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# Essential components for a special religious education program with specific recommendations and reservations

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ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS  
FOR A SPECIAL RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAM  
WITH SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS  
AND RESERVATIONS

by  
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A RESEARCH PAPER  
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
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This research paper has been  
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## CHAPTER I

### THE PROBLEM

#### Introduction

The Church is the Sign of Christ. It must manifest to people of each age and culture the Good News of Christ. The Church, the Sacrament of Christ, must render visible the love, concern, and solicitude of Christ for all and in a very special way for the mentally retarded.

The Church continues to preach today the value of each person, whether this person be handicapped or not. It upholds the innate dignity of each individual--a dignity arising not from intelligence or productivity but from likeness to God.

It is the nature of the Church to be a ministering community, responsible for service to all, regardless of their ability to respond. The commitment of the Catholic Church to the religious development and education of the faithful has enriched the contribution men and women have made to the Christian community and to the life of the nation. This commitment has been extended not only to those already in the mainstream of social life, but also to many suffering special disadvantages, including in a special way the physically and mentally handicapped. The right of

persons who are mentally retarded to receive religious education adapted to their special needs also challenges the ingenuity and the commitment of the Catholic community.<sup>1</sup>

The psychological and educational needs of normal children that influence their religious development and catechetical instruction are the same influences that are operative for the children who are the central focus of this paper, the mentally retarded.

The special child is a human being with body and soul. Retardation often affects only his intellectual functioning, not his ability to love. However, his growth in the spiritual life may be limited by the availability of programs of Christian formation suited to his intellectual ability. Every person receives the life challenge from God to develop to the greatest degree the capabilities he or she has been given. Retarded persons, even the most severely retarded, can grow in the life of grace. Our concern today must be to provide programs to ensure growth according to each one's capacity.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>National Conference of Catholic Bishops, To Teach As Jesus Did (Washington, D.C.: Catholic Conference, 1972), p. 31.

<sup>2</sup>Rev. Richard Kiernan, I Am Atlanta: Our Lady's Association for Exceptional Children, 1969), p. 11.

The mentally deficient can be perfectly capable of practicing charity because he knows that he has received the Spirit of Love which was sent by the Lord Jesus from God Our Father . . . and that this Spirit helps us to love one another,<sup>1</sup> as Jesus loves us and wishes that we love each other.

Because of their handicap, the learning process of the mentally retarded is augmented by methods and techniques that involve as many modes of communicating the catechetical message as possible. Basic educational psychology tells us that the more senses called upon in the learning situation the more certain one can be of the individual absorbing the concept.<sup>2</sup> Thus the organization and coherence of the various elements of a special religious education class contribute to ensuring the student's grasp of the single religious concept.

The limited capacity of the retarded child makes it necessary to adapt the goals of Christian education to his particular needs and interests. The general aim of the special religious educator is to meet with the insights of pastoral theology the spiritual needs of these persons and to remove those obstacles which prevent them from hearing the Word of God and celebrating its power in their lives.

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<sup>1</sup>Henri Bissonnier, Catechetical Pedagogy of the Mentally Deficient Children (Brussels: Lumen Vitae Press, 1967), p. 85.

<sup>2</sup>Maria Montessori, The Discovery of the Child (Notre Dame: Fides, 1967), pp. 29-30.



### Statement of the Problem

The primary objective of the special religious education program is to provide an opportunity for the mentally retarded person to develop, within the limits of the individual's abilities, to a maturity in faith. Like all other persons, he is called to a life of sharing the gift of faith within the Christian community. Such maturity in faith demands an awareness of himself as a person; an awareness of other people and God's creation around him; an awareness of the Christian message and how it relates to himself and others; a deeper interiorization of the message by participation in the worship and activities of the local parish community; an awareness of his responsibility to be of service to others.<sup>1</sup>

Obviously, then, the goal of special religious education is not just the teaching of facts about God, but the nurturing of an authentic faith experience within the daily life of the individual. Special religious education strives to develop the faith potential of the mentally retarded through the experience of the love of God and neighbor.

Integral to this endeavor is the development of a sense of community. The authentic faith experience does not exist in isolation from others; rather, it grows within the Christian community and is nourished by the life of that

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<sup>1</sup>Hans R. Hahn, Helping the Retarded to Know God (St. Louis: Concorida Publishing House, 1969), p. 39.

community. Therefore, a program of special religious education also should seek to foster a consciousness of community life and should stress the importance of the family as the basic structure of the community. The program provides the opportunity for the mentally retarded person to grow spiritually, emotionally, and socially.

To Teach as Jesus Did points out:

. . . the educational mission of the Church is an integrated ministry embracing three interlocking dimensions: the message revealed by God (didache) which the Church proclaims; fellowship in the life of the Holy Spirit (koinonia); service to the Christian community and the entire human community (diakonia).<sup>1</sup>

The mentally retarded, therefore, have a right to three separate dimensions in the program of religious education:

1. The right to hear the Good News belongs to everyone. The mentally retarded child needs to hear the Word of God and experience the love of Jesus as does every person.
2. He also has a right to find Christian fellowship and community among the People of God. This includes participation in the life of the Church through liturgy and reception of the Sacraments, as well as all other parish functions.
3. And finally, the mentally retarded person has a right to be involved in service to the Christian community as an expression of his commitment in faith.

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<sup>1</sup>National Conference of Catholic Bishops, To Teach As Jesus Did, p. 10.

### Justification of the Study

The purpose of this research paper is to present what the literature describes as desirable components for special religious education programs and to suggest various organizational models with their specific recommendations and reservations.

### Definition of Terms

Religious Education. Religious education is the announcing, the proclamation and the revelation of God's Word. It is a theological discipline, a part of pastoral theology and allied to the study of preaching and the study of liturgical celebrations. In fact, religious education is no less than the faithful transmission of the Gospel to the little ones, to adolescents, to the simple, to sophisticated adults.<sup>1</sup>

Special Religious Education. Refers to the formation of Christ in the baptized as the ultimate aim of religious instruction. This formation involves two factors: knowing (to bring the special child to know and accept with faith what God has revealed); and loving (to bring him to commit himself totally to the life of the whole Christ). The laws of learning operate according to the nature of the soul's two faculties--intellect and will. The aim of instruction

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<sup>1</sup>Gabriel Moran, Theology of Revelation (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966), p. 2.

is to have the special child know and believe all the realities revealed by God through His Church. Love is more important, for man is saved by how much he loves God and not by how much he knows about Him. This should be kept in mind when dealing with a mentally retarded child.<sup>1</sup>

Catechist. This is a believer who by his word gives witness to Christ's mystery and thus illuminates earthly life, in order to help them achieve an authentic religious self-commitment.<sup>2</sup>

