

**Involve Implementation Manual  
How to Create a Welcoming Ministry for All Children and  
Youth in our Faith Communities**

**To be used in conjunction with the book:**

*Welcoming Children with Special Needs: A Guidebook for Faith  
Communities*

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**This manual is to be used** by ministers, religious educators, and lay leaders who have completed the Involve Training.

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## INTRODUCTION

Can UU faith communities be welcoming places for all children that cross the thresholds into our churches? Do we want to make this commitment? If we do, how does our ministry to children change or does it need to change? Will we need to re-structure the church? How will the curricula need to change or does it? Who will need to be involved? How do we change the attitudes of the people in the congregation?

It is important to explore all of these questions if we as a denomination want to minister to all children. This also has profound implications for our ministry to adults with disabilities. Our understanding of differences and gifts will be challenged and will change. Can we re-structure our church services to accommodate people with different cognitive or attention abilities? Our culture=s penchant for labeling all children=s behavior that does not fit within a narrow definition of Anormal@ will come under serious question. Does it make spiritual sense to participate in this labeling? As a faith community can we minister differently and with compassion?

Committing to be leaders in this effort requires that we come to an understanding not only of our own responses to those we label but also requires an understanding of how the structures in our churches contribute to difficulties in ministering to children and people that have been labeled as disabled and often exist on the margins of society. Can we perhaps forge a new structure and ministry? Committing ourselves to this effort could open up possibilities for an entire new way of doing worship. It can be exciting as well as spiritually fulfilling for everyone involved. But it will not be easy. It may cause people to question their beliefs and their vision of a faith community. One workshop participant commented that the Catholic Church service is much more suited to populations with attention and cognitive difficulties. The service is constructed to have change and movement, so nothing lasts for more than 10 to 15 minutes. Would we want to structure our services similarly to be more welcoming to different populations? Can we tolerate odd behavior in our worship service? Is the current separate RE programming what we want to see as part of our lifespan faith development or do we want to explore more completely integrating our children and adult programming? These are questions that a faith community will need to wrestle with if they want to be welcoming to children, youth, and adults who have been labeled with a disability.

During the **Involve Training** it will be important as facilitators to explore and be aware of our own feelings, anxieties, and beliefs concerning children with special needs. You will need to establish your own philosophy and vision within the context of being a Unitarian Universalist. We will then explore what labeling does to children. We will also explore Judith Snow=s giftedness and disability paradigms and how they affect our ministry to children. Next we will examine the structure of the church and discuss a step by step approach to working with churches. This *Implementation Manual* is to help with this process. It is designed to be used in conjunction with the book, *Welcoming Children with Special Needs: A Guidebook for Faith Communities*. Also the key points of the teaching techniques described in *Welcoming Children with Special Needs: A Guidebook for Faith Communities* will be discussed and studied. In conclusion, we will envision a

utopian model of a welcoming faith community and briefly overview the disabilities and disorders.

This *Implementation Manual* outlines an ideal consulting situation in which you are asked to assess the situation and then work with the pertinent people to develop an action plan for the church to follow. If you are using this manual to work with your own church, then you should be able to follow the suggested phases of implementation. However, I realize that most churches will ask you to conduct a two hour or if you are fortunate a day-long workshop on how to create a welcoming community for children with special needs. In the “Introductory Workshops” section of this manual, I will discuss ideas to use when a church asks you to conduct a preliminary workshop for exploring ministry to children with special needs.

***Always start each training activity or consultation with the lighting of the chalice and a meditation.*** In the appendix, I give some ideas on what to use.

## **Phase One: Assessing the Congregation's Ministry to Children**

When working with any church congregation in assessing how to improve or start an inclusive ministry for children with special needs, it is important to realize that there are no absolute steps to be followed. Let the culture and overall awareness of the church determine where to start. This *Involve Implementation Manual* suggests ideas on how and where to start. Interviewing all the pertinent players is essential and then where to go next will most likely become apparent.

