

# Resources for the Journey

Volume 8, Number 2

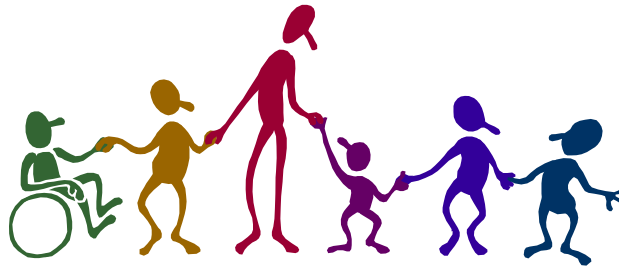
May 2006

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- Deb DeMeester
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- Metro Lutheran
- St. John's United Church of Christ, Norwood

## Paving the Way: Including All Children in our Programming

by Kris Potter



For thirty years, I have experienced the challenge of disability second hand, walking the road that is Multiple Sclerosis with my Mom. I recently asked her what I should say to children about MS in a Children's Sermon I gave at our church. She said this: "Tell them I am proud that every day when I wake up I am able to think of creative ways to deal with the challenge MS causes for me that day." This is the challenge we who work with children face as well, seeking out creative ways to include, as best we are able, all children in our church programming.

One of the lessons I have learned from taking vacations with a person who uses a walker or wheelchair to get around is that you are always scanning the horizon for anything that makes the way ahead inaccessible.

Are there stairs? How many? How high? Are there railings? Our children have learned that when we vacation with Gramma, they are the scouts, always running ahead to see if there is anything to obstruct the path. The experience of accommodating my Mother's disability led me

to consider how we pave the way for children in our Church School. What are we doing as Christian Educators, Sunday school teachers, and parents to make sure that we have paved the way for each child to experience success in our Sunday school

classrooms? What are we doing to make sure children and families feel included whatever special needs a child may have?

During the 2005-2006 program year, we made movement towards inclusion and welcome for children in our church school by asking parents to complete an inclusion assessment form for their child. This survey was the result of a phone conversation with Ron Cottone, Executive Director of Disability Awareness Ministries, Inc. (DAMI). I called Ron seeking ways

to better prepare Sunday school teachers for all the children that would be entering their classroom in the fall. How could we equip them for success in this key volunteer position? Ron suggested using a simple survey that

would ask parents to tell us about their child and

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The experience of accommodating my Mother's disability led me to consider how we pave the way for children in our church—making sure each child has the opportunity to experience success in the Sunday school classroom and other ministry settings.

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## Resource Center Bulletin Board: News and Events

### Paving the Way: Implementing Inclusion Assessment Forms in Educational Ministry

Children and youth come in all shapes and sizes, with various gifts and abilities and needs. We need to find ways to pave the way for all God's children to participate in our educational ministry. Some special needs are obvious, but others are not. It can be helpful to gather information about all of the children and youth with whom we minister, to better understand and meet their needs. Disability Awareness Ministries has developed a comprehensive inclusion assessment form that can be used by churches to gather information about program participants and subsequently develop plans for accommodation and inclusion. Mayflower Community Congregational United Church of Christ piloted the use of the form during the 2005-2006 program year. Participants in this workshop will have the opportunity to hear Mayflower's story and receive training in the use of such a form.

This event is scheduled for Thursday, August 24, 2006, 9:30 a.m. to 12:00 noon at the Minnesota Church Center. The cost is \$20/individual or \$15/person for two or more from the same congregation. Registration brochures are available by calling the Resource Center for Churches or visiting our website: [www.resourcesforthejourney.org](http://www.resourcesforthejourney.org)



### The Ethical Dilemmas of Congregational Life: Leading with Integrity A Training and Enrichment Series

Churches face many issues that are potentially divisive and destructive to the congregation. Often church leaders feel ill-equipped to lead their congregation through these issues without compromising their own ethical integrity (or losing contributing members).

In this series, participants will: develop a basic ethical vocabulary; identify sources of authority and tradition within the Christian community; explore how personal beliefs, belief systems, authority and tradition influence approaches to ethical dilemmas; explore methods for working ethical dilemmas using case studies; explore ways to engage children and youth in conversations about ethics; develop models for exploring divisive issues (without blowing the place apart); and explore ways to build the moral capacity of the congregation.