Mental Retardation. Refers to subaverage general intellectual functioning which originates during the developmental period and is associated with impairment in adaptive behavior.<sup>3</sup>

#### Method or Technique for Teaching the Mentally Retarded

Curriculum planning for the retarded requires great care that it may be realistic, systematic, sequential, with consideration of adequate readiness for each new step

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<sup>1</sup>Rev. G. Emmett Carter, The Modern Challenge to Religious Education (New York: Sadlier, 1961), pp. 99-110.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>3</sup>Herbert Grossman, "Manual on Terminology and Classification in Mental Retardation," American Association of Mental Deficiency, Special Publication Series No. 2, 1973, p. 11.

in learning, and with the rate of speed adjusted to limited capabilities. The retarded child has a right to an education that will prepare him for the greatest possible fulness of life now, and develop the greatest possible spiritual stature for his ultimate future.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Sister M. Sheila, O.S.F., "Basic Philosophy Underlying a Sound Curriculum for the Mentally Retarded Child" (NCEA, Proceedings and Addresses, 56th Annual Meeting, Atlantic City, New Jersey, August, 1959), p. 346.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Historical Retrospect

Mental retardation has always been a problem of great magnitude which different cultures have met and dealt with in very different ways. In Hebrew culture, each child was considered a child of God and member of a race chosen by God for a Divine purpose. This concept was the measure of his right to education. This ideal did not, unfortunately, meet with acceptance in other cultures. For example, among the Greeks handicapped children were either neglected or exposed to death on some lonely mountain.

With the coming of Christ, there came also compassion and care for the poor, the lame, the blind, the demoniac and the mentally deficient. With Him came the Great Mandate for all deviates and unfortunate victims of society: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole soul and with thy whole mind . . . and thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."<sup>1</sup> This fundamental principle of

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<sup>1</sup>Matthew 22:37.

Christ underscored the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man in relation to every human person.

St. Nicholas, in the fourth century, initiated charitable efforts for the care and protection of the mentally defective. The religious orders of the middle ages began to apply this new philosophy when they voluntarily assumed the care of handicapped children. The first colony for the custodial care of mental defectives was established in Belgium in the thirteenth century. St. Vincent de Paul and his Daughters of Charity established in the seventeenth century in a chateau in Paris a refuge for various unfortunates; the homeless, the outcasts and the bodily and mentally infirm.

Institutions for the deaf and mentally deficient were established in Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. During the nineteenth century, formal education for mentally defective children began.

The first American institution for handicapped children was the American School for the Deaf, privately organized in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1817. The first residential institution to be established for the education of mentally retarded was a private school opened by Dr. Harvey Wilbur in Barre, Massachusetts, July, 1848.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>National Society for Study of Education: Forty-Ninth Yearbook, Part 2, The Education of Exceptional Children, Henry Nelson (ed.) (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1950), p. 8.

In the following years, states began to recognize their responsibilities and by the middle of the nineteenth century several state schools had been established. However, special classes in local school systems did not become widely known until early in the twentieth century. Although some classes had already been organized in a few large cities before 1900.

The entry of the Catholic educational system into the field of special education is relatively recent, dating from 1954 when the National Catholic Education Association formally organized a Special Education Department. As a result, Catholic Special Education has acquired status nationally; the learning problems of handicapped children have been brought into intelligent focus, and their rights to share in the blessings of a Catholic education are finally being recognized.<sup>1</sup>

The Church has an obligation toward the mentally retarded just as it has toward all the faithful. They need to learn the Christian message as much as those who are blessed with mental and physical health. While some retardates require institutional care, optimally provided by residential schools under religious jurisdiction, it is neither possible nor desirable for Church agencies to provide residential and spiritual care for all the children who are mentally retarded. The majority of handicapped

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<sup>1</sup>Very Rev. Msgr. E. H. Behrmann, "The Education of Retarded Children," Catholic Charities Review (March 1961): 10.



children will and should remain in home settings. This means that parishes must accept the needs of these people and provide a place for them in the life of the parish. The retarded person, as every person, wants to celebrate his belonging to a parish community.<sup>1</sup>

### Special Religious Education Today

Special religious education is an integral part of the Church's teaching ministry in that it is the endeavor to fulfill Christ's mandate to "make disciples of all" by witnessing to and preaching the Word of God. All children, including the mentally retarded, have a basic right and need to enjoy the life of faith according to their abilities. Insofar as the mentally retarded are children of God and in no way excluded from the life of grace in the Church, it is the duty of all Christians to be concerned not only for their physical welfare but for their spiritual life as well. Special religious education programs are designed to allow the individual to grow to a maturity in faith, supported by the love and acceptance of the entire Christian community, through full and active participation in the worship and sacramental life of the Church.

The objective in carrying on religious education for the mentally retarded is to assist these children to give

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<sup>1</sup>Sr. Mary Therese Harrington, Religious Education for the Mentally Retarded (New York: Paulist Press, 1973), p. 11.

glory to God through the fullest development of their entire personalities.<sup>1</sup> Christianity recognizes the worth of each human life, no matter how feebly it functions. There are no second class citizens in the Kingdom of God. There is no point on the I.Q. scale below which a Catholic child becomes a second class Catholic. The fulfillment of God's purpose may be delayed because of the human condition, but His creative power and redeeming love will not be overcome.

Generally speaking, little provision is made for adequate religious instruction for the mentally retarded. Frequently they are grouped with children of average ability and are able to gain only vague comprehension from the educational experience and, therefore, acquire very limited religious awareness. Some severely retarded persons are deemed incapable of any learning, thus no religious instruction is afforded them. However, since the greatest number of mentally retarded children can benefit by religious instruction which is adapted to their abilities and needs, every effort should be employed to make religious education available to them.<sup>2</sup>

Catholic special education is still developing and revising its goals and objectives, as research and experience make their respective contributions. The aim of the overall program of religious nurture is to put the retarded person in touch with God through Christian life in community and to remove those obstacles which prevent hearing the Word of

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<sup>1</sup>Sr. Mary Theodore, Challenge of the Retarded Child (St. Meinrad: Abbey Press, 1969), p. 149.

<sup>2</sup>La Donna Bogardus, Christian Education for Retarded Persons (New York: Abingdon Press, 1969), pp. 31-32.

God and celebrating its power in their lives. Some general goals to be considered might include the following:

1. To familiarize these persons with God, His name, His ways with people.
2. To provide basic understandings of communion as experienced in prayer and Eucharist.
3. To develop communion with God as life-long gift and challenge.
4. To familiarize these persons with creation as gift to be acknowledged in gratitude.
5. To prepare the students to acknowledge failure, to express sorrow, and to make reparation.
6. To familiarize students with the Christian's invitation to social obligations.
7. To recognize and ritualize confirmation, its gifts and its challenges.
8. To prepare students for faith-life and its demands by providing adequate Christian models.
9. To teach students to prepare for each Sunday Eucharist through meditation on the Word celebrated that day.