Please always keep in mind when working with a church that their current children's ministry will determine whether or not they can successfully include children with special needs. Congregations with a philosophy of keeping children separate from adult programming and worship will have a much more difficult time including children with special needs. Those congregations that weave children into the fabric of their faith community will have a much easier time welcoming all children.

(For the purposes of brevity, I will refer to the book *Welcoming Children with Special Needs: A Guidebook for Faith Communities* as the *Guide*.) This *Implementation Manual* is written to be used in conjunction with the *Guide*. The corresponding chapter to read in the *Guide* when implementing phase one is "Welcoming All Children into Our Faith Communities."

### **Interviews**

The appendix contains a sample questionnaire to be used when interviewing the key players within the congregation who will either help or hinder the creation of a welcoming environment and program for children with special needs. The purpose of the interviews is to determine the attitudes, beliefs, desires of the people in the church capable of making changes; to determine the overall culture of the church in regard to children's ministry and understanding of people with disabilities; and to assess current programming and activities. The interviews will hopefully help you determine the following:

- ✓ What is the current RE programming and ministry to children?
- ✓ What is the Church's history in ministering to children and children with special needs?
- ✓ Is there an Accessibility Committee? If so, does this committee concern itself with RE ministry?
- ✓ Who initiated the request for outside training and help? Was it RE driven or adult programming driven?
- ✓ What is the level of awareness and feelings of the minister(s) and religious educator?
- ✓ What is the level of awareness of the RE Committee members and the parent/teachers?
- ✓ What is the level of awareness of the Governing Board?
- ✓ What is the level of awareness of the other members of the congregation?

It is important to interview: the Senior Minister and Associate Minister, if there is one; the Director of Religious Education or the Minister of Religious Education; the Youth Program Director or whoever is in charge of the youth programming; the Chair of the RE Committee; the Chair of the Governing Committee; at least 5 parents of which 3 are parents of a child with special needs; 3 random members of the congregation who do not currently have children in the RE program; and any lay leaders who have influence in the congregation. It may be important to interview other Chairs of Committees that are impacted by religious education such as: adult education, or the committee responsible for welcoming new members. The minister should be able to make suggestions as to who should be interviewed.

After completing the interviews, compile the information and write a summary of your findings. This summary report should be shared with everyone interviewed, however it is primarily to be used by the Planning Committee. Forming a Planning Committee is the next step of phase one.

### **Planning Committee**

The purpose of the Planning Committee is to decide how the congregation will create or improve an inclusive ministry to children with special needs. Members of the Planning Committee should include: the minister, the religious educator, the youth program advisor or director, the Chair and/or members of the RE Committee and the Youth Committee, a member of the Governing Board, members of the congregation who do not have children, parents, and parents of children with special needs. This committee should only have to meet twice. The committee's task is to form an action plan for creating an inclusive ministry.

Some churches will already have an Accessibility Committee. If this is the case, then the Accessibility Committee can be the Planning Committee. There may be a need to add some additional members just for the planning meetings if the Accessibility Committee does not have the necessary representation. If the church does not have an Accessibility Committee, then the action plan developed by the Planning Committee may designate the need to form one. If a church does have an Accessibility Committee, they may already have accomplished some of the proposed tasks for an action plan or they may never have considered a ministry to children with special needs. In any case, it will be a good review for them to consider the proposed tasks and may help revitalize the committee.

Once the Planning Committee is formed, schedule two meetings. During the first meeting report your findings from your interviews. Out of this report you will certainly be able to form your own opinions as to where the church is strong and where there is need for improvement or the need to create something new. As a consultant you are expected to share your opinions, but be mindful of allowing the Committee to decide their own action plan.

## Planning Committee Tasks

### *Assessing Attitudes*

In the “Teacher Training” section in chapter three, “Religious Education that Welcomes All Children” from the *Guide*, there is an activity theme titled “Assessing Attitudes.” Please use this training activity to determine the committee’s feelings and desires to create a welcoming ministry for children with special needs.

