



National Apostolate for
Inclusion Ministry

*Promoting the Full Inclusion of People with Intellectual/ Developmental Disabilities in the
Life of the Catholic Church*

St. Luke Model for Informing Teachers about Students with Challenging Needs

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The most effective way to reduce people's fears about others with disabilities is to give them simple, helpful, practical information about the person and his/her disability. Open communication is a key component of successful work with people with challenging needs. Administrators need to create an environment where questions are welcomed and teachers realize that there is no stigma attached if they ask for help and assistance.

One way to accomplish this is through a system of regular communications with the people directly involved with the student. This inclusive religious education committee model was initiated at St. Luke Church near Dayton, Ohio.

1. The director of religious education arranged for a one-day in-service workshop for her teachers to help them become familiar with a variety of challenging needs and ways to work with students in the classroom.
2. A group of people from the community in the disability field were introduced to the teachers. It was explained that these individuals were eager to volunteer their time and expertise to help the teachers. The catechists would need to be willing to ask for help when needed.
3. The director of religious education created a volunteer committee that included: teachers, parents of children with disabilities and professionals in the field of special education. The purpose of the committee was to oversee the inclusion of students with disabilities in the religious education program.
4. The committee chairperson made the initial contact with the families of students with disabilities to reassure them about the inclusion of their children in the religious education program.
5. Parents shared valuable information with the committee chairperson and this was then subsequently shared in a systematic manner with teachers at the beginning of each year.
6. Committee members maintained periodic contact with both parents and teachers to monitor any possible difficulties as they happened rather than allow problems to grow big before they were addressed.

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What were the results at St. Luke where this committee model was used?

Most behavioral interventions were successful and in the majority of cases, students with disabilities, their classmates and teachers had wonderful experiences together. Many people who were initially reluctant to work with students with disabilities became some of the best advocates for these same children. Suggested adaptations for the classroom were shared with teachers by the chairperson of the inclusive education committee.

With support and reassurance, the teachers were able to allow each student to progress at his or her own pace. The teachers were able to let go of the pressure to have everyone doing the same thing in the same way at the same time. Students with challenging needs were simply given opportunities to learn beside their able-bodied peers and everyone was seen as a valuable, contributing member of their group. Teachers began to teach less from a didactic model and more from an experiential approach to lesson content. New ways of doing things were created and the excitement of the program was contagious. In an end of the year survey about the program many positive comments were made.