





A PARISH-BASED APPROACH

HOW TO

Welcome,  
Include, AND  
Catechize

Children with Autism  
and Other Special Needs



LAWRENCE R. SUTTON, PH.D.

LOYOLA PRESS.  
A JESUIT MINISTRY  

---

Chicago





**LOYOLAPRESS.**  
A JESUIT MINISTRY

3441 N. Ashland Avenue  
Chicago, Illinois 60657  
(800) 621-1008  
[www.loyolapress.com](http://www.loyolapress.com)

© 2013 Lawrence Sutton  
All rights reserved.

Scripture texts in this work are taken from the *New American Bible*, revised edition © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, D.C. and are used by permission of the copyright owner. All Rights Reserved. No part of the New American Bible may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

Cover image of *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities* used with permission of the United States Conferences of Catholic Bishops, Washington, D.C.

Autism and Theory of Mind chart in Ch. 2 is adapted from *Asperger Syndrome and Difficult Moments: Practical Solutions for Tantrums, Rage, and Meltdowns* by Brenda Smith Myles, PhD and Jack Southwick (AAPC Publishing: Shawnee Mission: KS, 2005).

ISBN-13: 978-0-8294-3890-1

ISBN-10: 0-8294-3890-4

Library of Congress Control Number: 2013948175

Printed in China.

14 15 16 17 18 RRD 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3





## Epilogue

The program described in this book took several years to develop. The 2006 pilot program at Our Lady of Grace parish didn't even have a name. It consisted of me, five boys with autism, and some teenagers learning to be faith mentors. We succeeded, the program grew, and we got better at teaching and learning. I helped other parishes start similar programs and described the program at conferences and workshops. Then national organizations became interested. It seemed to me and to others in the field that we had a model that many parishes could follow to provide religious education to children with autism and other disabilities.

We took a giant step toward realizing this vision when Loyola Press entered the picture in 2012. Loyola Press, which has been developing and publishing religious education curricula for decades, wanted to serve students with disabilities. They learned about the program at Our Lady of Grace, liked what they saw, and proposed that we work together to adapt their *Finding God* curriculum. This is what we've done, and the result is the *Adaptive Finding God Program*—a full-fledged religious education program that can be used successfully with children with autism and other special needs.

This program overcomes the biggest obstacle faced by parishes that want to serve children with autism and other disabilities and parents



who desperately want to find ways to share God with their children: the hurdle of developing a program more or less from scratch. The *Adaptive Finding God Program* has all the materials needed to implement individualized catechesis in any parish. It includes core catechetical content aligned with an existing curriculum, leveled instruction, training materials for teen faith mentors, learning tools, and other materials that program coordinators and mentors need. Parishes can take this program and make it their own.

For generations, Catholics with disabilities and their families have been underserved by their Church. The success of one-on-one catechesis and the development of the *Adaptive Finding God Program* are signs that things are changing. At long last, pastors, catechetical leaders, and families have the tools they need to bring the graces of the sacraments and the fullness of faith to children with autism and other special needs.

Many obstacles remain. Leaders at all levels of the Church have much work to do to bring all Catholics into full participation in parish life. But in one area at least—religious education—we have a clear path forward. I invite you to join me on it.