### *Develop an Action Plan*

In the *Guide’s* chapter one, “Welcoming All Children into Our Faith Community” I provide detailed information on the steps to take when creating a ministry for people with disabilities. Please read this chapter carefully and use it to help the Planning Committee form an action plan. You may want the Planning Committee to read sections of this chapter.

On a flip chart write:

What	Who	How	When
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Under what, write the following tasks which correspond to the section titles in the *Guide’s* chapter one: Develop Disability Sensitivity Training, Develop a Task Force, Provide Accessibility, Reach Out to Families with Special Needs Children, Create Opportunities for Social Justice and Advocacy, Create a Religious Education Program that Welcomes All Children. (There is an entire chapter on this final task. The job of this committee is to decide if they want to undertake the task and who should be responsible for it.) You will probably need a separate flip chart page for each task.

There are some similarities between the Planning Committee and the suggested Task Force. The Planning Committee may want to continue meeting as the Task Force in order to follow through with disability awareness and the tasks suggested in the *Guide*. The Planning Committee may want to call the Task Force the Accessibility Committee or one of the tasks of the Task Force may be to form an Accessibility Committee. Obviously many of the same people will be involved in whatever configuration evolves.

Once the “who, how and when” of the tasks are discussed and decided, the Planning Committee disbands and then hopefully the Task Force or Accessibility Committee will take over ensuring that the action plan is carried out. Someone should be assigned to make sure the Task Force gets formed, either the minister or the chair of the Governing Board would be best. Or, someone from the Planning Committee may volunteer for the job. It is also very possible that most members of the Planning Committee will agree to stay on as Task Force or Accessibility Committee members.

This Task Force and not the RE Committee needs to be responsible for creating the culture for welcoming children with disabilities. When a church looks at becoming more

inclusive of children with special needs, it will impact the whole church and will most likely lead to looking at ministry to adults with disabilities also. If ministry to children with disabilities gets seen as the RE Committee's problem then it will be much more difficult to create an inclusive ministry for children. Even though the RE Committee will be given the task of creating inclusive programming for children with special needs, they need to have the support of the entire congregation which is committed to a ministry to people with disabilities.



## **Phase Two: Creating Religious Education that Welcomes All Children**

The Task Force now has an action plan to follow and has designated the RE Committee to improve its program for children with special needs. The RE Committee representative and religious educator on the Task Force will be responsible for relaying progress and coordinating congregational-wide disability awareness activities with the RE Committee. (Please read and refer to the chapter three in the *Guide*, “Religious Education that Welcomes All Children.” It gives detailed information about the composition and budget of the RE Committee, how and why to create a mission statement and an RE philosophy, RE registration, and RE programming. The information provided below is only to assist in the use of the information provided in the *Guide*.)

While it is important to have the entire congregation supportive of ministering to children with special needs, it is vitally important that the RE Committee be committed to the idea. There is much that needs to occur for successful programming. Awareness training for the entire congregation is necessary, however exploration of what is involved with ministry to children with special needs is essential. There are many people in the congregation that will be affected directly by ministry to children with special needs: the minister, the religious educator, the teachers, and all parents with children in the RE program. A mission statement can help this process.

### **The RE Committee**

If you are asked to work with the RE Committee, it will be necessary to make sure that parents of children with special needs are represented. Some parents of children with special needs will not have the time for this commitment because of the constant advocacy and care their children require. Solicit their input as much as possible without them actually having to attend meetings. Also explore who in the congregation has expertise regarding disabilities and see if they can become a member of the RE committee.

It is important to do some disability awareness training as regards to exploring attitudes and beliefs. Make sure all concerns are aired. RE Committee members should hear the stories of the parents with special needs children to gain an understanding of the issues and need. Unless inclusive programming is explained carefully, what often results is the resentment of some parents if they feel too much attention and resources are given to the child with special needs.

