

# St John Chrysostom and the Socialization of Persons with Developmental Disability: Patristic Inspiration for Contemporary Application

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## Introduction

The Lord Jesus, in His Sermon on the Mount,<sup>1</sup> relates the manner in which prayer, fasting, and almsgiving are to be practiced; they are to be done secretly, and not to gain admiration from others. St. Paul writes, "If I give away all that I have, [ . . . ] but have not love, I gain nothing" (1 Cor. 13:3). The motive for charitable acts is crucial, if it is to be pleasing to the Lord.

"By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 John 3:16). Our model, Jesus, reveals the true dimensions of almsgiving. "And we all, [ . . . ] beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another" (2 Cor. 3:18). The lifelong struggle from egocentrism toward consistently reflecting the likeness of Christ through love is the process of Theosis, salvation in its ultimate sense. Our call to love impels us to do all that we can in order that those around us also find their place and role in the Church, the Body of Christ, the Ark of salvation, including those one might deem "less honorable [and] unpresentable [ . . . ]. On the contrary, the parts of

the body which are weaker are indispensable [and are given] greater honor [ . . . ] that the members may have the same care for one another" (emphasis added) (1 Cor. 12:22-25).

Christ's death on the cross expressed God's love of sinners, His enemies (Rom. 5:10). If this love of enemies is the very depths of the dimensions of almsgiving, the socialization of persons with developmental disability into the Body of Christ (which requires a step into unfamiliar social territory for most people) is a step toward the depths. It is not an optional one. On Judgment Day we will hear the message, "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it [or] . . . did it not to me" (Matt. 25:40, 45).

John L. Boojrama writes: "Socialization [ . . . ] is the interaction of the individual person with a community and its symbols, which describe and often define that community. Socialization, which connotes a sharing of meaning and the symbols which express that meaning, permits the development of a sense of belonging, self-identity, and [ . . . ] (projected stability)."<sup>2</sup> The symbols Boojrama refers to are the many tangible sacramentals and sacraments of Orthodox Church life, experienced in parish worship and activities and at home, which have been received in each generation of the Church from the holy Apostles and Fathers through Holy Tradition. These holy symbols (from Gk. symbolon) partake in the living reality of their Referent, revealing Him; they are more than signs. One Church Father, St. John Chrysostom, has left a vast treasury of teachings on the day-to-day implications of this fullness. His life, ministry, exegesis, and exhortation are particularly illuminating in regard to the Church's ministry to needy people.

Elder Paisios says of persons with developmental disability that "their souls are already saved [ . . . ] without making any efforts [they] have earned Paradise."<sup>3</sup> As Jesus said concerning children, "for to such belongs the Kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 19:14). But it is commonly known that Helen Keller, both blind and deaf, and at one point unmanageable, through the discipline imposed by a determined teacher, achieved much. Even modest gifts are to be nurtured; they

are “the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Cor. 12:7). Getting to Heaven is one thing, but the opportunity to build on “Jesus Christ [. . .] the foundation [. . .] with gold, silver, and precious stones [. . .] [for] a reward” (1 Cor. 3:11-14) is another. One must not, out of pity, exempt such ones from the discipline which brings growth. The Church and the family have a divine mandate to help persons with developmental disability contribute as best as they can.

After a short survey of St. John Chrysostom’s precursors and life, relevant excerpts from his homilies concerning almsgiving and its dimensions, including the socialization of needy people, will be given and briefly commented upon. After this, writings by contemporary Orthodox theologians concerning almsgiving, socialization in general, and the socialization of persons with developmentally disability will be addressed. Finally, the ministries of family support, Christian education, and life together with persons with developmental disability in the Orthodox Church, along with some examples of current efforts, will receive some preliminary attention, with some concrete suggestions. What would be helpful in the American Orthodox Church, with its multiple jurisdictions, is a website to which families and their priests could turn for information on the various kinds of support available, both in the Church and outside the Church. This could help them plan the care of both the persons with developmental disability in their family and those in the families in their community who would find the infinite benefits of a Church that carefully attends to the tangible and concrete, as opposed to a predominant focus on word-centered abstract concepts. This thesis is in preparation for such a website.

Demetrios J. Constantelos charted the roots and practice of “philanthropy” (synonymous with the Greek word agape, usually translated as charity or love in English) in the Byzantine Christian world.<sup>4</sup> He chronicles this aspect of the Tradition to the Byzantine period. A few examples will be brought forth relating to St. John Chrysostom’s specific roots, to show that his New Testament exegesis on the subject is based in the Tradition of the Church.

