



# **RHYTHMS OF GRACE TRAINING**

About Rhythms of Grace

Autism Spectrum Family Life

Gathering the Parish

Gathering Volunteers

Safe Church

Setting up your worship space

Inviting Families

# ABOUT RHYTHMS OF GRACE

Sensory-Friendly Worship

Incorporating:

- Therapeutic Activities
- Family Support
- Autism-aware materials



# What A Special Grace *is...*

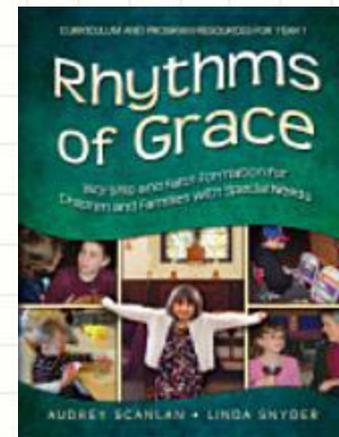
## **RHYTHMS OF GRACE**

### **Sensory Friendly Formation & Liturgy**

*A church experience for  
those who don't feel  
comfortable in a  
traditional worship  
setting*

## **A SPECIAL GRACE A Ministry of Social Justice**

- **Awareness**
- **Advocacy**
- **Inclusion**



# What Rhythms of Grace *is NOT*...

## **A Replacement Service**

**Intended to exclude anyone from regular Sunday services or formation.**

## **We start with**

### **WHAT IF...**

**Every church looked around their wider community, saw who *WASN'T* there and found a way of “being Church” with *them* ?**

# History of the Rhythms of Grace Curriculum

- Audrey Scanlan & Linda Snyder
  - 2003 Worship & Formation
  - Year 1 Curriculum
- Today a Non-Profit Board
  - Getting Year 2 & 3 On Line



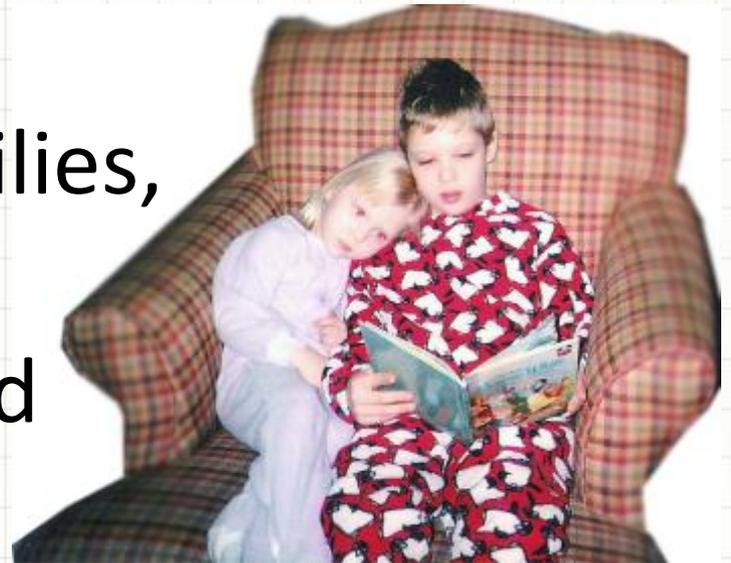
# ABOUT A SPECIAL GRACE

- A Ministry of Inclusion – engaging in campaigns for full inclusion in the church of children, teens, youth and adults on the Spectrum.



# ABOUT RHYTHMS OF GRACE

- A Ministry of Awareness - seeking to raise awareness in the church of the issues facing Autism Spectrum families, including barriers to church attendance and participation.