### **RE Mission Statement**

I feel it is important before creating a mission statement for the RE ministry to discuss what is the philosophy of ministering to children. If members are unclear as to why they should minister to children, then they will have difficulty coming up with a mission statement. Developing a philosophy of ministry can be controversial, but it is invaluable in bringing forth people’s views about their faith and how they want to convey spiritual concerns to their children. This is the time to carefully include a ministry to children

with special needs. It will also clear up assumptions about how others feel. Once the philosophy is agreed upon, then it needs to be incorporated into a mission statement for the brochure conveying the information on the RE program. I strongly suggest that the philosophy and mission statement be shared with the entire congregation for their input and agreement. If this is shared after the congregation has received disability awareness training, then it is more likely that inclusive ministry will be embraced.

The philosophy of ministry and the mission statement need to be reviewed or re-stated each year to the whole congregation because people forget and there are always new members. What generally happens is once the philosophy of ministry is developed and the mission statement is written, then it is rarely revisited or reviewed again. People forget and new families are never informed. The philosophy of ministry is also often assumed which can cause difficulties if a church is trying to convey their ministry to an interim minister or religious educator or a new minister or religious educator, especially if the interim or new person tries to change the church's ministry to children.

### **RE Registration**

Registering children for the RE and Youth programs usually occurs in the fall. Some churches do this well and some do not. Chapter three provides good information on the importance of soliciting information from parents. I can not emphasize enough the reluctance many parents will have on providing special needs information on their child unless their child has an obvious disability. It is important to create a climate of encouragement and trust so that parents will contribute information with the knowledge that it will only be used to create an optimal RE experience for their child.

It is also critically important for teachers to have information about the children with special needs they will be teaching and that the teachers be given ideas on how to include these children in their teaching group. Because teachers change two or three times during the year, this transfer of knowledge often does not happen. Please carefully discuss a strategy for relaying information about the children from one teacher to the next. If done carefully and consistently it can be the difference between a successful or unsuccessful inclusive ministry.

### **RE Programming and Teaching Techniques**

It is very important to read the pertinent sections in chapter three, *Religious Education that Welcomes All Children*. The training activities described in the "Teacher Training" section of this chapter provide ideas on how to help teachers be comfortable with teaching a variety of children with special needs including children who are anxious or disruptive or difficult. The information provided in this chapter is detailed and self-explanatory. It would be very helpful for all teachers to read this chapter. Also, you or the religious educator can convey the information verbally with a combination of lecture and using the training activities described in the "Teacher Training" section. This can be part of the yearly teacher orientation.

One technique that I mention over and over again when ministering to children with special needs is Dr. Robert Brook's "island of competence." Dr Brook believes that all children no matter how difficult have something they are good at. It could be feeding their dog, or watering their plants, or playing with children. For a child who does not fit in at church, finding their "island of competence" can totally turn around self-defeating, negative behavior. Find something the child likes to do and then make a big deal of it and make them responsible for a corresponding task in the church. I give the example in the *Guide* of the child who likes plants. She is given the task of watering the plants in the church, given an official title and then praised publicly by the adults for her good works. Many children with special needs, especially the ones that are seen as troubled, rarely have opportunities to excel and receive praise from adults. We could make an extraordinary positive difference in a child's life by providing that opportunity.

## **Phase Three: Ministering to Families**

While it is obvious that the successful inclusion of children with special needs requires a comfortable acceptance into the RE programming, the following tasks of ministering to families, providing support and welcoming parents and siblings of the special needs child into all aspects of church life are also vitally important. Chapter two in the *Guide* focuses on this subject. Again it is important to read this chapter when working with churches. It carefully describes what it is like to be a family with a special needs child and therefore does not require any more information in this manual.

