the local parish program in providing catechist from within the deaf community.

It has been my experience that the best catechists for deaf children are those who use American Sign Language as their first language. This means training active Catholic deaf adults to be catechists. Providing children who are deaf a program that is in their language gives full communication access and connects to the life experience of the child.

If you do not know where to begin with this endeavor, seek out the nearest deaf ministry office or the National Catholic Office for the Deaf. Bring together a few Catholic deaf adults, ask for their input and their help. Deaf adults can team with the child's parents to become the catechist, and at the same time assist the parent in learning religious signs.

To help with sacramental preparation, the National Catholic Office for the Deaf has some wonderful resources that you will find listed on the handout. For catechesis in American Sign Language, the best contact for Catholic resources is the National Catholic Office for the Deaf. Many producers of Catholic videos are now beginning to caption their DVDs and videos. I urge you when purchasing video materials to inquire about captioning. We provide a list of producers of captioned AV materials in the handout.

I hope this information, the strategies and resources I have provided help in your goal to pass on our faith to all our children, and through our catechesis we may put children not only in touch, but in communion and intimacy with Jesus.

>> Thank you, Kathleen. I think you have a little survey now we get to look at, right?

>> Yes, of course. To review, and also engage yourself, and maybe committing to some of these strategies, I ask you to look at the poll and kindly check any strategies you think you may use or possibly already use in teaching children with sensory disabilities. Thank you.

>> All right, folks, time to go to work. You can check off, we'll see what we can do. I really want to thank Kathleen for helping us recognize that we're not alone, there are a host of services and people willing to help us. So it's a lot of work, folks, but let's look at it and see what you can offer in terms of your insights and ideas.

And while we're doing that, I am going to ask Anne to respond to our first question. A lot of you wanted to know, you asked for volunteers, all this kind of help, do you think -- how do we go about that? Can you help us, Anne?

>> What works for us in the north archdiocese is reaching out to the wisdom and talents in our parish communities. I've been incredibly fortunate that there are three gifted professionals, Dr. Mary Beth Walsh, the theologian and mother I mentioned to you, but then also Dr. Jerry Gibby, who is a language specialist and director of the Phoenix Center in Nutley, and Dr. Linda Meyer who is a behaviorist and executive director at Acosa, they really have done an awful lot in terms of helping to put together training for catechist.

So it's important, you've got specialists in your areas that can help you. Beyond that, though, even within parish bulletins, I had one director of religious ed, after six months of continually keeping it posted that she needed a catechist who could work with a child with autism, finally the man said, you know, I can't ignore this anymore. The challenge is out there, and that's really just to help people to share their gift through their generous heart.

>> I think that flows well if you want to look at the survey results, because the highest categories have to do with having other people help, be a part, as well as those visual clues that you talked about, Kathleen.

There was a specific question, Kathleen, about adults. Can you respond to that question in terms of what is it that adults -- are there things for low-seeing adults?

>> The question relating to if we have volunteers in our parish, religious education programs, who themselves have low vision or are blind, are there materials that can assist them.

Actually, they're the same materials that are listed in the handout that you can get from the website. There are many libraries for the blind. The Catholic library for the blind is the Xavier Society, and they have many of our religious texts either in large print or in Braille, or they can be accessed in a taped version. So the adult could be utilizing those materials. Even the secular library for the blind carry a good number of religious books, so they're very helpful. So those materials could help the assistant to be ready to assist in the classroom.

>> Thanks. Anne, I know I gave you a question, but I want you to think about this one. The question is many children on the autism spectrum have melt-downs or aggressive behavior in the classroom, which you talked a little bit about, that assist in adapting and other suggestions, and they mentioned the future horizons group having materials and books. What are some other options?

>> I think really the thing to think about is to start with asking the parents, when you first meet the child. And what are -- you'll notice on the questions asked, what are any inappropriate behaviors, and what are some things that can actually prompt that. Triggers, to cause those.

That's really -- usually that's something the child is uncomfortable, they're stressed, that's usually what it means. And so as much as you can work with the family to prevent those situations, the better you will be.

But then once it happens, because stuff does happen, what are the best responses that are comforting. Sometimes it's just soothing conversation, helping to walk out with the child, I mean, there's -- again, start with the family, though, so that you know what works for that particular person. But that's often why it is.

