



## Spring into Life

There are seeds of inclusion along with fruits of ministry growing in parishes throughout the diocese. Some beautiful blossoms can be found on our **Special Recognition** page. There, parishioners with physical challenges and developmental delays who are ministering with joy as advocates, cantors, choir members, Eucharistic Ministers, ushers, faith formation teachers and altar servers are highlighted. Few are new to ministry. All are vital members of their faith communities. We are more than happy to update this page, with your help, whenever we can!

Providing faith formation for **all** of our special children is an important part of our religious education programs. Workshops sponsored by this Office continue to help make this dream a reality. The aim of each workshop is to provide suggestions for developing a program for those children whose needs are too great to be met in a “typical” classroom. It is not enough to “find a teacher” for them. The children should not be taught in isolation, but should form a community in which they can participate and worship. Many times, they benefit from a program modified to meet their needs in a one-on-one or small group session. Tips for including these children, information about different learning styles, supplemental materials designed for children with special needs, and suggestions on how to establish such a program are included in each workshop. There is always time for sharing and discussion so that we can learn from each other on how to better serve the needs of these children. Attending a workshop is a real first step towards inclusion of **all** children with special needs in faith formation! Please check the website at [www.drvc-faith.org/disabilities.html](http://www.drvc-faith.org/disabilities.html) for an updated list of workshops. If you would like to sponsor a workshop for your catechists and parents, please let me know!

Some parishes already offer beautiful bouquets of inclusion. St. Anne’s faith formation program, monthly liturgy for special children, respite program, and support group for parents of children with disabilities, make them an outstanding example of what can be done when hearts are open to the needs of all. St. Agnes in Rockville Centre celebrated their first monthly liturgy for special children and their families. Our Lady of Mercy in Hicksville sponsors a monthly adult faith formation program for adults with developmental delays. This program has been blossoming for years, as has a similar program at our Lady of Grace in West Babylon. Parishes such as St. Raphael, Our Lady of Grace, Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Our Lady of Perpetual Help, St. Bernard, St. Frances de Chantal and St. Joseph’s in Kings Park, have wonderful programs in place for children with very special needs. Christ the King in Commack sponsors sports programs and dances for young people with disabilities. Holy Spirit in New Hyde Park takes great pride in their committee for inclusion, as does St. Frances de Chantal in Wantagh. St. Bernard’s in Levittown celebrated Inclusion Sunday this year with a welcome mat out for all those with disabilities.

This office celebrated Disabilities Awareness Month with a beautiful Liturgy and Brunch at Our Lady of Lourdes in West Islip on March 1<sup>st</sup>. Nearly 200 persons listened to the message that we all travel together on our faith journey. Our Diocesan Liturgy Celebrating the Gifts of Persons with Disabilities will again be celebrated this year at St. Frances de Chantal in Wantagh on May 18<sup>th</sup>. We look forward to offering a fall event to better include those who live “out east”.

In addition to the above, a number of parishes sponsor diocesan social events for adults with special needs. Our Lady of Mercy in Hicksville, Sacred Heart in North Merrick, St. Bernard’s in Levittown, St. Joseph’s in Kings Park, and St. Frances de Chantal in Wantagh, all host dances for adults with disabilities. For the members of the Youth Ministry and Confirmation Programs in these parishes, each dance is truly a hands on experience in reaching out to all. Finally, the girls at Our Lady of Mercy Academy in Syosset share their spirit of welcome and zest for life every year with adults with special needs at their winter dance.

This list is not inclusive. It represents only some of what is happening in the Diocese right now. It is the hope of this Office that the work of inclusion in faith formation, ministry, and worship will continue to grow in the beautiful garden that is the Diocese of Rockville Centre!