

The 2006 Inclusion Awareness Day Workbook

**Celebrating the 10th
Anniversary of**

***OPEN HEARTS
OPEN MINDS
OPEN DOORS***

CREATING ACCESS AND INCLUSION IN WORSHIP

July, 2006

Dear Religious Leader:

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the historic conference that inaugurated the Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors inclusion movement. This year is also the 10th anniversary of the deaths of Joseph Cardinal Bernardin and Father Henri Nouwen. Since 1996 Pathways Awareness Foundation has carried out the legacy of inclusion left by these two spiritual leaders in the last months of their lives. Due to their inspirational leadership, many congregations have made great progress on providing environments that allow people of all abilities to participate in worship, ministries and leadership roles in our Houses of Faith.

An integral part of this inclusion movement is the annual Inclusion Awareness Day. We invite your congregation to participate on Sunday, September 24, 2006. Pathways Awareness Foundation has provided the Inclusion Awareness Day Workbook at www.inclusioninworship.org to assist with your participation. If your congregation is unable to participate on September 24th please set aside another weekend to reflect on your progress on this important issue.

To commemorate the 10th anniversary of Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors, Pathways Awareness Foundation is issuing a commemorative two DVD set that will include English, Spanish, Polish, captioned and descriptive versions of *Open Hearts Open Minds, Open Doors* plus the bonus DVD of the complete 1996 keynote address *The Vulnerable Journey* by Father Henri Nouwen. Please call 1-800-955-2445 to order your copy at the special price of \$20.00 per set.

Our heartfelt thanks for your continued efforts to raise awareness to the gifts received when worshipping communities are accessible and inclusive. Please continue to open your communities so that people of all abilities can participate, not only on Inclusion Awareness Day, but every day of the year.

Sincerely,



Shirley W. Ryan
Chairman

PREPARE THE WORD FOR INCLUSION AWARENESS DAY

ROMAN CATHOLIC READING SUMMARIES

READING I Wisdom 2:12, 17-20

SUMMARY: Evildoers plot against the just one, scorning the idea that **God** will deliver him.

PSALM 54:3-4, 5, 6-8

SUMMARY: God is the one who sustains and saves our lives.

READING II James 3:16-4:3

SUMMARY: Jealousy and selfishness breed conflict; wisdom and mercy come with cultivating peace.

GOSPEL READING Mark 9:30-37

SUMMARY: Greatness is defined as choosing to serve others.

THE INNER WORD: WHAT'S IN YOUR HEART?

Inclusion Awareness Day is an opportunity to direct our attention to the most vulnerable in our community.

- What do I see as my own vulnerabilities? What do I need to feel whole and welcome by others? What resentments and fears do I have regarding my own and others' weaknesses and limits?
- What can I do to gather everyone into the life of the parish? What resistance do I or others feel toward wholeheartedly embracing the racial, ethnic, physical, and intellectual diversity of the people in our community?
- How competitive am I? Do I get caught up in wanting to be the greatest in the eyes of the world or in the eyes of God? What practices can I implement in my life and the life of the parish to break free of toxic comparisons?

- Do I truly believe that the last shall be first? How can we place the last—the weakest and most vulnerable—at the center of our parish life and celebrations?

WHO'S LISTENING? WHO'S IN YOUR AUDIENCE?

Everyone at today's worship service has felt marginalized, disregarded, and ignored. Everyone knows what it is like to feel vulnerable, exposed, and in need of the help and support of others to survive. Yet, many of us choose to deny or conceal our vulnerabilities because we live in a culture that glorifies strength, power, and dominance. The task today is to help all members of the congregation acknowledge their own vulnerabilities—whether hidden or exposed—and see how much we need one another to thrive.

EXPLORING THE WORD: EXEGETICAL ESSAY

Making ourselves vulnerable and honoring the vulnerability in others is at the heart of Christian faith. Spiritual writer Father Henri Nouwen warned that if we fail to place the weakest among us at the center of liturgy, we cease to become church. The problem is vulnerability is rarely welcome in our competitive culture. Messages from every quarter encourage us to be the best, the brightest, the greatest, the swiftest, the most powerful, the most beautiful, or the most intelligent.

In today's readings, the Book of Wisdom warns of the wickedness of such competitiveness, and Saint James sees nothing but conflict resulting from such selfish ambition. Jesus, then, offers the final blow to our obsession with being first by advising us that if we want to be great, we have to be small—at least in terms of our egos. When the disciples argued about who among them was the greatest, Jesus placed a child in their midst—an irrelevant, powerless, non-person by the standards of the ancient world—and said, "Whoever receives one such as this receives me."