# ABOUT A SPECIAL GRACE

- A Ministry of Advocacy – Seeking to develop programs, curriculum, aids and materials for use in churches to meet the needs of Autism Spectrum families







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Developmental Delays

Primarily in Social Language Development

Centers for Disease Control released new prevalence statistics this year, based on 2008 Observation

**Identified Prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorders**  
ADDM Network 2000-2008  
Combining Data from All Sites

Surveillance Year	Birth Year	Number of ADDM Sites Reporting	Prevalence per 1,000 Children (Range)	This is about 1 in X children...
2000	1992	6	6.7 (4.5-9.9)	1 in 150
2002	1994	14	6.6 (3.3-10.6)	1 in 150
2004	1996	8	8.0 (4.6-9.8)	1 in 125
2006	1998	11	9.0 (4.2-12.1)	1 in 110
2008	2000	14	11.3 (4.8-21.2)	1 in 88

Research: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/research.html>

# AUTISM SPECTRUM FAMILY LIFE

- Welcome to Holland
- Grief & Readjustment
- Celebration
- Warriors
- Guilt – This is HARD
- GETTING it

## A PARENT'S JOURNEY

- I'd rather be in Paris
- NOT FAIR
- Celebration
- Defender
- NOT FAIR
- Warriors

## A SIBLING'S JOURNEY

# ***Autism Isolation Syndrome***

**or**

Why We  
Don't See  
Many  
Autism  
Families in  
Church

The three main components  
of the syndrome are:

1. Emotional isolation from  
the self and others
2. Physical isolation from  
others
3. Social isolation

Excerpt from "Autism Isolation Syndrome" By **Rebecca Sperber, M.S., MFT**  
On **Autism Today**

<http://www.autismtoday.com/articles/AUTISM-ISOLATION-SYNDROME.asp?cat=1>

**Many families report experiences IN CHURCHES such as :**

- Judgmental comments
- Stares and criticism
- Being shamed for their perceived “faults” as parents
- Being blamed for their child’s noise or disruptive behavior



# Autism “Characteristics”

## SENSORY

- Hypersensitive to
  - Sound
  - Light/dark
  - Changes in routine
  - Textures
  - Touch
  - Body in space
- Preference for
  - Low noise
  - Steady lighting
  - Stable routine
  - Enclosed space



# Autism “Characteristics”

## SOCIAL



- **May**
  - Circle & Touch
  - Self-stimulate
  - Respond non-verbally
- **May Not**
  - Converse
  - Make eye contact
  - Respond to verbal inquiry or instruction
  - Notice what others are doing

