Dear Catechetical leaders:

About six years ago, I was responsible for preparing a large number of children for First Eucharist in my parish, and of course one of the aspects of preparation was to “rehearse” the children receiving the host and the wine for their special day. One beautiful, faith-filled mom approached me about her son, who had both autism and a severe gluten allergy. She was worried that he would not be able to participate in the Eucharistic celebration with the rest of his peers. This was a new situation for me as a DRE—but between the pastor, the mom, and myself, and by exercising a little common sense, creativity, flexibility, and compassion, we were able to make the celebration a joy-filled one for the boy and his family.

When Pope Francis talks about reaching out to the “peripheries,” we don’t need to go far. Families raising children with developmental and learning disabilities are often on those peripheries—and sometimes we assume that our parishes have nothing for them. Let’s find ways to be compassionate, creative, and resourceful in caring for all our children and their families—regardless of their challenges.

- Sharon K. Perkins, Office of Evangelization, Catechesis, and Family Life

In April, we recognize the gifts of persons with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs), and show how our faith leads us to create communities where all are welcome.

Everybody Belongs...

In Baptism, we become equal in dignity as necessary members of the Body of Christ. Because everybody belongs, we provide support and accommodations so that all may worship, grow in faith and celebrate the sacraments. Such access is a baptismal right of every Catholic, including persons with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

Info on Autism Spectrum Disorders

- It is a developmental disability related to varying differences in brain development
- Learning abilities can range from extremely gifted to very challenging
- It will often significantly affect a person’s communication, behavior and social skills
- Rates continue to rise; currently estimated at 1 in 68 births.
Continued from page 1:

- Some persons are nonverbal
- Autism is 5 times more common in boys
- Persons with autism are most likely in every community, including faith communities
- Practice Christ-like hospitality, as autism can create social isolation for the whole family; networking with others builds stronger communities.
- Every human being is a person first, not a diagnosis; use people first language by referring to a “person with autism,” rather than “an autistic person.”
- Some individuals may not be able to attend an entire Mass; they may need extra space in the pew or to take a break.
- Walking around a room or having an object to hold can often provide a person the ability to focus and feel calm.
- Some persons may be more affected by lights, sounds and scents; respect their sensitivities.
- Persons who are non-verbal can receive the Sacraments of Reconciliation, Eucharist and Confirmation, as they can express their spiritual understanding through gestures or signs of reverence.

“Respect for persons with disabilities and including them equally in the life of the Church is crucial for our understanding of the human person.”

- Daniel Cardinal DiNardo Archbishop of Galveston-Houston

"Every parish should seek out its parishioners with... disabilities, support them with love and concern, and ensure that they have ready access to a catechetical program suited to their needs and abilities."

- National Directory for Catechesis, 61

---

**Catholic Resources**

- Catholics with Autism
- Adapted Sacramental Prep Kits
  [www.loyolapress.com/special-needs.htm](http://www.loyolapress.com/special-needs.htm)
- USCCB Pastoral Statement
  [http://tinyurl.com/m4l43bb](http://tinyurl.com/m4l43bb)
- USCCB Welcome and Justice
  [http://tinyurl.com/my6gn9v](http://tinyurl.com/my6gn9v)
- USCCB Sacramental Guidelines
  [http://tinyurl.com/m9se6hc](http://tinyurl.com/m9se6hc)

**Other Resources**

- Autism Society of America
- Autism Spectrum Disorders at cdc.gov
- Diocese of Austin Website
  [Special Needs pages](http://www.catholicswithautism.org)
God created mankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:27)

2017 SPECIAL NEEDS WORKSHOPS

DIOCESAN PASTORAL CENTER
9:30 a.m.–3 p.m.

♦ Thursday, April 6: “Made in the Image of God”—
Serving Persons with Special Needs

♦ Monday, October 9: “Made in the Image of God”—
Sacramental Formation for Persons with Special Needs

Keynote Presenter:

Charleen Katra is an Associate Director in the Office of Evangelization and Catechesis for the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston. For eighteen years her responsibilities have included Ministry with Persons with Disabilities, Early Childhood and Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. Charleen speaks frequently at national, state and local events. Most notable are her presentations regarding strategies and best practices for the successful inclusion of diverse learners: from faith formation and sacramental preparation to liturgies and parish life! She believes that hospitality and evangelization are the foundations of this ministry which underscore Catholic social teaching regarding the dignity of the person. Charleen has a Bachelor of Science in Special Education and Elementary Education and a Masters in Pastoral Studies. She is a religion consultant and writer for Wm. H. Sadlier, Inc.

RSVP for April 6 attendance no later than April 3 to: carolyn-martinez@austindiocese.org
(There is no charge for these workshops.)
Cedarbrake Retreat Center, Belton

April 8, 2017: Passion of the Lord
The Passion of the Lord Retreat will be at Cedarbrake Retreat Center on April 8, from 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Come ponder and pray about Our Lord’s Passion as passed down to us in the Gospel of Mark. Brian Egan, Director at Cedarbrake, will lead this day. The cost is $40 and includes lunch. [Click here to register.]