It's clear that the way to greatness in the eyes of the divine is to align ourselves with those who are humble, outcast, and marginalized. Not only does Jesus identify himself with such shockingly insignificant representatives, but he also insists that when his disciples receive such humble persons, God is revealed in their midst.

The last shall be first, and a child is the sign of the kingdom. Does any of this make sense? Not by worldly standards. But if we want to embrace the kingdom, we have to shake ourselves loose from the desire to climb, possess, be in charge, and be invulnerable. Vulnerability is the only requirement to enter the house of the Lord. Our meekness is all we need to be full and equal participants in the kingdom.

This an especially important lesson to keep in mind today, as we celebrate Inclusion Awareness Day. Our bodies, minds, or spirits may not be the strongest or nimblest of all, but we are no less welcome at God's table. In God's realm the more vulnerable we are, the sooner we are served. It is our role as Christians to help build the kingdom here and now by graciously serving and being served.

The church teaches that we are commissioned to see our neighbor—without exception—as “another self” and be mindful of what our neighbor needs to live with dignity. Look around you. Where do you see needs? Think about how we can accommodate these needs more effectively and compassionately. What is it like to live with physical and mental challenges? Find out. What would help others live with more dignity? Ask. What could others learn from my story? Share. What resentments do I hold toward others who are different from me? Forgive.

We are all in this life together. We are one body in Christ. We need each other. In fact, God wills it so, according to Saint Catherine of Siena. It is against God's plan and against our best nature not to acknowledge our need for others and be charitable toward one another by distributing the graces and gifts we have each received. Do your best to share your gifts with others and make it possible for others to share their gifts with you. In this way none of us comes to the table empty-handed and none of us goes away hungry. We all share equally in the banquet of God's love.

STORY STARTER

Joe had just gotten off a commuter train when an older woman came up to him and asked for directions to the nearest bus stop where she was to meet her friend.

Joe walked with her toward what he thought was the closest bus stop. But the farther they walked, the more he had the feeling it wasn't the right stop. While Joe and the woman were trying to figure out what to do, they saw someone crossing the street and coming toward them. She was a young woman, in her 20s, who had Down syndrome. "What are you looking for?" the young woman asked.

Fairly certain the young woman wouldn't be able to help, but feeling guilty that he had led the older woman astray, Joe said, "This woman is supposed to meet her friend at the bus stop nearest the train terminal," Joe said. "But we're not sure we're headed toward the right stop."

"Oh," the young woman said without a moment's hesitation, "you want the stop back around the corner for the #250 bus. That's nearest to the station. I take that bus all the time to work." They thanked the young woman, and just as quickly as she appeared, she disappeared. Joe escorted the older woman to the correct bus stop.

As he walked away, he felt sure God had visited him that day.

PRAYER FOR AWARENESS

God, our beloved creator, you fashioned us in your image. We are precious in your eyes. Instill in us the awareness and courage we need to see your face in the face of our neighbors and care for the least of our brothers and sisters. Help us to break down barriers in our hearts and remove obstacles in our communities that prevent all of your faithful from fully participating in the life of your church. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

INTERCESSIONS

Jesus helped his disciples understand that the true path to greatness lies in our humility. God, we humbly ask you to open our minds and hearts so:

- that our church may be a sign of inclusion and acceptance of all peoples. We pray to the Lord. Lord, hear our prayer.
- that our pastors may cultivate peace in their parish communities by enabling everyone access to the table. We pray to the Lord. Lord,

hear our prayer.

- that our parishioners may acknowledge their own vulnerabilities and accept the limitations of others. We pray to the Lord. Lord, hear our prayer.
- that our families may encourage each member to thrive in unique ways. We pray to the Lord. Lord, hear our prayer.

Heavenly God, we, who were created in your image and likeness, ask that you make us aware of your presence in each person we meet and that we receive each person as we would a child of God, for that is what you call us all.

RITUAL BLESSING

BLESSING FOR THE END OF THE CEREMONY

Ask the assembly to please be seated.

Loving God, for charity's sake, you instilled in each of us a need for others. Help us do your good works by sharing our gifts with others and allowing others to share their gifts with us. Welcome us all at your banquet table as we welcome one another today in the spirit of awareness and inclusion.

Extend your hand over the people:

Let us call upon God to make holy our weaknesses so that they may bring us closer to our neighbors and our divine master. May each of us learn that our greatness lies in our humility. May we find the wisdom to accept others as they are and the courage to become the person God intended us to be. May our open hearts and minds bring us everlasting peace.