# Spectrum of Abilities

1

- Attention to detail

2

- Honesty with no bias

3

- “Deep” Learners

# Spectrum of Preferences

1

- Visual over Auditory

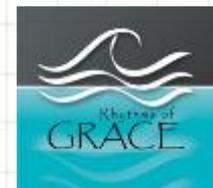
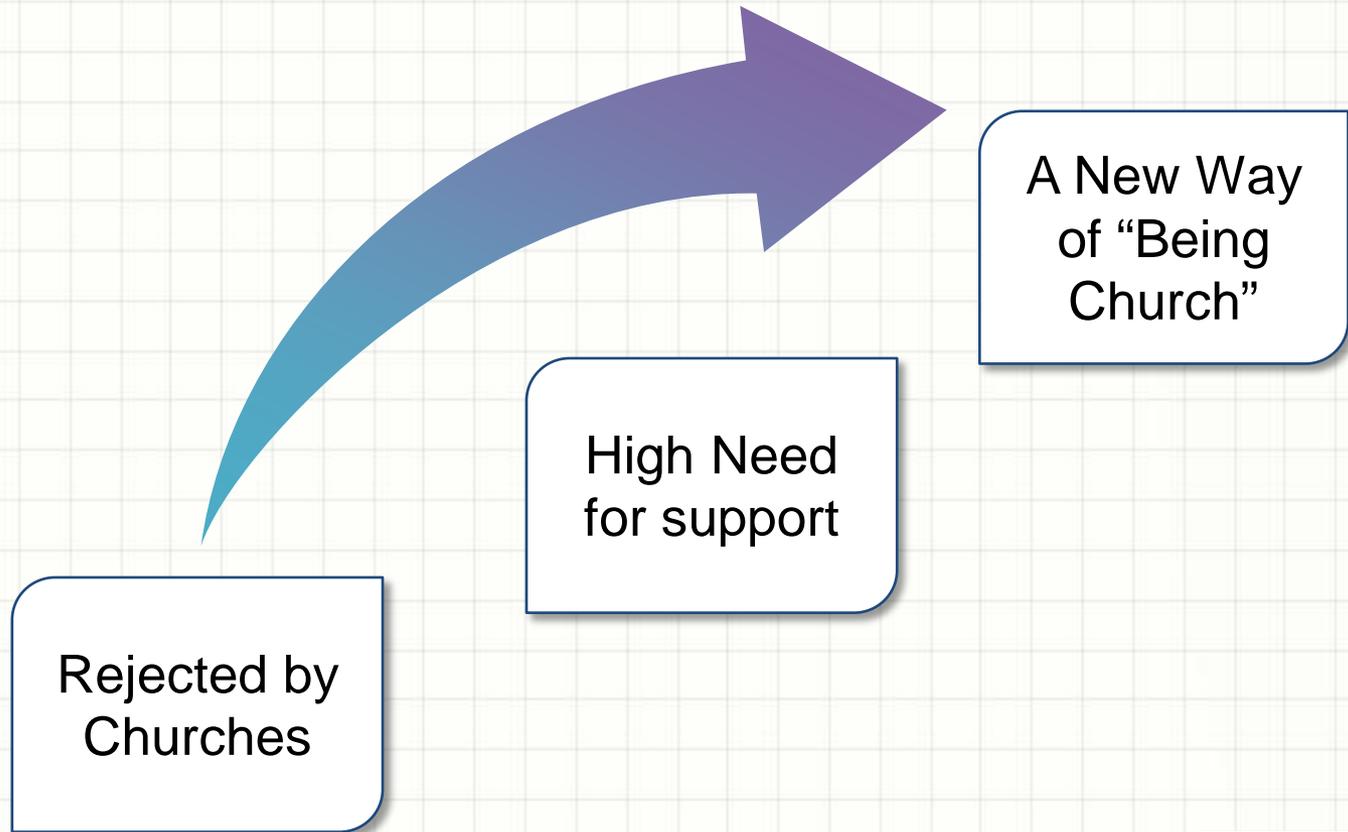
2

- Enclosed spaces over Wide open spaces

3

- Objects over people

# From Need to Ministry



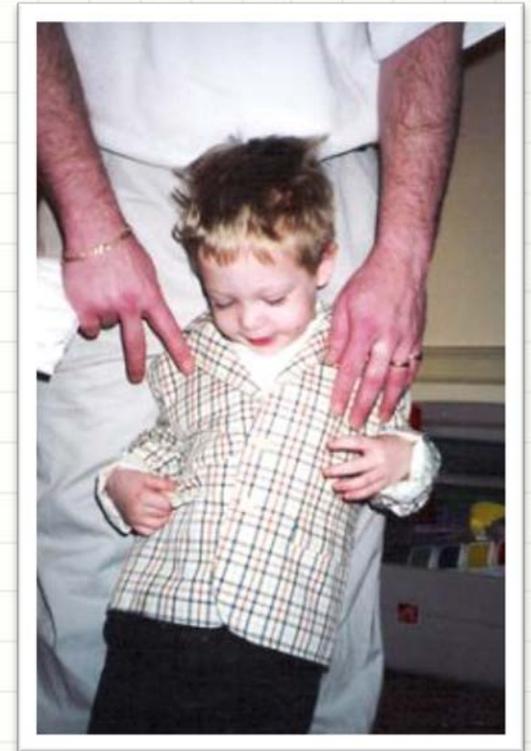
# Formation for Children & Youth

## *Our Focus*

Developing awareness of God in a supportive community

Naming the holy in a variety of communications

Developing connections with the Divine Human Jesus



# Support for Siblings

## *Our Focus*

Developing awareness of God in a supportive community

Accepting the complexity of family life

Developing connections with the Divine Human Jesus



# Support for Parents

## *Our Focus*

Developing awareness of God in  
a supportive community

Worshipping together as a  
Family

Being with people who GET IT

Healing past church wounds





# RHYTHMS OF GRACE TRAINING

Gathering the Parish

Gathering Volunteers

Safe Church

Setting up your worship space

Inviting Families

# Gathering the Parish

## *Most common misunderstandings about Rhythms of Grace:*

1. Only for Autistic Children
2. A way to keep “those kids” out of regular church or Sunday School
3. Only those with previous or “Special Ed” experience can be successful as volunteers
4. Volunteers must be “Good with Kids”
5. Only for “our” autistic kids OR
6. We have NO autistic kids in our church, why do it?