>> That's a very good discussion. I have a question for both of you, if you don't mind. The first one specifically said, can you -- what kind of a suggestion do you have for helping catechists become comfortable in working with children and youth with disabilities, because for many of them it feels very daunting.

>> KATHLEEN: That's a great question, and it's a challenge that we all face. I would say, you know, continuing to have annual or biannual in-services. Sometimes to ask the catechist to observe in another classroom can be helpful. They're two suggestions that I would have. Continual in-services, observing teachers who feel more comfortable.

And I guess the third would be to have a mentor, I think mentors are a great way of making people -- like someone that they can talk to and have conversation with related to what they're doing. Because a lot of times people will come to me and just say is it okay if, just to relieve their fears by saying sure, if the child needs to have a shorter time at religious ed or to have a place where they can just calm down, a little private place, those kinds of things.

So a mentor is also a good idea.

>> ANNE: I agree, those are all great suggestions, Sister Kathleen. Another one that comes to mind is also taking the chance -- for example, a child with autism, or another disability. Ask if you can observe the child in his or her educational setting. Because then you get to see how that child actually responds and acts in a supported setting, which also gives you ideas how to -- what might be helpful.

That's one way. And then again, part of it is it's just taking that first step and actually meeting the person, the child, and starting the process. But at the same time, letting the parents know you're in their hands relative to what is helpful, and that you care, and want to do your best.

>> We have a great deal today, because some of you said you're using all kinds of initials, NCOD, NAFIM, so what does it all mean. We have with us today two people who are going to talk briefly about what these organizations can do for you.

First we have Connie Wild, executive director of the National Catholic Office for the Deaf. Connie.

>> Yes, and what I'd like to share with you is some of the services which we are operating, which include referrals to local areas and diocese where you might see our resources for the catechists, interpreters, clergy, and others.

Our resources are in English and Spanish, includes books, videos, and DVDs, both to use in the classroom and for learning sign language.

We also have an annual pastoral week conference for clergy, religious lay ministers, and others who work in deaf ministry, providing support, resources, workshops and presentations. For any more information you can contact us at info@NCOD.org. Thank you.

>> Thank you, Connie. We also with us Barbara Lampey of the National Apostolate for Inclusion Ministry. Barbara.

>> The National Apostolate for Inclusion Ministry, called NAFIM, is a membership organization and it's concerned with the full participation of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in the life of church and society.

Many of our members are involved in catechesis, and there may be a member near you to whom we can refer you. We also are working on a number of information sheets which are on our website, www.NAFIM.org, also translated into Spanish, which would be useful to your catechists who need to become comfortable with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Finally, your inquiries, questions, and good and bad experiences can help us help others and you. Thank you.

>> Thanks very much, Barbara. I do have a question I'd like to pose to both of you. This concern has to do with identifying children with special needs. And sometimes they ask people to check a box, but they found that a lot of times people are hesitant to do that. What do you think is the best tool to engage parents who may not want to identify their child?

>> ANNE: It starts with actually first establishing as much of a welcoming environment as you can with parents. Because what you should remember is that they're hoping that this is one place their child can just be like everyone else. And so it's not that they don't want to share the information to be helpful, but they just don't want their child to stick out. So that's the first thing, is just try to be welcoming.

However, once you know that you've got a child that has special needs, and there are challenges with behavior and there are difficulties, then just have a conversation with the parent and ask, say, these are what we -- this is what we're experiencing, this is what is happening. What can we do, what do you think. What kinds of things are helpful with your child learning. And ask if they have an IEP at school. And again, stressing that everything is kept in confidence, although the catechist really needs to know.

>> Thanks. Kathleen, if you'd start at the beginning, this person has just been the first year on the job, she just found out she has a student that's completely deaf, she's lost about what to do. What's your best guidance, she's just starting out.

>> KATHLEEN: I would think that the first thing you need to do is communicate with the parent or guardian about what type of language the child is using. Is the child in an oral program at school, and is it lipreading that they're depending on to communicate.

If the child is depending on American Sign Language, then you do need to talk to your program director, your DRE, about whether or not you will have an interpreter, or will you be seeking a catechist who uses American Sign Language. So those are two issues that you need to deal with.

And if the child is using American Sign Language, then it would be good to connect with your local deaf ministry or nearby deaf ministry.

>> Thanks. Kathleen, I just gave you a question, if you would not mind summarizing it and then answering it, we would appreciate it. I mean Anne, sorry.