### **Ministers and Religious Educators as Listeners**

In this section of the *Guide* I describe a technique for creating the attitude of a good listener. I feel this is absolutely critical for providing pastoral care for families. Parents of children with special needs receive constant advice and lots of conflicting information about their children. If they come to the religious educator and/or minister for pastoral care they are most likely not looking for advice. The role of a religious educator and/or minister is to listen with no judgments, just listen and provide a vehicle for contemplating the spiritual reasons for why children with special needs are in their lives.

In the *Guide*, I have also provided alternative information and views which parents generally do not receive from mainstream professionals. Many parents will be eager for alternative information. Because most alternative information touches on the spiritual, it is appropriate for a church to be a resource for this information. Church personnel obviously can not prescribe or diagnose, but we can suggest resources for parents to explore.

### **Support Circles**

In the *Guide*, I also describe the formation of support circles for families of children with special needs. Small group ministry provides a good model for the support circle. Please read the section “Support Circle” in chapter two for a full description of these support circles. If you are consulting with a church that is having a major problem with a child and their family, I would suggest the formation of one of these support circles for the family. It shows that the congregation cares about all their members and provides a positive structure for solving inclusion problems.

## **Phase Four: Understanding the Disabilities**

The *Guide* provides information on each of the more common disability groups. If a church is having difficulty with a child with a specific disability, the information in the *Guide* may provide some insight about how to minister to the child. The information will also help the teachers to understand that certain behaviors are typical to certain disabilities and not necessarily the child trying to be difficult or odd. A word of caution, each child is unique and we want to avoid expecting certain behavior just because the child has been diagnosed with a disability or disorder. For example we hear this child has ADD and we immediately expect them to be hyperactive and difficult to control. Often our expectations can create the very behavior we fear. In the “Teacher Training” section there are some training activities to help teachers see the child and their gifts and strengths rather than what the disability label implies.

A technique that is valuable to use when helping the religious educator and teachers work with a particularly difficult child is called reframing. Have them list all the negative behavior the child is exhibiting and then have them come up with alternative positive words to describe the behavior. For example, the hyperactive child can be seen as highly energetic, the aggressive child can be seen as assertive. When we use positive instead of negative words to describe behavior, we are more likely to create encouraging expectations for the child and to like the child. We are also more likely to see the world through the child’s eyes and interact with respect.

In the “Teacher Training” section there is also a training activity for “Developing Empathy and a Welcoming Community.” This activity is also good for leading a discussion about the various disabilities. It helps people understand what a child with a disability may feel coming to their church. Areas in which the church congregation needs to improve will be revealed.

The key to ministering to children with disabilities is flexibility. RE programming should adapt to the child rather than the child having to adapt to the program. If you are asked to help a church minister to a certain child, convey the expectation that there is always a way to include the child. Some physical disabilities will require specific accommodations. Other disabilities will require different teaching strategies. Obviously there is some behavior that can never be tolerated such as violence to other children. However, we should never give up on a child. And if they can not come to church for awhile, I believe they should be visited in their home. In the section “Teaching Difficult of Disruptive Children” in chapter three, I describe developing contracts with children and listening to their stories and their reasons for negative behavior.

## Introductory/Planning Workshops

It is very likely that most churches will only have the funds to have someone conduct a couple of workshops or a day-long workshop rather than the complete program suggested in this manual. If this is the case then you will need to provide the church congregation with the tools to do most of the work themselves. They should follow the steps or phases outlined in this manual.

In order to make the most impact, make sure that all the pertinent people attend the workshop. These should include the people that were suggested for interviews in Phase I. I strongly suggest that a workshop only for the RE Committee is not a good idea, unless it is clear that children's ministry is embraced by the entire congregation.

An introductory/planning workshop should explore the reasons why the church wants an inclusive ministry and then leave them with an action plan. The action plan should incorporate interviewing key people, the forming of a planning committee and the charges from the congregation as to what the planning committee is supposed to accomplish.