# Keep the Parish Involved

## Use Posters



## Use Bulletin Inserts



### Supportive worship for Autism Families

#### Featuring:

- Therapeutic activities
- Sibling Support
- Parent Networking





# RHYTHMS OF GRACE TRAINING

Gathering Volunteers

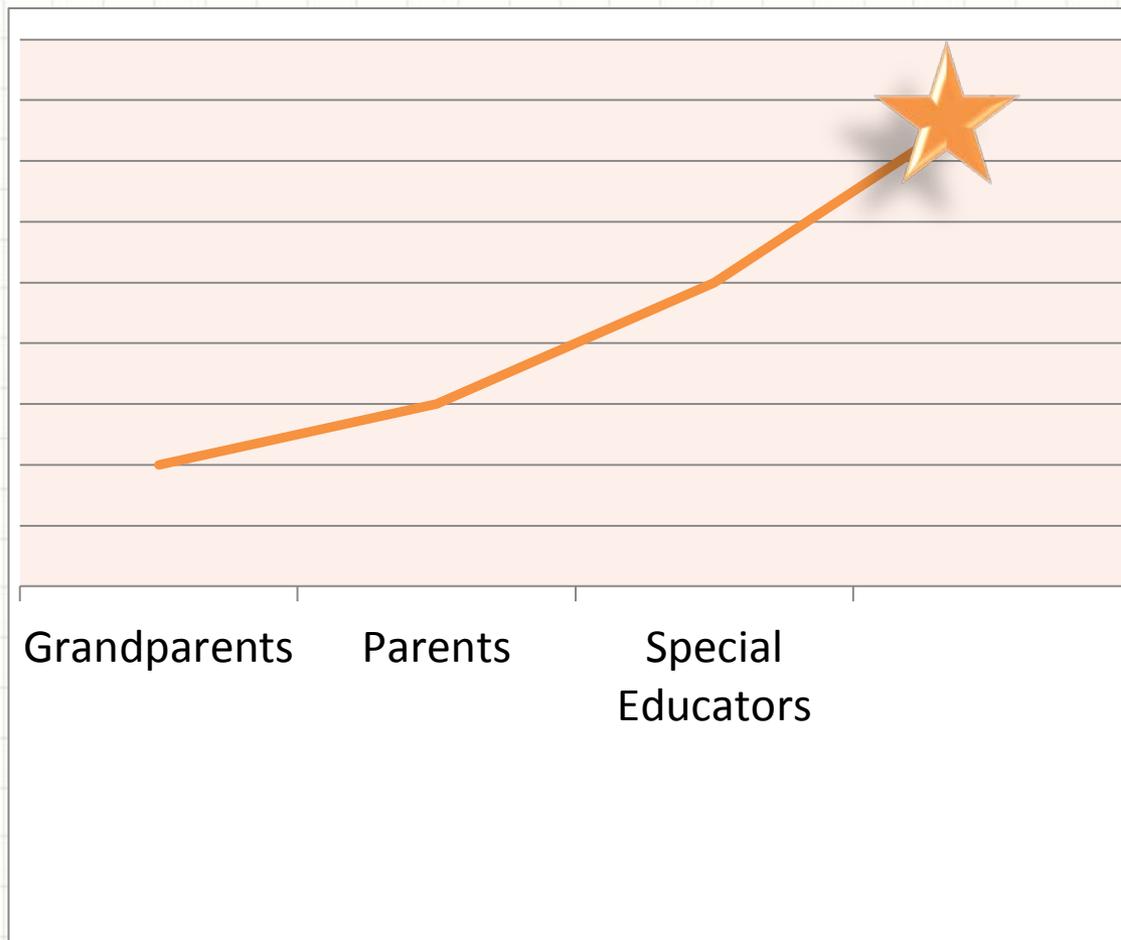
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# Gathering Volunteers

Who are your best potential Volunteers?