April 25, 2017: The Spiritual Journey
The Spiritual Journey Retreat will be held at St. Helen’s Catholic Church in Georgetown on April 25, beginning at 9 a.m. and concluding with mass at noon. You will have a chance to listen to the stories of some of our beloved, retired priests. Contact Cedarbrake Retreat Center with any questions at (254) 780-2436. [Click here to register.]

Eagle’s Wings Retreat Center, Burnet

April 4, 2017: The Gift of Hope
Just as humanity is dependent upon a supply of oxygen, so too is humanity’s dependence upon its supply of hope. Yet today hopelessness and despair are everywhere. Join us as we prepare to enter into Holy Week by exploring the depth of hope that we are given through the power of Christ’s resurrection. Presenter: Cheryl Maxwell; Former Director of the Office of Worship and Secretariat Director for Formation and Spirituality at the Diocese of Austin and gifted retreat leader. [Click here to register.]

May 6, 2017: Texas Women’s Retreat
You’re invited to a spiritual reprieve and a chance to deepen your understanding of your role as woman in the heart of the Church. This retreat will include talks, testimonies, all-night Eucharistic Adoration, Mass, and the Divine Office prayed with the Dominican Sisters of Mary, and more! The theme for this year’s retreat is “For the hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that rules the world.” This year’s key speaker is one of our foundresses and vocation director, Sr. Joseph Andrew, OP. To learn more and register, please click here to visit our website, [www.sistersofmary.org](http://www.sistersofmary.org).

SAVE THE DATE!
2nd annual
Austin Diocesan Women’s Conference
Saturday, September 23, 2017
Santa Cruz Parish, Buda, TX

WOMEN:
Healing the Body of Christ

Kathleen Beckman
Author, Catholic evangelist, President, Foundation of Prayer for Priests

Sr. Miriam James Heidland
Author and Popular Catholic Speaker
Diocesan DRE Retreat Day
March 20, 2017—Schoenstatt Austin
Publisher Days

Our Sunday Visitor will be at the Pastoral Center on Monday, April 24, from 9:30 a.m.-3 p.m.

Catechists and Parish Coordinators of Religious Education are encouraged to attend any or all of the sessions, regardless of the published curriculum currently used in their parishes. Please RSVP informing us if you plan to attend: carolyn-martinez@austindiocese.org

Sadlier Religion was here on March 27. Here are some pictures:

Office of Worship: Lenten Overview

The season of Lent began on Ash Wednesday, March 1, and continues until the Mass of the Lord’s Supper on Holy Thursday, April 13, when the Paschal Triduum begins. The Office of Worship has created the 2017 Lenten Overview for your convenience with much valuable information. Please click to download a copy: 2017 Lenten Overview
REGISTRATION FOR SUMMER CERTIFICATION PROGRAM
IS NOW OPEN!

Visit our 2017 webpages to register and view the full class listing for the following programs:

♦ 2017 Summer Certification Program
♦ 2017 Basic Teachings and CAF (English)
♦ 2017 Basic Teachings and CAF (Spanish)

DRE Certification Online Classes: Save-the-dates! Class time: 1-3 p.m.

Working with Volunteers—Part 1: September 5 / Part 2: September 19
Maintaining Professional Balance—Part 1: October 3 / Part 2: October 17
Forming Ministerial Relationships—Part 1: November 14 / Part 2: November 28
Parish Programming & Budgets—Part 1: December 5 / Part 2: December 12

Note: Registration for these will open in the summer prior to classes.

Family Life
Dr. Phi Le, Associate Director

For more information about the Office of Family Life, please visit the following web pages:

♦ Family Life Office home page
♦ Catechesis on Human Love
♦ Introduction to Theology of the Body
♦ Marriage Preparation
♦ Natural Family Planning
♦ Prepare-Enrich

If you have questions, please call Dr. Phi Le (512) 949-2470, or Yolanda Sanchez (512) 949-2492.

Religious Education Survey

We have received 66 surveys from parishes throughout the diocese. We are needing to reach 100% participation. The information on this survey will help our department better assist the parish programs. Please complete the survey online or print and complete the hard copy and email, fax, or mail to us. If you have questions, please call (512) 949-2542.
Who is my rep?