In the section "Teacher Training" from chapter three, "Religious Education that Welcomes All Children", there are two training activities that can be used for beginning an introductory/planning workshop. The **activity themes** are "Assessing Attitudes" and "If the child is safe, everyone is safe." "If the child is safe, everyone is safe," is a quote from G. Campbell Morgan, "The Children's Playground in the city of God," the Westminster Pulpit, circa 1908. Obviously this theme has been around for a long time. Besides a discussion suggested in the *Guide*, it might be interesting to talk about why this idea has been around so long and whether or not any progress has been made toward accomplishing it.

Another good quote to use to start a introductory/planning workshop is from Ursula K. Le Guin "Can you create a utopian community around the suffering of one child?" I insert church before community. Put the quote on a flip chart. Assume that the suffering child belongs to a family in the church. You can use one of the descriptions of children I [provide in the "Teacher Training" section. First have a discussion as to what is meant by utopian. Hopefully people will realize that utopian means that everyone within the community has equal say, equal rights and equal opportunity to be happy. Next put who what and when on a flip chart. And have a discussion as to who creates this community, what would have to happen to make this community, and when could the church follow through on the what.

No matter what training activity you use, make sure the participants are left with an action plan of next steps and who will be responsible for the next steps, and who will be responsible for overseeing the process.

## **Appendix**

**Sample Questionnaire**

**Meditations, Prayers, and Songs**

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR USING THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The questionnaire is a sample of what you can use to interview people in the church. Copy it as many times as is necessary. Try to be consistent about asking the questions. Even if you feel you already have the answer, it is interesting to find out if people in the congregation give consistent answers. It is the areas of contradictions or lack of information that will indicate where the congregation needs to focus for becoming welcoming for children with special needs.

Please refer to the questions listed under interviews, page one of this manual. The questionnaire is trying to determine what is the level of commitment to children's ministry and what is the level of awareness concerning children's ministry and ministry to children and adults with disabilities? Many people are unfamiliar with disability and may not realize someone with a heart condition, or diabetes, or difficulties reading as having a disability. Many people equate disability only with physical disability. Also many disabilities are not readily apparent so people may just be unaware. Therefore, it is very possible for someone in the church to say that there are no members in the congregation with a disability when in actuality there may be several people with disabilities who are not so obvious. Disability awareness training is much needed to help people realize that disabilities are not them but us. (There is a training activity for accomplishing this task in the "Teacher Training" section of chapter three of the *Guide*.)



## INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Position in Church: \_\_\_\_\_

1. How would you characterize children's ministry in your church?

2. Has there ever been a discussion of the philosophy of ministry to children and youth?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, who was involved in the discussion, the RE Committee, the Youth Committee, and/or the entire congregation?

If yes, is ministry to children with special needs part of the church's philosophy of ministry?

If no, why has this never occurred?

If no, do you feel it would be helpful to have congregation-wide discussion of the philosophy of ministry to children and youth?

3. Is there a mission statement for the RE program for both children and youth?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, where is the mission statement written down?

If yes, do you feel that the mission statement accurately reflects the church's philosophy of ministry to children?

If yes, are you familiar with the mission statement? What is it?

If no, do you feel a mission statement would be helpful?

4. What is the structure of your religious education program? (Children part of the service, separate program, children's chapel, any intergenerational programming, etc.)
5. Who are the teachers for the children? (Current parents, the RE Committee, other members of the congregation.)

6. Are you aware of any children with special needs in the RE program?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, how do the children with special needs fit into the program?

If yes, are there any problems of which you are aware?

If no, why do you think there are no children with special needs in the program?

7. Is there a committee concerned with ministry to people with disabilities, such as an Accessibility Committee?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, does this committee coordinate with the RE Committee?

If yes, is the committee active and what activities does it sponsor?

If no, do you feel the church needs an Accessibility Committee?

8. Can you describe who is a person with a disability?

9. Do you have any people with disabilities within your congregation?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, what type of disability do they have?

10. Is the church handicapped accessible?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, who was involved in the decision to make it handicapped accessible?