Awareness of the responsibility for the religious education of handicapped persons is becoming increasingly evident. Departments of special education in religion are

moving forward in the development of programs, curriculum, methods, and other elements influencing the teaching of religion to the handicapped. The Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi have pioneered in the education of retarded children. They have published a very valuable contribution for teachers entitled Special Religious Education: A Curriculum Guide. They advise the teachers to "study the child and teach according to his needs and abilities."<sup>1</sup>

### Essential Components

We have seen briefly the historical development of special education and glanced at the state of special religious education today. Let us now examine the essential components of a special religious education program a bit more at length.

### Sacramental Preparation

Since faith is nourished and sustained within the Christian community and, since the life of that community is strengthened and unified by the sacramental life of the Church, it is imperative that the mentally retarded be admitted, in accordance with each individual's abilities, to the life of grace found in the reception of the Sacraments.

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<sup>1</sup>Sr. Sheila Haskett, Journey with Jesus: A Curriculum Guide for Special Religious Education (Milwaukee: Cardinal Stritch College, 1971), p. 11.

Only in this way will they attain to full membership in the Church, the People of God. It is the love and grace of Christ which is extended to us in the Sacraments and which draws us to them. With this in mind, we must respond to Our Lord's command: "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs."<sup>1</sup>

The Sacraments and worship of the Church are essentially social in nature. For this reason, preparation for sacramental reception should embody the social context in which the Sacraments are received. Since the family is the basic social structure and the social context most familiar to the child, it is the best model which can be used to introduce and develop the sense of community which surrounds the worship and sacramental life of the Church. Parents, then, must be deeply involved in the sacramental preparation of their children. Hopefully, in this way, the child will learn to recognize the love and fellowship which binds the Christian community, by associating it with the love and the support exhibited in the family.

Sacraments are the principal and fundamental actions whereby Christ unceasingly bestows His Spirit on the faithful, thus making them the holy people which offers itself,

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<sup>1</sup>Mark 10:14.

in Him and with Him, as an oblation acceptable to the Father. The Sacraments are surely to be considered inestimable blessings to the Church.<sup>1</sup>

It is necessary, especially when addressing the area of the Sacraments, and particularly the Eucharist, to focus attention on faith in the recipient rather than knowledge. Faith is essentially a relationship with God.

. . . the child will little by little become accustomed to the very notion of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, a notion which is the most difficult in theory but actually simpler than is imagined for the children. And it is at this we must arrive. Here it is, in our opinion, that we must finish, and not begin, at least with the persons who are mentally retarded.<sup>2</sup>

Scripture is not so much interested in how much a person knows as in that he believes. The faith-belief of all Christians, and especially here the mentally retarded, is strengthened by the reception of the Eucharist.

Preparation for the reception of the Eucharist should stress the Eucharist as a community meal, a remembrance and renewal of Jesus giving His life for us, and the sign of the Father's love and goodness and desire to be with us. The students should know that in the Eucharist, Jesus shares Himself to help us to know and love the Father and one another.

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<sup>1</sup>Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, General Catechetical Directory (Washington, D.C.: National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1971).

<sup>2</sup>Bissonnier, Catechetical Pedagogy of the Mentally Deficient Child, p. 114.

It is necessary to be able to distinguish between the Eucharist and ordinary bread, and to desire to receive Jesus in this Sacrament.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is intended to aid us in our continuing development and growth as Christian people. It is concerned with the basic direction a person's life is taking either as an increasing response to God's call by faith, or a decrease in this response. A person's actions show clearly the direction in which the relationship is moving.

In preparing the child for the Sacrament of Reconciliation we are trying to aid the child in the development of a personal relationship with God and with his neighbor. As the child grows, there should be a gradual building up of this personal relationship with God and neighbor.

To the question, "Can the mentally deficient commit sin?" Bissonnier answers:

The least that we can say is that this question cannot be answered by the negative. To refuse in principle to the mentally deficient the possibility to sin would be to deny for them in principle the existence of some sort of advertence and some sort of liberty. This would then be forgetting . . . and this is an amazingly frequent error . . . that advertence and liberty are not a question of all or nothing, but of degree. This is true for all beings, but more particularly for the person who is psychologically sick or handicapped. There are degrees in deficiency and consequently degrees in responsibility. We should thus take this into account and not believe that we are rendering a service to the mentally deficient when we treat him like a being lacking all control, all culpability and, in correlation, all possibility of improvement and progress. For the subconscious paternalism which sleeps in the heart

of every person would be more satisfied in this case than the mentally deficient himself. To treat him as responsible and eventually as a being susceptible of a certain culpability is, on the contrary, to honor him and give him more stature in his own eyes. It is simply and objectively, to treat him as he deserves.

Of course, to consider the mentally deficient as relatively responsible is not the same thing as treating him unjustly or severely. It is just as true that his responsibility and consequently his culpability are diminished and, equally that his moral judgment is not so sure, enlightened and as mature as ours normally is.<sup>1</sup>

Handicapped persons are able to distinguish between actions which cause happiness or unhappiness to others and please or displease God. Time should be spent emphasizing the importance of Christian actions and attitudes in their lives. Students should learn the importance of being sorry for causing unhappiness to others and displeasing to God. Simple forgiveness services provide the opportunity to express need and desire for reconciliation with each other and with God. As mentally retarded persons become responsible for their actions, they can benefit from the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Parents, teachers, students, and priests mutually determine whether or not reception of this Sacrament will be spiritually meaningful for each person.

Confirmation should be administered to every baptized handicapped person. Instruction prior to the reception of this Sacrament should be preceded by experiences of God's love and goodness within the community of the Church. They should know about God who made them and who wishes to share

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 71.



His God-life with them. They should know His Son, Jesus, Who came to be with us to show us how to live in love and peace with one another.

Emphasis should be given to the importance of the Spirit in the Church and in our lives within the community, and to the fact that the Spirit is coming in Confirmation in a special way to perfect our Baptism. Time should be spent preparing for meaningful participation in the Confirmation ceremony. Mentally retarded persons should receive this Sacrament in their parish communities. Various elements, both theological and communal, that influence the reception of the Sacrament by mentally retarded persons need to be considered.

In recognizing the faith dimension, the parish community welcomes the opportunity to deepen the membership bond with the retarded.