- Where do We Start? Working Tools for Church Dilemmas—Thursday, October 12, 2006
- But the Bible Tells Me So: Working the Dilemmas of Authority and Tradition—Thursday, November 16, 2006
- What do You Do with What you Know? Working the Dilemmas of Pastoral Care—Thursday, January 18, 2007
- When Reasonable People Won't Be Reasonable: Working the Dilemmas of Congregational Leadership—Thursday, February 15, 2007
- I Learned It in Sunday School: Working the Dilemmas with Children, Youth, and Parents—Thursday, March 15, 2007

- When Agreeing to Disagree Isn't Enough: Working the Dilemmas that Might Be Unworkable—Thursday, April 19, 2007

The cost will be \$225 for the series. All sessions will begin at 9:00 a.m. and end at 12:30 p.m. They will be held at the Minnesota Church Center. For more information or a registration brochure, contact the Resource Center for Churches. The registration brochure is also available for download from our website.

### Summer Closure

The Resource Center for Churches will close at 4:00 p.m. on Friday, June 30, 2006 and will reopen at 9:30 a.m. on Tuesday, August 1, 2006. Please plan accordingly, making arrangements in advance for any resources you might need during that time.

### Rhonda's Reflections

After much prayerful reflection, I have submitted my letter of resignation as Director of the Resource Center for Churches effective June 30, 2006. It has been a pleasure to serve you for the past 7 1/2 years. By its very nature, the work of a Resource Center is always new and fresh and I have treasured that. I have also cherished the relationships I have built and perhaps am grieving that loss the most. But I now sense God is calling me to move in some different directions.

However, the Resource Center will continue to be your partner in ministry. Sally will still be here. And the Board of Directors is engaged in a search for a new director.

So, until we meet again (and I really hope we do), may you experience God's presence in your life and ministry.

## Paving the Way Continued

then putting that important information into the hands of teachers, soon after they met their classes in the fall. Ron and I worked together to create a survey that would meet our needs.

Questions on the survey covered a wide range of subjects including: What classroom activities are exciting and fun for you child? Tell us about your child's language abilities including reading. Does your child have any special dietary requirements? Has your child ever been on an overnight or retreat? Does your child live with any of the following conditions? (This question was accompanied by a list of both common and not-so-common diagnoses.) Would it be helpful for your child to have a volunteer aide to assist them in participating fully in our programming? The entire form can be accessed at the Resource Center for Churches website ([www.resourcesforthejourney.org](http://www.resourcesforthejourney.org)) or at the DAMI website ([www.disability-awareness.org](http://www.disability-awareness.org)).

Ultimately, the survey grew to three pages in length. I was afraid busy parents would not take the time to fill out one more form in the fall. However, much to my surprise, out of approximately 100 families in the program, I received 51 completed forms! Parents were grateful for the opportunity to share some of the information that makes their child(ren) unique.

Our next question was how to get this confidential information to teachers. Soon after classes began meeting in the fall, we shared the information gleaned from the survey with teachers. I invited the teachers to a 'read-a-bout' in one of our classrooms before classes began one Sunday Morning. We divided the forms by age level so the teachers could read about their students.

Once we had the thoughtful information provided by parents,

and our teachers had at least skimmed the forms, we wondered how to put programs in place to address the needs of our children? Ron suggested developing an Inclusion Team, a model he has implemented in other churches. At our church this is embodied in small groups concerned with answering the needs of a particular child. For example, if a child needs an aide, the team includes the child's parents, me (as Christian education director), the child's Sunday school teachers, and the aide. We use an email distribution list to communicate with each other about how things are going and/or any problems that arise.

As a result of implementing the inclusion assessment form, I discovered something I did not expect. About ten parents reported that their child did not feel they had a friend in the church school. Coming from multiple city schools, these children did not have a feeling of close community with their classmates. In the short term, we addressed this by placing youth group members in the classroom once a month to try and form 'buddy' relationships. We also brought in a teacher from our area Junior High to speak to the Sunday school teachers about how she builds community in her class using Responsive Classroom techniques. Long term we will address this in additional ways.