The New Testament flows from and fulfills the Old Testament. "If there is among you a poor man [ . . . ], you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against [him], but you shall open your hand to him, and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be" (Deut. 15:7-8). "Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees" (Isa. 35:3). "Blessed is he that considers the poor! The Lord delivers him in the day of trouble" (Ps. 41:1). These verses are representative, and the Apostolic Tradition is built on it and consistent with it.

A generation after the apostles, St. Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, St. John's hometown, wrote: "Take notice of those who have contrary opinions concerning the grace of Jesus Christ [ . . . ]. They do not care for acts of love, they don't care about the widow, the orphan, the distressed, the afflicted, the prisoner, or for him released from prison, neither do they worry about the hungry or thirsty."<sup>5</sup> Heretics, by the absence of acts of mercy, proved themselves devoid of the Holy Spirit and his fruits. According to the canons of the Apostolic Constitutions, IV, sect. 1 & 2, the Church assigned to the bishop the responsibility for the Church's needy: "to the orphans, the care of parents; to the widows, the care and the protection of husbands; [ . . . ] to the invalid, commiseration; to the strangers, a shelter, to the hungry, food; to the thirsty, drink; to the naked, clothing, to the sick, visitation, to the prisoners, assistance [ . . . ]. The Church of Rome under Bishop Cornelius was feeding more than fifteen hundred widows and afflicted persons."<sup>6</sup>

Constantelos writes, "In the fourth century (in which St. John Chrysostom was born) Christian philanthropy must have taken on new dimensions. It was extended to believers and unbelievers alike" (15-16). "The seventieth Canon of a corpus of eighty attributed to the first Council of Nicaea (325) advised that hospitals should be erected in every city of the Empire."<sup>7</sup> The lay physician Zenobios treated the poor for free, and also helped them financially.<sup>8</sup> There was also an increased interest in the ascetic, solitary life; yet charitable work was considered integral to this life, as evidenced by the writings and acts of St. Basil the Great.<sup>9</sup>

As bishop of Caesarea St. Basil exhorted the monks to be charitable not only to one another, but to all. He even encouraged competition among them in this. The brothers were to labor, so that their institution would be able to provide for the hungry. St. Basil founded what was later named the Basileias, a hostel for travelers and a hospital for, among others, lepers. St. Basil "[. . .] counseled the monks who worked there to look after the patients as if they were brothers of Christ."<sup>10</sup> St. Basil himself nursed the lepers, "applying ointments upon them with his own hands."<sup>11</sup> These fourth century monasteries, which for the most part had open door policies, were havens for travelers and those in need (Constantelos, 90). St. John Chrysostom would have been himself socialized with the news and example of such philanthropy, practiced by the serious Christians around him, whether cleric, monk, or lay person.

St. John Chrysostom grew up in Antioch in a middle-class family; his father, a civil servant, died when St. John was very young. St. John's mother, Anthousa, retained the means to afford him a good education. He studied rhetoric under the renowned Libanos, a pagan. In his youth he often attended the law-courts, and liked the theater. But he put aside his plan to enter civil service and was baptized in 368 A.D. For three years he studied under Diodore in an ascetic school and attended to the Nicene bishop Meletios, even though the Arians were in favor under Emperor Valens at the time. He was tonsured a reader in 371 A.D. (J.N.D. Kelly).<sup>12</sup>

While being considered for ordination, he fled to Mt. Silipios near Antioch take up the monastic life under a Syrian elder. There he observed silence, worked so as to give alms, sought to pray continually, and ate one simple meal in the evening. He slept on straw (29-31). After four years of this, he withdrew to a cave for two years, praying, learning the Scriptures by heart, eating as little as possible, and never once lying down. But his digestive system faltered and would remain a chronic problem. He returned to the city (32-34).

In 381 A.D. St. John was ordained a deacon; his duties included instructing catechumens, performing auxiliary liturgical functions, and assisting the bishop in pastoral work, especially in regards to the poor, sick, mentally ill, widows, and orphans. He would visit hospital, prisons, and poor-houses. He also began to write apologies and treatises, which evidenced monastic rigor (37-40). In 386 A.D. he was ordained to the priesthood. His gift for preaching won him the title Chrysostom, which means golden mouth. He was a practitioner of the Antiochian School of exegesis, with its focus on the literal text and the historical sense and the avoidance of allegorizing. But he often speaks of a spiritual sense, such as Noah's ark as the Church. In his homilies, he would exegetically clear up obscure points, and then elaborate or even digress in useful lessons on pertinent issues, occasionally doctrinal, but more often moral and social, especially against spectacles and for almsgiving (55, 95-96).

