

## FAITH FORMATION CURRICULUM FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

### DIOCESE OF JOLIET

All baptized persons have the right to catechesis to assist their spiritual growth and understanding of the Catholic faith. (Canon 773 ff.) Parishes should have the same care and concern for children with special needs and their growth in knowledge and practice of the faith that is shown for all other children.

Children with developmental or learning disabilities should receive evangelizing catechesis adapted to their abilities and circumstances. (Canon 777.4) They should be included in regular catechetical sessions whenever possible. If this is not practical, special arrangements for home or private instruction by parents or other persons trained to teach those with special needs should be provided. (See *Faith Formation in the Diocese of Joliet*, "Procedural Guidelines" section IV)

Faith formation curriculum may be adapted from the parish's ordinary texts, or a special curriculum, such as *The Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Program*, may be used. Programs such as those from the University of Dayton may also be of assistance in adapting general religious education texts. For more information and options for faith formation of persons with disabilities, please see *Opening the Door* resource manual or contact the Consultant for Special Needs at the REO.

While it is appropriate that children with disabilities should be prepared for sacraments, under the guidelines of the U.S. Catholic Bishops *Guidelines for the Celebration of Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities*, they should also receive whatever general faith formation is possible and practical. "...meaningful participation of children, adolescents and adults with disabilities in their faith communities includes opportunities for ongoing spiritual development and growth beyond sacramental preparation." (National Catholic Office for Persons with Disabilities "Statement on Spiritual Development and Participation of Persons with Disabilities," 1995) Parents or guardians should be encouraged to present children and youth with disabilities for faith formation throughout their lives, not just when they wish them to receive sacraments.

The minimum faith formation for children with special needs should be consistent with that for all other children. It should be such that 1.) It enables them to become familiar with the Trinity and whatever beliefs of the Church they are capable of understanding. 2.) They should be given opportunities and helped to participate in the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church. 3.) They should become aware, as much as they are capable, that God should guide their behavioral choices, and that they are called to love and serve others. 4.) Lastly, they should be taught to pray or to allow themselves to become present to God in whatever manner is appropriate to their circumstances and abilities.

Since some children with special needs may not communicate in the same way as other children, catechists should become aware of the signs they give of understanding, whether verbal or non-verbal, and should look for these. While such persons may not be able to communicate or act independently, they should be assisted with loving care to acquire the internal disposition of a disciple of Jesus Christ and assisted to participate as fully as possible in the faith life of their community.