# Gathering Volunteers

## What They Need to Know

Rethink usual ways of  
interaction



- Eye Contact
- Body Language
- Conversation



# Gathering Volunteers

## What They Need to Know

Rethink usual rewards of  
working with children



- Children will not seek interaction
- Extreme honesty –can't be thin-skinned
- Smiles are rare





**BUT NOT IMPOSSIBLE!!**



# Training Volunteers

- *By request for Training to A Special Grace or Rhythms of Grace*
- *Diocesan Guidelines for Volunteers who Work with Children*
- *By Experience*





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# SAFE CHURCH PRACTICES



- Especially vulnerable
    - Never be alone with a child
    - Never restrain a child unless in immediate absolute danger
    - Parents are responsible for toileting
    - Parents/Guardians **MUST** be present at the service
  - Safety
    - NOT responsive to verbal commands
    - Parents must be responsible for physical safety
- Online Training Module available on request



# RHYTHMS OF GRACE TRAINING

Setting up your worship space  
Inviting Families

# Creating a Worship Space

- Sensory Comfort
  - Steady Light, no Flickering or buzzing
  - Minimize echoing with carpeting or rugs
- Safety
  - Contained area to minimize “bolting”
  - Cover outlets & remove cords



*Plan on using the SAME space in the SAME way EVERY time*

# Creating a Worship Space

- Transitions are Hard
  - Keep areas close by
  - Cover items not in use to avoid distraction
- Attention to Detail
  - Search the area on hands & knees for potential hazards
  - Remove any extraneous decorations



# Creating a Worship Space

- 7-8 “Stations” or “Areas” needed
  - “Safe Space”
  - Gathering
  - Storytelling
  - 4 Sermon activities
  - Altar

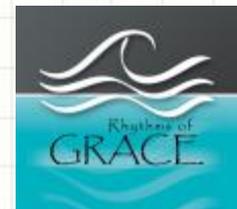


# WORSHIP SPACE

1

• Visual over Auditory

- Use Signs whenever possible
- Icons are preferable to words
- Arrows
- Avoid verbal instruction



# Worship Space

2

- Enclosed spaces over Wide open spaces

- Try to avoid wide expanses of open space
- Break up wide open areas with chairs or tables

# WORSHIP SPACE

SAFE

- Enclosed spaces

DO

Provide a “Safe Place” – enclosed area where a child can watch but is not overwhelmed

- Tent
- Giant Beanbag Chair



# WORSHIP SPACE

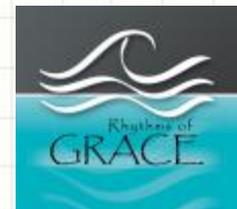
SAFE

- Enclosed spaces

Don't

Allow more than one child at a time in "Safe Place"

Allow child out of sight from group



# Worship Space

3

- Objects over people

- Have Sensory Aids available in several areas
- Allow objects to be moved from area to area if helping transitions



# Worship Space

3

## • Sensory Aids



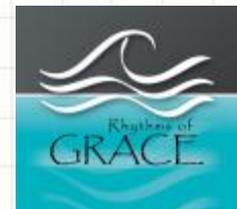
- JESUS “Fill” space in lap
- Weighted Vest Heavy = Comfort
- Fleece Rubbing decreases sensitivity
- Kushies Steady hand pressure = calm
- Squeeze Balls
- Ear Plugs Reduce Noise
- Trampoline Reorient body in space

# WORSHIP SPACE

1

## • Gathering Activity Space

- Located *close to entrance*
- Located within sight of Storytelling space
- Always in the same place