He was ordained archbishop of Constantinople in 397 A.D. Like Antioch, the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire was religiously pluralistic, with pagans, Arians, Novatians, in addition to Nicene Christians. The Novatians had their own bishop, supported by the Emperor (Mayer and Allen, 14-16). And there was the young, weak Emperor Arkadius, his strong-willed Empress Aelia Eudoxia, and the Imperial Court to contend with. He found a supporter in the widowed deaconess Olympias, who shared St. John's dedication to God and the poor (Kelly, 109-13).

He was expected to entertain; he did not. He cut his budget, and that of the clergy and widows, directing the funds to hospitals. He offended many: the wealthy, by castigating their lifestyles in his homilies; the clergy, with his ascetic standards; and even the city's monastics, including St. Isaac the Syrian, for their excessive contact with society (Kelly, 118-20, 123-25, 136). But his homilies were a sensation, so much so that he had to insist on silence to quell the frequent applause. He rebuked luxurious living and theater attendance and encouraged healthy marriage and family life and almsgiving. "What madness is this [. . .] one man defecates in a

silver pot, another has not so much as a crust of bread." He apologized for that comment a few days later (130-01, 134-36).<sup>13</sup> He personally attended to the administration of the city's charitable institutions and promoted missions to the Goths and to Persia (141-44).

His part in negotiations concerning a renegade Goth, his handling of the selling of holy orders in Asia, and a dispute over certain monastics with Patriarch Theophilus of Alexandria made him enemies (145-80). Also, his diatribes against ostentation angered the empress (150, 170-01, 211). A council originally convened as a trial of Theophilus was engineered into a trial of St. John, for a long list of overblown canonical infractions. With the emperor and empress against him, the verdict was a foregone conclusion: deposition and exile (212-27).

There was a public uproar; he was secreted away at night. But a misfortune suddenly befell the empress-- a sign, she felt-- and she pleaded with the emperor to call for St. John's return (229-32). And it was done. But soon later, a forceful denunciation of a noisy celebration-- at the time of Divine Liturgy on Sunday-- of a new statue dedicated to empress Euodoxia, turned her against him again (238-40). Despite public support for St. John, he was sent into exile for good on June 20, 404 A.D. to Cucusos, an isolated town in the mountains, uncongenial to St. John's fragile health (250, 254). He bore his trial resolutely; in letters to deaconess Olympias, he exhorted her to trust God's providence (270-01). His enemies later arranged that he be sent to a yet more remote and disagreeable place, but on the journey the rugged terrain and brutal pace were more than his health could stand, and he died, on September 14, 407 A.D. His last words were, "Glory be to God for everything" (283-85).

Thirty years later, with St. John having been rehabilitated in the Eastern Church, thanks to pressure from the Pope of Rome, his relics arrived back in Constantinople in January 438 A.D. Emperor Theophilus II bowed down and placed his forehead on the relics, begging St. John's forgiveness for his parents, Arkadios and Euodoxia (286-90).

Two women stand in contrast to Eudoxia in their response to St. John. The Deaconess Olympias, in addition to being his confidant, gave all her large fortune to charity, for hostages, and to charitable institutions. Later empress Flacilla, wife of emperor Theodosius II, whom St. John had baptized, erected hospitals, hostels, a home for epileptics, and old-age homes, and endowed them abundantly (Constantelos, 112, 268). They had ears to hear the golden message, and use their gold to buy treasures in heaven.

Fr. George Florovsky, in "St. John Chrysostom: The Prophet of Charity,"<sup>14</sup> affirmed that St. John's ethics were rooted in the Cross and the Resurrection, in salvation in Christ, and the imitation of Christ's love through works of charity; and he made this message concrete for his flock. He laid out stark choices for his privileged hearers: a focus on luxury (bad) versus a focus on charity (good); the anxiety of possessiveness versus the freedom of consecration-- of all that we are and have-- to God. His ethics had mystical depth; the poor person, for instance, was to be considered the true altar of the Lord. He accepted unjust treatment with a spirit of joy and trust in Christ, who himself had experienced a most unjust death.

Metropolitan Philip Saliba, Primate of the American Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese, in an address entitled, "Struggling Against the New Iconoclasm," quoted St. John Chrysostom in regard to the incongruity of decorating our Church temples but neglecting the poor. Metropolitan Philip said St. John's statement "[. . .] made me tremble. I hope it does the same to you."<sup>15</sup> His words were and are indeed spurs to repentance.