Diocesan Deanery Representative Listing

Austin Central/ Austin South: Gustavo Rodriguez
Anna Chavez, St. Ignatius, Austin
Jennifer Brooks, Holy Cross, Austin

San Marcos: Carolyn Martinez
Susan Moore, St. Ferdinand Parish, Blanco
Kevin Kapchinski, St. Martin de Porres, Dripping Springs

Brenham/LaGrange: Sharon Perkins
Debbie Greene, Sacred Heart Parish, La Grange
Lexxus Mayorga, St. John the Baptist, Fayetteville

Bryan/College Station: Sharon Perkins
Beth Cowles, St. Anthony Parish, Bryan
Lisa Storemski, St. Joseph Parish, Bryan

Austin North/Georgetown/Round Rock: Gustavo Rodriguez
Tressi Breecher, St. Elizabeth Parish, Pflugerville
Karen Kurtin, Santa Rosa, Andice

Killeen/Temple: Gustavo Rodriguez
Tricia St. Amour, St. Mary, Temple
Linda Lorenz, Church of the Visitation, Westphalia

Waco: Gustavo Rodriguez
Christine Moore, St. Jerome Parish, Waco
Rosie Escobedo, St. Francis of the Brazos, Waco

Lampasas/ Marble Falls: Sharon Perkins
Amy Corley, St. John the Evangelist Parish, Marble Falls

Bastrop/ Lockhart: Carolyn Martinez
Deborah Esquivel, Ascension Parish, Bastrop
Jackie May, Sacred Heart Parish, Rockne

Listed above are the deanery representatives for each deanery. Deanery representatives provide support among catechetical leaders within their deanery; provide mentoring for new DREs; facilitate communication between parishes and the Diocese; set dates for deanery meetings and send out reminders; encourage attendance from deanery parishes to participate in meetings; and much more!

If you have questions regarding deanery representatives or need contact information, call Carolyn at (512) 949-2461.
Save the Date!

April 1, 2017: Online registration for 2017 Summer Certification Program is open! Visit www.austindiocese.org/saff2017 to register.

April 6, 2017: “Made in the Image of God”—Serving Persons with Special Needs, at Diocesan Pastoral Center

April 24, 2017: Our Sunday Visitor Faith Formation Presentation

May 8, 2017: Ascension Press Adult Faith Formation Presentation (**date subject to change**)

June 5, 2017: Summer Certification Courses begin at Diocesan Pastoral Center

June 9, 2017: Ascension Press Training for “YOU” (Theology of the Body for Teens) at Diocesan Pastoral Center

September 23, 2017: Diocesan Women’s Conference at Santa Cruz, Buda

October 9, 2017: “Made in the Image of God”—Sacramental Formation for Persons with Special Needs, at Diocesan Pastoral Center

October 23, 2017: Catechists Workshop with Dr. Joseph White at the Pastoral Center—Involving Parents, Engaging Families

November 6, 2017: Catechists Workshop with Dr. Joseph White at the Pastoral Center—Keeping Kids’ Attention

Deanery Meetings

**Austin North/Georgetown/RR:**
Thursday, May 4, 10 a.m.
St. Thomas More, Austin

**Austin South & Central:**
Tuesday, May 2, 10 a.m.
Holy Cross, Austin

**Waco Deanery:**
Thursday, April 20, 6:30 p.m.
St. Philip, China Springs

**Temple/Killeen:**
Thursday, April 20, 4:30 p.m.
St. Mary, Temple

**Bastrop/lockhart Deanery:**
April 21, 6:45 p.m.
St. Mary, Lockhart

May 26, 6:45 p.m.
Ascension, Bastrop

June 9, 6:45 p.m.
Ascension, Bastrop

**Brenham/La Grange Deanery & Bryan/College Station:**
Monday, April 24, 10 a.m.
St. Mary, Caldwell

**San Marcos Deanery:**
Thursday, April 20, 10 a.m.
St. Mary, Wimberley

Thursday, May 18, 10 a.m.
St. Mary, Wimberley

Thursday, June 22, 10 a.m.
St. Mary, Wimberley

Thursday, July 20, 10 a.m.
St. Mary, Wimberley

**Marble Falls/Lampasas:**
Friday, May 26, 10 a.m.
Location pending
Should we confirm Catholics at the Easter Vigil?

Q: We have a new pastor, and he told us that we are not supposed to be confirming adult Catholics at the Easter Vigil. If confirmation is an initiation sacrament, what’s wrong with celebrating it at the Vigil?

A: Your question raises a larger issue of who should be celebrating sacraments at the Easter Vigil. I’ve seen group weddings celebrated at the Vigil because the couples were being “initiated” into married life. Simply attaching the word “initiation” to a sacrament does not automatically mean it needs to be celebrated at the Vigil. The Easter Vigil is primarily for the initiation of unbaptized adults (RCIA, 23). There are exceptions, but initiating unbaptized adults at the Vigil is the norm. Children of catechetical age are considered “adults” for the purpose of the rite, but the Easter Vigil norm is a bit more flexible if they are under 14 years of age. In paragraph 304 in the section on adaptations for children: “Celebration of the sacraments of initiation should preferably take place at the Easter Vigil or on a Sunday.” This is the usual situation envisioned by the RCIA. Every other situation is some kind of an exception. Unfortunately, in some places, the exceptions are starting to become the norm, such as:

- Baptized, uncatechized adults
- Baptized Catholics
- Baptized Protestants
- Baptized, catechized adults
- “Restored order” children

Please consult the full article at this link, to see how TeamRCIA, consulting the Rite, responds to each of these exceptions. And remember: the question to ask is not, “did I do everything perfectly, by the book?” but rather, “what plans will I put in place for next year so our parish can move a little closer to the ideal?”