1. The baptized retarded has a right to confirmation, to full initiation into the body of believers.
2. In the faith of the Church, the confirmed retarded contacts the dynamic healing of Jesus Christ. He becomes one in the mission of Christ. Christ's mission is both experienced and witnessed through the gift of the Spirit with impelling power.
3. The Sacrament of Confirmation opens a way for the retarded to grow in faith.
4. To have a real hope and courage for the future, the retarded person needs the support of a community with a common language of gesture and symbol and action and words.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Sister Cecelia Huyck, Confirmation for the Mentally Retarded (Collegetown, Minnesota: St. John University, 1973), p. 20.

Confirmation is the action of the community of believers to bring their special people more fully into such a community under the sign of the risen Christ. The Church is looking to her model . . . Jesus healed the handicapped people and drew them to Himself in faith. This was Jesus' mission and it is still so today.

### Liturgy

As the special religious education program provides a welcoming community for the mentally retarded, so too it must provide for their spiritual growth and development. Their catechetical experiences are enriched as the retarded participate in relevant liturgical and paraliturgical opportunities, and thus in the richness of the celebrated Christian message.

The experience of worship is the basic sacred dimension of each individual's life. Through its symbolic power, ritual unites human beings, regardless of age, race or creed, with the sacred. Nevertheless, since the Mass is essentially an adult form of worship it can often become an abstract service with no basis of meaning for young children and mentally retarded persons. It is, therefore, advised that liturgical ceremonies, particularly the Mass, be adapted to the specific needs and abilities of the participants. In preparing worship for the mentally retarded and their families, the following principles should be kept in mind:

1. Simplicity and brevity so that the mentally retarded can grasp the unity and meaning of the overall liturgical action.
2. Spontaneity and activity to guide freedom of expression in word and gesture.
3. The aspect of community must be truly visible.
4. A warm environment which allows the participants to be close to the celebration and to receive the attention of the celebrant should be provided.
5. One scripture reading should be sufficient. More than one reading can give rise to confusion and a lack of comprehension of the message.
6. Authorized adaptations of the Eucharistic Prayer for children should be used.<sup>1</sup>

Excess verbage in the form of long explanations should be avoided. Each part of the Mass or service should be kept as brief as possible, particularly the verbal parts, with the entire service not exceeding half an hour.<sup>2</sup>

### Prayer

Special attention must be paid to the role of prayer in the life of retarded children and in their program of religious education. Prayer can and should be a vital part of their lives. Since mentally retarded persons often act and remain on a low level of moral maturity because of their retarded intellectual development, special effort must be made to raise their prayer life from egocentric concerns to concern for more universal needs. Bissonnier,

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<sup>1</sup>Rev. John Shea, Proposed Eucharistic Rite for the Celebration with the Mentally Retarded (Baltimore: St. Mary Seminary, 1971), p. 8.

<sup>2</sup>Sr. Sheila Haskett, Director's Handbook for Journey With Jesus (Milwaukee: Cardinal Stritch College, 1977), p. 75.

with particular attention to the prayer life of retarded individuals, affirms that it is important to awaken a sense of prayer in the deficient child. He further suggests that the four ends of prayer be presented to mentally handicapped children, especially since there is too often the tendency to limit prayers to ones of supplication.<sup>1</sup>

Speaking specifically for the retarded child, Bissonnier stresses the importance of prayer for awakening a sense of God. He points out the difficulty in ascertaining prayer because of language handicaps. He notes, however, that even though the child's language is "deficient in abstractions and concrete in form, it is often rich in symbolism. We symbolize often and are often strangely impressed by symbols which we cannot express."<sup>2</sup> He encourages educators to go beyond the "crude expressions" and to understand the "religious significance of the child's gestures."<sup>3</sup>

Human experience, symbol, biblical and liturgical signs are all essential elements of liturgy or paraliturgy designed for the participation of exceptional children. Experience admits that the retarded are educable in faith, if

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<sup>1</sup>Bissonnier, Catechetical Pedagogy of the Mentally Deficient Child, p. 147.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

faith is seen as experiential. Liturgical functions must utilize and build upon human experience and life situations, in order to portray a spiritual reality.

If there is a key to successful religion classes the key is communication. Essential to all communication is the readiness of the receiver to grasp the message. The child understands the supernatural only in light of the natural.<sup>1</sup>

Since the retarded child is often hampered by lack of communication skills, the world of symbols, signs, and gestures is very meaningful to him. Because of the retarded child's deficiency in grasping abstract concepts, the catechist must rely substantially upon his intuitive processes and the symbol becomes a medium for intuitive knowledge. Such symbols as light, outstretched arms, water, joyful music, a circle, a gesture of joy or sorrow may have a significant meaning for the retardate.

In the paraliturgy, the child has an opportunity for expressing himself. To the extent that we furnish the child with these occasions, we develop his personality and furnish him an opportunity to give of himself. This is an authentic and fundamental religious education, a true advancement towards God.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Sister Sheila Haskett, "Who? Me" Teach Religion to the Retarded?" Parent Educator (September 1969):5-7.

<sup>2</sup>Bissonnier, Catechetical Pedagogy of the Mentally Deficient Child, p. 9.

### Teacher Readiness

Thus far we have discussed the right of the mentally retarded child to religious instruction, and we have examined the essential components of the special religious education program. Let us turn now to the final figure in our scenario of the special religious education program: the teacher.

Not everyone has the attitudes toward the mentally retarded which suggest successful work with them. Jean Vanier, who has lived with developmentally disabled men in a small village near Paris, France, speaks eloquently of the real love one must have for the person of the retarded. He says:

One cannot think "I love this retarded person because I must think for him; I can take care of him." This patronizing attitude is not love at all, but a mockery of the person and his handicap. "Do gooders" can do no good for the retarded person. It is essential to appear before him humble, and in the knowledge of one's own handicaps of heart, one's own deficiencies.

If a teacher always wants to give and never stops to listen, never stops to receive, there can be no real communion. Love must be a communion. It must be a receiving as well as a giving. There must be an awareness of the wonderful gifts that the handicapped individual can give. We must recognize and humbly receive these gifts before we can say we are truly loving this retarded person. The greatest gift we can give to him is to let the retarded person give to us. We must be able to say "thank you" before we can truly say "I love you."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Jean Vanier, Be Not Afraid (New York: Paulist Press, 1975), p. 15.

The teacher's role, then, is to communicate through his/her own person the love of Christ for the person of the retardate. The retarded person has a unique ability to respond with faith and love, freely, sincerely, and joyfully. And although it is essential for teachers to understand their role, it is equally important that they be sensitive to and understanding of the characteristics and particular needs of handicapped persons. Teachers should be familiar with techniques that will effect a maximum faith-love response.