For now, we have increased our level of inclusiveness by combining the use of a simple child assessment survey with strategies developed by our teaching staff and, when needed, inclusion teams for particular children.

*Kris Potter is Director of Ministries to Children and Families at Mayflower Community Congregational United Church of Christ.*

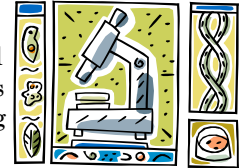
## What's



## at the Resource Center

### *Bioethics and the Book of Life (VD4060).*

The last few decades have seen astounding progress in the life sciences, progress that raises moral and ethical questions about everything from the treatment of disease



to the meaning of human life. Scientists, ethicists and religious leaders are asking where scientific advances in stem-cell research and cloning are leading us. How might these advances transform human life? What is the role of religion and ethics in grappling with the choices the new genetic knowledge presents? And have the responses of theologians, ethicists, religious leaders and faith traditions kept up with the accomplishments of science and technology? A 24-page guide will help viewers delve into these and other questions. (VHS, 90 minutes)

*Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Pacifist, Nazi Resister (DV98).* Why did the German Church embrace Hitler and the Nazi Party? And what was a good German, a deeply religious and pacifist man, to do about it? Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a young German theologian who offered one of the first clear voices of resistance to Adolf Hitler. Bonhoeffer openly challenged his church to stand with the Jews in their time of need, and eventually joined a plot to kill Hitler. Extensive research in the U.S. and Europe brings to life this amazing story of moral courage. Extraordinary archival footage is interwoven with interviews with friends, family and students of Bonhoeffer, with historians and theologians, and with the worlds of Bonhoeffer himself. (DVD, 90 minutes)



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Website: [www.resourcesforthejourney.org](http://www.resourcesforthejourney.org)

### *Your Partner in Ministry*

The Resource Center for Churches partners with congregations in ministry by providing print and audio-visual resources, consultation services, training, and networking to facilitate the journey of faith.

It is an ecumenical ministry of the: Episcopal Diocese of Minnesota; Minnesota Annual Conference United Methodist Church; Minnesota Conference United Church of Christ; Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area; Synod of Lakes and Prairies (PCUSA).

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## New Resources Continued from Page 3

### ***Biology and Belief: Conversations in Faith and Science***

**(DV97).** This six-part series examines modern issues that confront the realms of both science and faith. It is hosted by Dr. Alan Padgett, Professor of Systematic Theology at Luther Seminary. Session One: God After Darwin: Evolution and Divine Providence with Dr. John Hought, Professor of Theology, Georgetown University. Session Two: Intelligent Design in Biology with Dr. Jed Macosko, Professor of Biophysics, Wake Forest University. Session Three: Brain, Consciousness and the Soul with Dr. Greg Peterson, Professor of Religion and Philosophy, South Dakota State University. Session Four, The Ethics of Stem Cell Research with Dr. Dianne Bartels, Associate Director, Center for Bioethics, University of Minnesota. Session Five: Christian Faith, Farming and the Care of Ani-

mals with Dr. John Deen, Professor, College of Veterinary Medicine, University of Minnesota. Session Six: Science vs. Belief? The Challenge of Naturalism with Dr. Terrence Nichols, University of St. Thomas. (DVD, 135 minutes)

***Nooma: Matthew (DV95).*** Suffering the loss of someone we love can be the most difficult thing in life to deal with. One moment we have them and the next they're gone. What are we supposed to do? How are we supposed to feel? The truth is, there's no certain way we're "supposed" to feel. Whatever we're feeling, it's okay. It's okay to feel shock, anger, denial or whatever we may feel. It's okay. And if we

don't feel anything at all, that's okay too. It's okay to have no answers and no explanations. Because sometimes all the reasoning and the comforting words in the world just isn't what we need. What might help us however is to understand how Jesus dealt with this kind of loss. (DVD, 14 minutes) *Nooma is a cutting edge series for youth and young adults.*

### **In Print**

*Anxious Souls will Ask....: The Christ Centered Spirituality of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* by John Matthews

*Contemplative Youth Ministry* by Mark Yaconelli

*Congregational Fitness: Healthy Practices for Lay Folk* by Denise Goodman