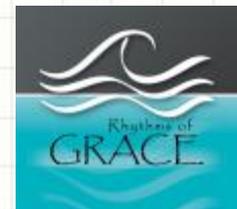


# WORSHIP SPACE

2

## • Storytelling Space

- Located within sight of Gathering Activity space
- Always in the same place
- Easily seen from the “Safe Space”

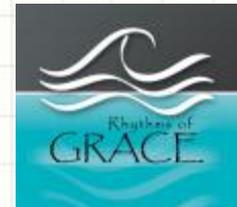


# WORSHIP SPACE

3

## • Fine Motor Activity Space

- Located within sight of Storytelling space
- Always in the same place
- Make sure at least two seats are tight against a wall (enclosure=security)

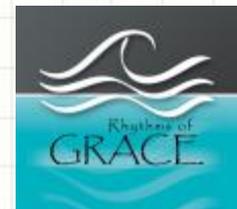


# WORSHIP SPACE

4

- Gross Motor Activity Space

- Located within sight of Storytelling space
- Always in the same place

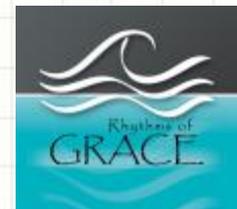


# WORSHIP SPACE

5

- Two Other Activity Spaces

- Located within sight of Storytelling space
- Always in the same place



# WORSHIP SPACE

6

- Altar

- Located within sight of Activity spaces
- Can be same as Storytelling space
- Always in the same place
- Best on the Floor!
- We like the Catechesis altar



# A Word About Resources

- *Troll the clearance bins*
- *Ask congregation for donations*
- *Specific ordering information in book or packet*
- *BE CREATIVE*
- *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd/Godly Play materials*





# RHYTHMS OF GRACE TRAINING

Inviting Families

# Inviting Families

- *Parent ListServes*
- *Autism Support Groups*
- *School Parent Support Programs*
- *POSTERS*
- *Local YMCA or gyms offering services to Autism families*
- *Autism Meetups – online groups*





USE PICTURE TRANSITION AIDS  
USE COUNTDOWN CLOCK

## Gathering Activity

- Designed to provide a way to transition into the service
- Related to the story
- Provides a transition vehicle to the Storytelling Space

10 – 15 minutes



# StoryTelling

5 – 10 minutes



- Prefaced by showing the Bible
- Using pictures and story cards preferred
- Remember that AS children are very LITERAL in their use of language
- Provide a low-stress way to participate – hand motions, repeated words, even sign language
- Transition to activities using pictures

# “Sermon” Activities

At Least 4

20 – 30 minutes



**Fine Motor** – Dexterity, Hand Strength, Hand-Eye Coordination

**Gross Motor** – Motor Planning, Strength, Coordination



# “Sermon” Activities

**Receptive Language** – Hearing and understanding language

**Social Skills** – Practice skills in structured setting

**Proprioceptive** – Orienting the body in space

# “Sermon” Activities

**Sensory** – Enjoying sensation without being overwhelmed

**Face Time** – Learning facial expression and Body Language



# REGATHERING

5 minutes

## SONG:

Jesu, Jesu,  
Fill us with your love  
Teach us how to share  
The blessings we have  
from you

## SONG:

Gather our hearts O God  
Gather our thoughts O God  
Bring us together around  
you

- Designed to assist in transitioning to the worship space
- Helps teach turn-taking

# Holy Communion

- On the Floor
- Keep it Simple and Short
- Gluten-Free wafers
- Non-Alcoholic wine



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## **Assist in setting the Table**

Jesus Took the Bread

Jesus Blessed the Bread

Jesus Broke the Bread

Jesus Gave the Bread

## **Distribute from hand to hand**

Jesus took the wine

Jesus blessed the wine

Jesus gave the wine

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# Resources

- Rhythms of Grace – CT site  
[www.rhythms-of-grace.org](http://www.rhythms-of-grace.org)
- A Special Grace – MA site  
[www.ASpecialGrace.com](http://www.ASpecialGrace.com)
- Facebook : Rhythms of Grace – Sensory-Friendly Worship
- [Twitter: @RevRebe](https://twitter.com/RevRebe)