Teachers prepare for their teaching role by receiving instruction in:

1. learning characteristics of mentally handicapped persons
2. content and materials to be used
3. lesson planning
4. special needs of handicapped persons
5. facts about mental retardation
6. creative ways to teach religious concepts
7. the importance of liturgy in the life of the handicapped person.<sup>1</sup>

Realizing that mental retardation in no way lessens a person's human dignity nor membership in the parish community, it is appropriate to teach mentally retarded persons according to their own levels of ability. Within the regular parish religious education structure handicapped persons should receive instruction that is suitable to their

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<sup>1</sup>Rev. John Gilbert, Guidelines for Ministry to Mentally Handicapped Persons (St. Paul, Minnesota: Catholic Education Center, 1973), p. 3.

capacity for understanding. They should also be encouraged to participate in the ritual acts of the community and to receive the Sacraments which are the instruments and signs of salvation.

In the preceding pages the essential components of a special religious education program have been described with particular emphasis on the teacher. Let us turn now to an examination of the special learning characteristics of the mentally retarded person so as to secure the development of a special program truly geared to meet the religious needs of the mentally retarded person.

#### Learning Characteristics

The following characteristics will apply to persons who are mentally retarded.<sup>1</sup> Not all persons will have all characteristics, but a person may have several of them.

1. Lower tolerance for frustration. Mentally retarded persons may give up quickly and become upset easily.

2. Negative attitude toward learning. Because he/she has failed so often, the person wants to avoid situations that cause tension. He/she may not want to try anything new or go back to something that has caused difficulty.

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<sup>1</sup>Sr. Brigid O'Donnell, O.S.F. We Care. A Guidebook for Special Education Catechists (Madison: Religious Education Center, 1977), pp. 2-4.



3. Low opinion of ability and personal worth. The retarded person often sees others succeeding in things he/she cannot do. He/she may become aggressive or passive, depending on his/her personality.

4. Inferior ability to think abstractly. Relationships, understanding principles, generalizations and reasoning are very difficult. Concrete things should be used as often as possible.

5. Limited attention span and poor memory. This means that the catechist must allow for a diversity of activity and for much repetition, especially from week to week.

6. Hyperactivity. This person finds it difficult to sit still. The catechist should plan some activities to include action and mobility. At times, however, this person should be required to sit and listen, even though the period may be brief.

7. Perceptual difficulties. The retarded person may not see things that are important or may have trouble knowing what is real and what is a picture. Audio-visual materials should be simple to help this person learn effectively.

8. Poor transfer ability. The mentally retarded person may have difficulty applying what he/she learns in one situation to another. Many examples of one principle may have to be used to make the principle more universal.

9. Poor incidental learning ability. Most people learn things informally as well as formally. They pick up things with little conscious effort. Many of these things will have to be formally taught to a retarded person.

10. Restricted language ability. This characteristic may be demonstrated by difficulty in speaking, limited vocabulary, reading and writing difficulties, little ability to associate ideas. The catechist is not a trained speech therapist, but he/she can be patient in listening and not demand what the student is not able to give.

11. More variability in learning. Some students learn better by sight, some by hearing. Some may have no verbal ability to communicate. The catechist should explore which means are the best for each person.

12. Non-verbal students. If your student does not speak, some general things to remember are:

- a. The student may be absorbing more than he/she can relate back to you. Look for non-verbal clues, like a nod or shake of the head, an interest in what you are saying, a smile,
- b. Ask simple questions that can be answered yes or no.
- c. Use pictures and objects that the student can point to to indicate he/she understands.

- d. Have him/her draw a response or act it out.
- e. Use puppets and flannel-figures to portray a story or concept.
- f. Do not be discouraged by a seeming lack of response. Just your presence means a great deal to this person, even if he/she cannot tell you.

Essential to any good educational program are the specific techniques and "tools of the trade" used to communicate the concepts and ideas of the lesson. The following teaching techniques are particularly helpful in the special religious education program.

#### Teaching Techniques<sup>1</sup>

1. Use learning activities appropriate to the student's mental age.
2. Do not build a false sense of competence in the retarded person. He/she should be made aware of limitations and helped to work with them.
3. Teach at a slower rate. If you do not accomplish everything this time, that is O.K. Teach well, even if you teach only one thing.
4. Break down everything into small steps.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 13-14.

5. Make skillful use of repetition. You may have to present the same thing many times in different ways.

6. Always begin at a simple, concrete level. Use objects if possible. Language and symbols are more abstract; they can be used, but only after using a more concrete level of understanding.

7. Use example. Your own attitudes will be most important. If the retarded person sees someone else doing what he/she is talking about, the learning becomes easier.

8. Break up the lesson time with different activities. Do not spend the entire time on one project--or just talking!

9. Be flexible. Depending on the day, the topic, the mood of your student, you may have to change your plans. Look to see if your student understands what you are saying and doing.

10. Use short, simple sentences. Check to see that your vocabulary fits the age and experience of your student.

11. Be firm, yet gentle. Let the student know that you are both here to learn. The atmosphere you create and the expectation you have is very important.

12. Insist that the student follow through each task to its completion. Never allow a person to terminate a task unless it is completed.

13. Do not let the student gain control of the situation. The student may use many methods to avoid a given task. He may try to make minor changes, verbalize, resist, act foolish, giggle, or develop aches and pains. Stop these

activities, or, if this is not possible, ignore them and work right through them.

14. Make commands short, simple, related to the task. Wait long enough to let the student think it through.

15. If necessary, use your hands to shape the action. Put your hands around the student to facilitate writing, drawing, etc.

16. If a given task proves too difficult, change to another task and then come back to it. If, after several attempts, the student does not show any comprehension, do not abandon it. Find a simpler approach.

All curriculum planning should be based as closely as possible on the psychological levels of the child's development. It is important to note that as much concrete involvement as possible on the part of the child is essential to any real learning. As with the normal child, the retarded child also learns best by doing.

The following stages, as outlined, are very general. In some situations they can be applied chronologically while in others they are best understood as a mental age. It is necessary to study each student and determine individually where he or she is developmentally.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Religious Learning for Children with Mental Disabilities, CCD--Religious Education Office Archdiocese of Philadelphia, Raymond J. Teller, Director, 1975, pp. 32-41.

**LEVEL I: Zero to five/six Years**

Egotistical, self-centered. This should not be viewed negatively. It is a healthy, normal stage of development. The emphasis is on me. Opportunities should be given the child to fully experience who he is. The child should be continually reminded of how good God is to have made him in such a way that he can enjoy the good things and people around him. Much emphasis should be placed upon physical, concrete involvement in the learning experience.

**LEVEL II: Five/six to thirteen/fourteen Years**

The individual is more aware of others as being independent of him; there is a need of friendship, but generally a selfish need. This is the beginning of social awareness. This is a difficult state as seen in the child's difficulty in sharing. Opportunities should be given the child for group experiences.