Continue extending your hand over the people:

Let us call upon God to make holy our strengths so that they may be used to foster God's plan. May each of us learn that our salvation lies in our ability to receive the most vulnerable among us. May we find joy in surrendering our lives to God and loving our neighbors as ourselves. May our open hearts and minds bring us everlasting peace.

Heavenly Creator, your son showed us that faith sustains us at all times. With every cross we bear, may Jesus' example free us from anxiety, and with every blessing we receive, may we look to Jesus to teach us to be servants of all. We ask this in your name with humble and grateful hearts for the promise of inclusion in your everlasting embrace.

Response: Amen

Above Materials Developed By: Prepare the Word: Homilies from the heart that hit home, TrueQuest Communications Chicago, IL, www.PrepareTheWord.com

BULLETIN ARTICLES

Following is a short bulletin article announcing a congregation's participation in Inclusion Awareness Day. Add a description of your faith community's efforts to make your parish more accessible.

Inclusion Awareness Day, September 24, 2006

Inclusion Awareness Day focuses on issues of awareness, acceptance and inclusion of worshippers of varying abilities at our parish. Our participation in Inclusion Awareness Day affirms our commitment to making our parish accessible to all members of our faith community.

Sunday, September 24, 2006 is Inclusion Awareness Day. That weekend we will focus on access and inclusion through prayer, preaching, and reflection. Participating in Inclusion Awareness Day is just one step toward making our parish more accessible. To have a real and lasting impact, we must extend our efforts beyond this special day. Together we can open our community to people of all abilities so that everyone can participate in worship, ministries and fellowship every day of the year.

For more information about the Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors movement, Inclusion Awareness Day, and becoming an Inclusion Representative for your parish, visit www.inclusioninworship.org or call Pathways Awareness Foundation, 1-800-955-2445.

Inclusion Awareness Day, September 24, 2006

The following bulletin article can be used on Inclusion Awareness Day.

Today is Inclusion Awareness Day. It is a day to reflect on how well we, as a congregation and as individuals, include people of all abilities in our worship, ministry and fellowship. It is a day to create an awareness of the gifts each person brings to the community.

Inclusion Awareness Day is a day for us to reject the “culture of exclusion”; to reject the “culture of value based on function”. Today we adopt and support a “culture of life”; a “culture of inclusion”. Let us pray that we always remember that each person is created in God’s image, that each person is entitled to respect and that we will have the courage and grace to include all people, enhancing the unity of the Body of Christ.

Contributed by Deacon George Brooks, Infant Jesus of Prague Parish, Flossmoor, IL

QUOTES FOR INCLUSION AWARENESS DAY

“Vulnerability creates relationships. It helps create the interdependence that contributes to ecclesial communion.”
Francis Cardinal George

“Whether our disabilities are visible or not, we all have them.”
Father Henri Nouwen

“Inclusion begins in our hearts. It begins with affirmation...When we open our hearts and our community to the gifts each person brings, we are all strengthened.”
Joseph Cardinal Bernardin



The Inclusion Awareness Day Workbook is a publication of Pathways Awareness Foundation. Pathways Awareness Foundation is dedicated to raising awareness to the gifts received when faith communities include worshippers of all abilities. The “Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors” program provides information and educational materials about access and inclusion in worship to congregations of all denominations. The mission of Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors is to include persons of all abilities into worship, ministries and leadership positions in Houses of Faith. This mission is carried out by:

- Explaining how to be inclusive in the “Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors” video, Idea Guide, e-newsletter, and Inclusive Congregation Toolkit.
- Granting Open Hearts Awards to congregations to further inclusion efforts.
- Inviting congregations to celebrate Inclusion Awareness Day.
- Providing the “Different Gifts, But the Same Spirit” lesson plans to help children and youth understand inclusion.
- Featuring on-line inclusion in worship resources at **www.inclusioninworship.org**

INCLUSION RESOURCES FROM PATHWAYS AWARENESS FOUNDATION

Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors Commemorative DVD set with bonus DVD *The Vulnerable Journey* by Father Henri Nouwen \$20
Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors Idea Guide \$4
Opening Hearts, Minds and Doors White Paper \$3
The Vulnerable Journey by Father Henri Nouwen audiotape/CD \$4
Celebrating Inclusion in Worship: Seth’s Bar Mitzvah Video \$8
To order Call 1-800-955-2445

Available for downloading at www.inclusioninworship.org
Inclusive Congregation Toolkit
Different Gifts, But the Same Spirit Inclusive Religious Education Lesson Plans
Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors Quarterly Newsletter
2001-2006 Inclusion Awareness Day Workbooks