Office for Persons with Disabilities

Parish Contact Zoom Meeting: ‘Autism, Neurodiversity and Faith’

with Fr. Matt Schneider

May 27, 2020

Meeting Notes

* Sr. Kathleen welcomes everyone and begins with opening prayer

**The purpose of this gathering is to welcome Fr. Matt Schneider, LC who will share with us his insights into his autism diagnosis and how we might welcome, and integrate more fully into the church, those with autism.**

* Sister Kathleen introduces Fr. Matt Scneider, LC who serves as a priest in Delaware County, PA. He is currently pursuing his Doctorate Degree in Systematic Moral Theology.
* Fr. Matt begins by sharing his story about becoming a priest and how he has only recently been diagnosed with autism as an adult. Fr. Matt outlines three stages of helping those on the spectrum:
* Awareness - most churches are at this stage
* Acceptance - some churches practice this step with reverse cry room, low-sensory Masses and other accommodations.
* Integration - when we encourage and support those with autism to be full members of the church community and recognize their ability to be agents of evangelization.

* Sister Kathleen opens up the discussion for Q & A:
  + - * + Fr. Matt introduces Loyola Press Adaptive Sacramental Kits which he recommends
        + Question: Where are low-sensory and Inclusion Masses in Philadelphia?
* Sister Kathleen helps answer with recommendations for regional ones in Camden and monthly mass at St. John Chrysostom, Wallingford.
  + - * + Question: What made you decide to become a priest?
* Fr. Matt was an electrical engineering major when her heard Pope John Paull II’s address at World Youth Day and his words ‘Be Not Afraid’.
  + - * + Question: What do people need to do to facilitate 3rd stage in our church?
* Fr. Matt suggests we seek out the person with autism’s gifts
* For prayer, consider ‘theory of mind’ approach. For those without

autism, it is common to go from concept to example. For those

with autism, it can be helpful to move from example first, and then concept.

* + - * + Question: My son has high functioning autism. How do you suggest

he best learns abstract concepts?

* Start with examples
* Fr.Matt recommends the book: ‘Handbook to Christian Apologetics’ by Peter Kreeft and Robert Tacelli
* The book ‘Thinking in pictures’ by Temple Grandin is also recommended by a Zoom participant
  + - * + Question: Is one born with autism?

It is generally accepted that autism is 60-85% genetic

with environmental factors contributing to the rest.

* + - * + Question: How do I prepare my child with sensory issues for Mass?

Fr. Matt likes the ‘Vibes’ ear phones which reduces

Sound volume but not the quality of the sound

Reverse cry rooms work well

* As an aside, Sister Kathleen recommends communicating ‘calming measures’ to catechists before classes begin
* Ann Duschene shares her experience with autism, that abstract concepts are ok and that it is most helpful when ideas fit into the

Experience knowledge the person already has in their mind.

* + - * + Question: What web resources do you consider reliable?
* <https://www.autism-society.org>
* <http://www.thinkingautismguide.com>
* ASAN - <https://autisticadvocacy.org>
  + - * + Question: Do your share your autism diagnoses with others and what is

The reaction from others?

* Father doesn’t generally share it in discussions but is very open

about his diagnosis in general

* + - * + Question: How are your interactions with young people in relation

to your autism?

* Fr. Matt likes to use the story of St. Thorlak
* www.Aleteia.org has a few good stories on St. Thorlak
* Fr. Matt also touches on ‘The Chosen’ and the St. Matthew role
  + - * + Question: What age-group is your new prayer book for those with autism geared towards?
* Ages 12 and up
  + - * + Question: How can we reach you Fr.Matt?

Fr. Matt Schneider, LC is available through social media at:

@autisticpriest

@frmatthewLC

* Both Sister Kathleen and Fr. Matt end the Zoom gathering by discussing some important concepts to keep in mind: how everyone is called to holiness, how it is best to assume that understanding is taking place, and that all are created in the image and likeness of God and that all are able to receive the sacraments.

**Resources Mentioned:**

1. Religion Series for Children with IDD/Autism: <https://www.loyolapress.com/faith-formation/special-needs/adaptive-finding-god/>
2. Sacramental Kits: <https://www.loyolapress.com/faith-formation/special-needs/adaptive-learning-kits/>
3. Spirituality of St. Thorlak: <https://autismconsecrated.com>
4. Other Religious Education Resources: <http://opdarchphilly.org/parish-religious-education-programs/>

Office for Persons with Disabilities & the Deaf Apostolate – [www.opdarchphilly.org](http://www.opdarchphilly.org)

National Catholic Partnership on Disability - <http://opdarchphilly.org/parish-religious-education-programs/>