**LEVEL III: Fourteen years through Adulthood**

Egotism develops into a good self-concept and identity. The individual now sees himself as part of a community. At this level, and deepening through adulthood, there is an awareness of the needs of others and desire to respond to these needs. Coinciding with this is a realization that God is our Father and that Christ is our Brother.

The adolescent or adult, as he matures in age and grace, should be encouraged to volunteer his time and efforts wherever the situation requires. Whenever possible, he should be encouraged to be involved in parish endeavors. Too often society seeks to do for the retarded and neglects their tremendous potential for giving.

Also at this level is the beginning of the need for reflection and prayer. Periods of time for privacy and leisure time for thinking should be encouraged as well.

#### Lesson Plans

A well thought out lesson plan is an indispensable aid for any teacher, but particularly for those involved in the religious education of the retarded. Extreme care must be taken to ensure that each lesson is solid in doctrinal content without rendering the concepts involved incomprehensible or meaningless to the child. In order to be effective, the lesson should be based on the developmental level and potential of the individual.

A slow pace and frequent repetition are extremely important when working with the special child. Abstract concepts without foundation in the concrete are, for the most part, meaningless to the retarded child. Lessons must be simple and effective, but care must be taken not to stifle the growth or creativity of any child. The potential for development in each individual must be considered and carefully nurtured.

### Special Religious Education Models

Three models of special religious education are presented as suitable for adoption and/or adaptation for use in parish programs for special religious education.

#### CHICAGO ILLINOIS (SPRED)

The Special Religious Education Division of the Chicago Archdiocese has developed a program of religious instruction for the mentally retarded that has as its basis three elements: (1) Montessori's prepared environment; (2) the symbolic teaching technique; (3) the community of teachers. The learning situation of the SPRED program is what Montessori labelled the liberty of the "prepared environment."<sup>1</sup> This Montessori principle is essential to the SPRED philosophy. Montessori, in preparing an environment for children, was extremely critical of the different places where our children in today's society are supposed to live. Our environments are prepared only for healthy adults. Persons who are retarded, as well as little children, are supposed to adapt to the adult's world. In an environment not prepared for them they can only feel uneasy, uncomfortable, very often guilty as they discover in their daily lives that

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<sup>1</sup>E. M. Standing, Maria Montessori, Her Life and Work (New York: Mento-Omega Books, 1962), p. 284.



they cannot do as others are doing. For the child, teenager or adult person who is retarded the meeting room environment needs to be a place where he can feel totally at ease. To provide this reaction of satisfaction involved in self-discovery and discovery of others, the meeting room provides:

1. an environment where many choices are possible;
2. an environment where the person may work at his/her own rhythm;
3. an environment where each person's choices and pace are respected by the others.

Regarding the first element, sharing a symbolic experience which becomes transparent with new meaning does not require gifted intelligence because the process is fundamentally intuitive. Symbols are the manifestation in the sensible--in imagination, gestures, and feelings--of a further reality, the expression of a depth which both shows and hides itself. By symbol is meant an image which, because of its affective connotations, represents for us a reality whose depth of meaning will never be completely fathomed by the mind.

Pursuant to the second element, SPRED teachers meet regularly to share religious experiences and grow in the knowledge of their faith. In the week preceding the child's session, the teachers discuss the message and apply it in their own lives. By means of very honest discussions and prayer together, a believing adult community is formed. The

community of children inserted into this adult faith community discovers the friendship of Christ and is helped to grow in relationship with Him.

There are three kinds of catechists employed: the helpers who serve as the adult friends of the retarded child; leaders who coordinate the efforts of the helper catechists and give them training sessions; and, activity catechists responsible for the preparation of the materials. This arrangement establishes a one-to-one teacher-child relationship and forms the spokes of the Center's wheel of activity.

As regards the third element, the parish chairman and local priests are important members of the SPRED community. The parish chairman coordinates the relationships between local churches and gathers the retarded persons and their teachers. Priests from participating parishes are essential members of a faith community because they have the leadership role when it comes to worship. The catechetical community is gradually transformed into a worshipping community, then the priest is invited to the sacred room for the celebration of the Liturgy.

Simply put, the symbolic catechechesis of the Chicago Approach is a technique showing people that they encounter God through recognizing His presence by His action in their daily life.<sup>1</sup> In presenting religious realities to

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<sup>1</sup>Sister Ethne Kennedy, Faith and the Mentally Retarded: The Chicago Experience, SPRED Supplement No. 1 (Chicago: Archdiocesan Center of C.C.D., 1969), p. 3.

the retarded, the SPRED Center uses many natural symbols which become religious symbols (light, water, rock, seeds and trees) as their meanings are developed and experienced. The Chicago Approach to special religious education is a unique method combining Montessori's concept of prepared environment with a community of teachers and a symbolic catechesis.

#### MADISON, WISCONSIN

This program has a triple thrust. It is designed to provide instruction and worship for the retardates, training for the teachers, and lectures and discussions for the parents.

Catechists are largely teenagers and college students who volunteer their service each week to serve God's special people. They are encouraged to become a community of believers, so that their example may show the living faith which they teach formally to their students. The catechists meet with their special charges for a thirty minute lesson. Religious instruction takes place on a one-to-one basis, using simple materials, and communication based on the principle of a single idea per lesson.

An outline of content and general presentations is followed but with adaptation to the unique needs of each

student. A three-cycle curriculum is used, entitled Journey With Jesus.<sup>1</sup> It is published by the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi and is based on the Eucharist, Penance and Confirmation catechesis. Preparation for these Sacraments fosters the pupil's growing relationship to God, to himself, and to others.

While students are instructed by catechists, the parents gather for a lecture or discussion on some aspect of theology or mental retardation. Where this is not possible, some other time is set aside for meetings with parents. This sharing of ideas, experiences, successes and failures and receiving material support is an important part of the program, since parents do have the primary responsibility for their children's growth.

Sessions are climaxed with a celebration of the Liturgy adapted to the attention span and comprehension of the children. Participation is highly encouraged whether it be serving, singing, reading a simplified Scripture passage, or offering spontaneous petitions. When the adapted Liturgy is not feasible each week, a paraliturgy, using the Scripture readings for that week's Liturgy, provides a communal prayer experience for all concerned.

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<sup>1</sup>Sr. Sheila Haskett, Journey With Jesus: A Curriculum Guide for Special Religious Education (Milwaukee: Cardinal Stritch College, 1971), p. 17.

Sister Sheila writes:

It is content oriented. What should be taught to retarded children is not basically different from what should be taught to any child. The burden of the message is, God loves us; we return His love. The curriculum is based out of four major sources: Scripture, liturgy, doctrine, and witness. The extent, breadth, and depth of the development will depend on the child, his handicap, his previous religious experience, and his age.<sup>1</sup>

The program is based on a revelational theology. The focus being placed on the child's experience, his need to change, belong, discover, and share. There must be provided, likewise, an integration which recognizes natural realities as grace bearing.