>> KATHLEEN: We must look alike.

>> ANNE: Okay, the question is when preparing a child with intellectual disabilities to receive Eucharist, what criteria do we use to determine when that child is ready to receive, and how do we explain that it may take a bit longer to prepare.

What's interesting, and I didn't get to talk to it because of time, but the second to the last slide that you'll be able to see at another time, but there's three pictures of Ben. And he's going through what's called discrimination trials, learning to discriminate, tell the difference, between the host, which he understands, or knows is Jesus, or regular food. And that canonically is what is required to be ready to receive Eucharist, is to know the difference between the Eucharist and regular food.

So they don't need to know the full depth of what we mean by the presence of Christ, and that within the context of being able to comfortably participate in the mass is what I look for.

And in terms of the length of time, parents of children with autism, or if it's a child with specifically intellectual disability, they know sometimes things take longer, but I think we need to -- what our bishops have told us is to also not hold them to a stricter bar, we need to recognize what their capabilities are.

>> Thank you very much, Anne. Sister Kathleen, this person poses a question about what your preference is in mainstreaming students that are deaf. So can you respond to this question, please.

>> Sure, it's a great question, that they're considering mainstreaming some students who have been in our deaf program using an interpreter, since they are mainstreamed in their regular religious -- regular education program. Am I recommending that they participate in a more fully deaf program, with a deaf catechist who uses American Sign Language.

My recommendation would be that that would be my recommendation, that they would be with a deaf catechist, or a person who uses American Sign Language, and where the other children use American Sign Language. However, having an interpreter in a classroom is a really good way, also, of educating children who are deaf. What you need to see is what are the parents and what are the children seeking. And sometimes it's worth trying.

One of the things about using an interpreter in a religious education setting is that oftentimes the kids need to be taught what the religious signs are. So just sitting watching someone sign is not necessarily going to have them understand the religious signs. So there is some extra teaching that has to go along, like maybe some tutoring along those lines.

So I'm not going to say that it's the only way to do it, having a catechist who signs, and most of the students who know American Sign Language, but deaf people tell me that it's their preference.

>> Thanks. Anne, could you just kind of -- sometimes it's not the kids we're so worried about, it's more the parents we're worried about. So this person had a question about parents in there. Can you respond to that.

>> What the question is is if the parents want the children mainstreamed, but the parish isn't feeling up to it, that there have been some issues with behaviors. And again, I think to sit down and have a conversation with the parent, to really try to be engaging in a relationship, and understand what the concerns are and the needs, and find out what their specific -- if they have ideas on, first of all, what might be helpful.

If it is because of disruptive behavior, or -- then how do we work with that. Are there things that could be helpful. Could you have a religious education buddy that would maybe be helpful, supportive. If the child really does need to be in a separate program, hopefully, by honest, by openly engaging in the process in conversation with the parents, hopefully they will recognize that. And also know or talk about working towards the possibility for that in the future. It's sort of both, and there's not just one answer.

>> I think that's probably one of the best things both of you have helped us understand, that you take each case by itself and look at each individual, and start that way.

We don't have time for any more questions right here, we're going to be answering those and respond to those publicly -- I shouldn't say publicly, but in written form on the website, which you're able to find after May 26th. We do invite you back to a totally different topic, not totally different but a different style of topic on Wednesday, August 13th, at 1:00 p.m. for the 1978 bishops' pastoral at 30 years.

What will happen at that time is we'll be addressing the pastoral in terms of where are we now, where do we go from here, it will be a one hour session. And we hope you'll join us, because the 30th anniversary will be taking place on November 16th, it's a good way to begin that process.

The person doing that program is Peg Kolm, who is with the archdiocese of Washington, D.C., and Karen Murray with the archdiocese of Boston, and the moderator will be Jan Benson. Please know that if you have any other questions, feel free to send them at this time.

But what we'd like you to do right now is to complete the survey about this webinar which will help us immediately to do that.

I do want to thank very much, I want to thank Anne and Sister Kathleen for their time, their ideas, for the handouts. I know some of you wrote us and said you couldn't find them, but they are on the website. If you go, once again, to www.NCPD.org, and look under the webinar, you'll find them there. And after May 26th you'll be able to access this webinar, as well, for one full year.

So once again, thank you for your participation. Please at this time complete the webinar evaluation.

>> This concludes the teleconference, you may disconnect your lines at this time. Thank you for your participation.