If yes, has accessibility helped the church's ministry to children and adults with disabilities?

11. Other information

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## OPENING AND CLOSING WORDS, PRAYERS, AND SONGS (For opening and/or closing a workshop or session.)

### Opening and Closing Words and Prayers

#### From the hymnal, *Singing the Living Tradition*

470 – *Affirmation* (An affirmation of life, hope, and renewal even from tragedy.)

614 – *The Sacred Hoop* (The Great Spirit shelters all children of one mother and one father.)

616 – *For So the Children Come* (“Each night a child is born is a holy night –“)

652 – *The Great End in Religious Instruction* – (It is to awaken the soul and spiritual life.)

657 – *It Matters What We Believe* (Some beliefs are harmful and some beliefs free us and enrich us.)

664 – *Give Us the Spirit of the Child* (A child’s spirit brings us closer to the joy of living)

715 – *Your Children* (Children are their own beings, they are not yours.)

#### From Other Sources

“I light this chalice as a symbol of the Divine Light within us, the Divine Light within our children, and as a symbol of the Divine Light beyond our own being.” Or “I light this chalice for the living spirit within us, within our children, and the living spirit beyond our being.” Sally Patton

“Dear Mother and Father God, we know that by welcoming children with special needs into our faith communities, we are welcoming the Divine into our hearts. Blessings upon blessings upon blessings” Sally Patton

“Let us hold always, this picture of our child in her completeness, even—especially—in the face of those who see her as decomposed, a collection of deficits.” Barbara Gill, *Changed By a Child*

“The child is life and miracle, beauty and mystery, fulfillment and promise. Save the child. Protect the child. Care for the child.” From a conference on “The World’s Religions for the World’s Children” found in *Engaging in Transcendence* by Barbara Kimes Myers and William R. Myers

“All children are unique, each a fathomless universe of possibilities and feelings. Can we learn to listen carefully enough to hear the texture and resonances of their voices, their songs, their lives? Can we hear as (T.S.) Eliot put it, ‘the hidden laughter of children in the foliage?’ For there is only right now in which to do this work.” *Everyday Blessings*, Myla and Jon Kabat-Zinn

“Divine Mother and Father, we pray for our children labeled with a disability and for ourselves that we may connect beyond the labels and diagnoses to the perfect child within. Help us to see each child with your loving eyes so we may minister with compassion and creativity. Bless this work we do within your loving embrace. Amen” Sally Patton

“Spirit of life, spirit that radiates from within and connects us with every living thing. Help us remember and honor the child that still exists within each of us. For in our love for that inner child we know the uniqueness and specialness of each child in our church community and for all children everywhere. Whether we are parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, or special friends - children are connected to our souls. Loving God that speaks to us from within, help us remember what it means to cherish all children, for when the child is safe everyone is safe. We joyfully build an intergenerational church community, one that hears the “hidden laughter of children in the foliage” and stops to listen to the wisdom of its elders. Let us continue this sacred work, for right now is the time. Amen.” Sally Patton

### Songs

“How could Anyone” Words and music by Libby Roderick from the *If You See A Dream* CD (How could anyone fail to notice that you are beautiful and precious.) [www.alasks.net/~libbyr](http://www.alasks.net/~libbyr)

“See Me Beautiful” Words and music by Red Grammer from the *Teaching Peace* CD (See each child as beautiful) [www.redgrammer.com](http://www.redgrammer.com)

“We Are” Words and music by Dr. Ysaye M. Barnwell, Barnwell’s Notes Publishing, Washington D.C. Found on the Sweet Honey in the Rock CD, *Sacred Ground* (Each child that is born expresses who we are.) [www.ymbarnwell.com](http://www.ymbarnwell.com)

“Everything Possible” Words and music by Fred Small from the *No Limit* CD. (You can be anything you want to be, everything is possible.) [www.fredsmallmusic.com](http://www.fredsmallmusic.com)