The development of the child's self-concept is stressed by Sister Sheila. She writes, "No child, especially no retarded child, can understand God's loving concern if he has not personally experienced this concern as shown by parents and other loving adults."<sup>2</sup>

Religious education should be provided because mental development is not actually proportionate to spiritual capacity. Christianity can be grasped even by those with limited intellectual powers.

Actually, very few people of even superior intelligence approach religion in an entirely intellectual way. The

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<sup>1</sup>Sister Sheila Haskett, "A C.C.D. Curriculum for the Retarded," Parent Educator (February 1969):5a.

<sup>2</sup>Sister Sheila Haskett, "Who? Me? Teach Religion to the Retarded?" p. 5.

relation between what is known and what is believed is not a perfect one. Persons with learning problems can learn about God. Their understanding may not be complete, but most of them are capable of knowing good and evil and of making choices.<sup>1</sup>

The Madison program aims at helping the parents cope with situations that arise in the home. It aims at providing an opportunity for the parents to help each other and to work out ways of helping their children develop whatever capacities they can.

Most programs for developmentally disabled persons are hemmed in with qualification restrictions. The Church, however, must provide an open welcome to all who come. In order to provide this universal welcome, the Madison model proposes a one teacher to one student model, one that also offers service to the family.

#### KANSAS CITY, KANSAS (REACH)

The challenge of Christ and of Vatican Council II is to respond to the needs of our brothers and sisters. In September, 1971, a program was begun in Topeka, Kansas, for a group of people who are handicapped. In this program model the term handicapped includes the blind, the deaf, the retarded, and the physically disabled. The program is REACH,

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<sup>1</sup>Sister Sheila Haskett, "Why Teach Religion to the Retarded Child?" Parent Educator (January 1969):8a.

so called because an attempt is being made to offer Religious Education and Activities for the Community Handicapped.<sup>1</sup> The REACH program offers three services:

1. A religious education program in which instruction is given on an individual student-teacher relationship, and instruction in small groups is offered to any handicapped person over the age of seven years, by volunteer teachers working under direct supervision.

2. A Mass for the handicapped adapted to meet the needs and limitations of the handicapped while recognizing their strengths.

3. A social and recreational program (twice a month following the Saturday REACH Mass), which provides any young handicapped person a relaxing, social evening as a guest of REACH.

The spiritual, social, and recreational program, is conceived to meet the need of the handicapped for settings where they can relax, and meet friends, persons who may or may not be handicapped.

The entire program depends, for its vitality, on a dedicated group of volunteers who generously give themselves

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<sup>1</sup>Dolores Lebbert, "REACH: Religious Education and Activities for the Community Handicapped," NAMR Quarterly Publication 6 (Fall 1975):12-13.

to the cause and care of the handicapped: the folk group who provide the music for the Liturgy; the band which provides the music for dancing; the persons who provide transportation; the teachers in the religious education program; the organizations which provide refreshments; the persons who assist at the liturgy as friends of the handicapped; the clerical personnel and the professional persons who have provided consultation services.

The staff sees REACH adopting a Citizen Advocacy role by helping the handicapped help themselves; by pleading their cause and their rights before others; by alerting the community to the needs of the handicapped; and by being able to refer and counsel handicapped persons to other areas of help.

REACH is now operating in five separate locations in the Archdiocese of Kansas City, Kansas, and in the fall of 1975, the first REACH program was opened at St. Elizabeth's Church in Kansas City, Missouri.



## CHAPTER III

### SUMMARY

What is the role and place of the mentally retarded members in the Church and the people of God? If the mentally retarded are also to grow within the Church, special provision must be made for them. Every possible accommodation and adaptation must be provided in order to assure their fullest participation as members of Christ's Church.

#### Restatement of the Problem

This paper has examined some understandings of general catechetical content which must underlie formal religious instruction of children who are mentally retarded. The question was explored: Why, of what use, is religious instruction to these children? Desirable components for special religious education programs were explored as found in a survey of recent literature. Various organizational models with their specific recommendations and reservations were presented.

#### Principal Findings and Conclusions

A consideration of the material gathered in the review of literature reveals: (a) recognition by many

religious educators and special educators of the value of teaching religion to the mentally retarded individual; (b) their willingness to provide special religious education to him; (c) their concern about providing liturgical and paraliturgical and sacramental experiences appropriate to his level of competence and his needs.

Training and preparation are necessary for the special religious education teacher. Such teachers must possess a spiritual dedication and an understanding of the individual child's problems and needs. A review of special religious education materials and five recommended works to be used in teacher preparation are found in the Appendix of this paper.

Catechesis for Sacraments of initiation is recommended as highly significant in the spiritual formation of retarded persons. Sacraments are viewed as the principal and fundamental actions whereby Christ unceasingly bestows His Spirit on the faithful. A pastoral theology is presented for the Sacraments together with their catechetical materials and appropriate learning experiences.

Three models of special religious education were considered:

1. SPRED, a symbolic approach;
2. MADISON PROGRAM, a sacramental-centered approach;
3. REACH, a recreation-celebration model.

Christian concern for the mentally retarded is founded on the belief of God's love for all His people. The pages of the New Testament all echo Christ's concern for the afflicted of His society. The Church today is commissioned to carry out this concern of Christ to the poor and outcast of our society.

Today there is a growing realization of the responsibility to enable the mentally retarded to assume a fuller participation in the life and liturgy of the Church. In order to do this, the need has arisen for special religious instruction for the retarded. Pottebaum has defined religious education as "an effort to enter a person into a reflection on what life is about in light of the life and teachings of Jesus . . . an effort made in helping a person draw himself out and develop himself as an individual."<sup>1</sup> A program of Christian nurture, specifically geared to the needs of the retarded is intended to help these Christians grow in their knowledge of God as their Heavenly Father and in Jesus as their Redeemer.

What should be taught to retarded children is not basically different from what should be taught to any child. The burden of the message is: God loves us; we return God's love.

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<sup>1</sup>Gerald Pottebaum, "Religious Education in the 70's," National Catholic Reporter (October 29, 1971):12-14.

Retardation does not deprive one of the dignity of being a child of God. Although limited, retardates have the right to be given the opportunities to reach their potential. As children of God they, like all other children, have a right to know and love God. Our goal is to communicate and develop the Faith in the retarded, not just facts about God.

So much needs to be done in the area of special religious education. Hopefully, we will one day hear Christ say to us, "I was retarded, but you taught me to advance in grace; I was paralyzed, but you taught me about Him in whom we live, move and have our being; I was blind, but you taught me to see God; I was deaf, and you taught me to hear His voice."

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**APPENDIX**

## Materials for Teacher Preparation

### Catechetical Pedogogy of the Mentally Deficient Children by Henri Bissonnier.

This book, a classic in the field of special religious education, is published through Lumen Vitae Press, Brussels, and is available from Aquinas Subscription Agency, St. Paul, Minnesota.

This work was prepared by Father Bissonnier as a result of the research he conducted with mentally retarded children. Thus, the book contains important subjective factors which serve to enrich the objective aspects he transmits in this material.

In the nine chapters of this work, the author begins with orientations in special religious education and their practical implication for the mentally deficient children. Bissonnier continues his work with a consideration of the sacramental life of the retarded, followed by several chapters on the Sacraments of Baptism, Penance, Holy Eucharist, and Confirmation. The concluding chapter of the text considers prayer and the mentally retarded.

### Christian Education for Retarded Persons by LaDonna Bogardus.

This book deals with groups of mentally retarded in residential schools as well as those in the local parishes. It is specifically directed to teachers, with help on learning characteristics and teaching procedures, but contains guidance also for persons who plan and administer the program for these special persons.

This work, published by Abingdon Press, begins with a consideration of Christian growth and development as it applies to the person of the mentally retarded. Continuing

with a presentation of facts about the mentally retarded, the book moves to a consideration of how retarded persons learn, and suggested ways of teaching them. The concluding chapters consider various curriculum materials, and a sensitive focus on the qualifications of the teacher in a special religious education program.

Helping the Retarded to Know God by Hans R. Hahn  
and Werner H. Raasch.

For pastors, teachers, and parents, this manual covers all phases of the Christian education of the mentally retarded. It discusses the nature of mental retardation, the spiritual needs of the retarded, and the most effective teaching methods for these children. Included are ideas on organization, planning, choosing content, selecting materials and evaluating for a program which will help the retarded child grow in Christian faith and life.

The authors have prepared this textbook at the request of the Board of Parish Education's Committee on Religious Education for the Mentally Retarded, Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod. Its purpose, helping train Church members for teaching special classes, is presented in the student's text and the accompanying instructor's manual. The material, though designed for a teacher-student setting of ten sessions, can be easily assimilated by interested individuals.

The Challenge of the Retarded Child by Sister Mary  
Theodore.

For more than thirty years, retarded children have been the concern of Sister Mary Theodore, Director of Public Relations for St. Coletta School for Exceptional Children, Jefferson, Wisconsin. Through this book, the dedicated specialist shares her findings, philosophy, and hopes for the future regarding their education and care.

The scope of this warm and sympathetic book includes children of varying levels of mental abilities: the extremely limited ones; the trainable; the educable; and those who are merely slow learners. Discussing mental retardation as a whole, the author makes the problem live by telling the stories of children with various degrees of retardation whom she has known and cared for.

The author points out the need for long-range planning, including special guidance, so that the retarded may become as responsible, as helpful and as cooperative as possible.

Since Sister Mary Theodore has parents primarily in mind, she writes in a conversational style after the manner of a personal interview, and presents necessary technical material as simply and clearly, and yet as thoroughly and exactly, as possible. Her book is also designed for teachers who might find interest in the education and training of the exceptional child.

The fifteenth chapter of this work, "In Touch With God," presents valuable material for the special religious education in developing a philosophy for the parish program of religious instruction of the handicapped.

Leading the Mentally Retarded in Worship by Terry M. Welborn and Stanley Williams.

Mentally retarded persons are special. They have special abilities, special limitations, but they have the same religious needs as persons of normal intelligence, and that includes the need for worship.

This book can be of assistance to concerned Christians who conduct worship with people who have I.Q.'s ranging from 30 to 70, and who may be children, youth, or adults in terms of age.

Seven chapters offer practical help on topics such as the goals of worship, preparing for worship, the service itself. There are also sample messages that can be used as models for sermonettes.

Special Religious Education: A Curriculum Guide by Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi.

A curriculum is presented in three cycles: Holy Communion, Penance, and Confirmation. This particular organization was selected in order to provide an instructional basis for sacramental celebration. Understanding prepares for prayer and finds there its best expression.

The Holy Communion cycle lessons are devoted to learning about God, to enhancement of the self-concept by considering one's own importance to this wonderful person, God; and to exploration of how the relationship with God is deepened through prayer, the Mass, and Holy Communion.

Penance cycle lessons concentrate on the showing of love for God by doing what He wants us to do. Sin is presented as the decision to say "no" to God; Penance is the sign of return in sorrow to God's love and forgiveness.

The place of the young adult in the Church as a confirmed Christian is emphasized in the Confirmation cycle. The responsibility to witness to the Good News of Christ and to participate as fully as possible in the life of the Church are stressed.

Lesson plans are prepared at various levels to meet the range of pupil needs in a class or program. Material was obtained from field volunteers in special religious education programs where instruction was given on an individual or small group basis. For maximal effectiveness it is strongly recommended that the instruction period be culminated with celebration of a paraliturgy or liturgy offered at the child's level of understanding and attention.

Journey With Jesus: Gospel Study by Sister Sheila Haskett and Sister Coletta Dunn

The need for adults to continue to grow spiritually through some form of education is generally recognized in the Church today. There is need for an informed faith, with information being given and received at an adult level. As one grows older the Church can become more and more the focus of one's life, and identifying with the Church meets a social as well as a spiritual need.

During the years of adulthood, Scripture could very appropriately provide focus of instruction for the mentally retarded. Weekly sessions might prepare the person for the Gospel message of the coming Sunday and develop a habit of prayerfully pondering its implications in daily life.

The Church has adopted a three-year cycle of readings. The same system is followed here. Gospels being read on the respective Sundays in the parishes are currently being studied in the Special Religious Education Program. Sometimes only part of a Gospel is presented. This occurs if more than one message is included in the designated passage. The goal in the Special Religious Education Program is consistently to focus sharply on a single theme and message, and to develop it to the point where it is retained and applied in the day-to-day living of the developmentally disabled adult. In succeeding years, as the passages are repeated, the emphasis might be shifted, or another aspect of the message be considered.

Pages in this book are color coded by school or program years, rather than by Church years which begin on the first Sunday of Advent, long after programs are well in session. Plans are provided for thirty-two Sundays each year.

Essentially the session should underscore the questions: (1) What did Jesus say to the people? . . . what does Jesus say to me? or (2) What did this action by Jesus show the people? . . . what can I do about this? As the person comes to understand that he can be and do what God wants, he will also hopefully come to believe in his own worth, his own ability to be worthwhile and do worthwhile things, his own dignity and his value to other members of God's family. Understandings, insights, and appreciations are expressed in terms of specific, observable actions by means of which the person can put into practice in his life the Gospel message.