### **St. John Chrysostom and Socialization as a Dimension of Almsgiving**

In Homily 88 on Matthew 27:45-48,<sup>16</sup> St. John says, "Someone will say, 'Thou art every day discoursing to us of almsgiving and humanity.' Neither will I cease to speak of this [. . .]. Ye have not arrived even at the half" (523, c.1). The lack of response is the reason for his continual

reminders. Using medical and military imagery, he says he would rather arm his listeners to convert others, "but when ye are not yet sound, how can anyone arm you for the fight?" Christian doctrines can conquer, but the unbelievers can still reproach the lives of most of this church's members (523, c.2). After detailing their vices, he says, "Each day I go about this camp dressing your wounds, [ . . . ]." But if his listeners ever wake up, he says, "I will [ . . . ] teach you this art of war [ . . . ] and all men will immediately submit, if ye would become merciful, if forbearing, if mild and patient" people (524, c.1). St. John exposes vices, and exhorts his hearers to transformation, longing to make them lights to the world. He begins with almsgiving, and aims at transformation and evangelism.

St. John Chrysostom in this way exhorts his congregation to give alms in the broadest and deepest sense of the word, in the care and socialization of others. His exegesis, his denunciations, his attention to motive, his call to radical consecration as well as his accommodations to approximating behavior, his encouragement of almsgiving in its full scope and dimensions, all add up to a call for the full socialization of the brother and the neighbor, especially the needy one. It is a call from this Holy Hierarch to every generation of the Church.

Jaroslav Pelikan notes that, in commenting on Matthew 5:45, St. John says, "that you may become like your Father which is in Heaven" rather than "sons of your Father," as the text reads. He attributes this to "the characteristic emphasis of the Greek church fathers on the hope for *theosis*, deification. [ . . . ]. To be "[ . . . ] changed into His likeness from one degree of glory to another" (2 Cor. 3:17b) according to St. John Chrysostom, is the goal of the process of socialization: salvation as *theosis*, to become divine and heavenly.<sup>17</sup>

In his expository homilies on 1 Corinthians and Matthew, St. John exegeted several passages that directly involve the subject at hand, the Church and her members' ministry to the least of these, and their place in the Church. In his homily 5 he addresses the text, "not many mighty,

not many noble [are chosen. Rather,] God chose the foolish things of the world, that he might put to shame them that are wise (NPNF, 1, 12, 5, on 1 Cor. 1:26-27, 22, c.1). St. John says, "persons of [. . .] great insignificance [are chosen] to pull down boasting" (23, c.2). He warns the self-confident that faith saves, not reasoning ability (24, c.1). Lines of reasoning can lead one into subtle traps away from God. The Faith, received with trust, is a sure foundation (25, c.1). As the Lord says, we must become like a child. In this respect, persons with developmental disability may have something to teach.

St. Paul rebuked those who created factions in the Eucharistic love feast (1 Cor. 11:17-34). St. John sees "the community of the feast" as the focus of the Lord's' Supper, to be shared in common with all. Exclusivity and factions reduce it to a private feast, and not the Lord's (NPNF, 1, 12, 27, 159-60). St. Paul's indignation at this perversion focused on the shame the poor felt, rather than their hunger, St. John asserts (160, c.1); he adds, with thunder, that to hold back from the poor "casteth one out of the kingdom" (161, c.2). To neglect people one holds in less esteem and focus exclusively on fellowship with those with whom one is comfortable or from whom hopes to gain is to invite the condemnation of God.

St. Paul, addressing the matter of roles in the Body of Christ, writes, "The parts of the body which seem to be weaker are indispensable" (1 Cor. 12:22). St. John asks, "What in the body is more insignificant than a hair?" (NPNF, 1, 12, 30, 178, c.2). Yet, he says the removal of either the eyelids or eyebrows not only ruins the beauty of the eye, it endangers its function. He sees widows and their frailty, for instance, serving the role of teaching the essential lesson that life is fleeting, and hastens to its earthly end (179). Showing greater honor is urged toward weaker members, St. John says, so "that they might not meet with less care." The result is "equal sympathy" (184, c.1). But these dynamics do not operate automatically; effort is needed.

“Love does not insist on its own way [. . .]” (1 Cor. 13:5). St. John says, “For your own profit lies in the profit of your neighbor, and his in yours” (NPNE, 1, 12, 33, 197, c.1).

As to financial contributions to the Church, St. John says, “[. . .] Make thine house a church; thy little box a treasury. Become [. . .] a self-ordained steward of the poor. Thy benevolent mind assigns to thee this priesthood” (NPNE, 1, 12, 43, 259, c.2). In this way the home becomes sacred; the royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5) begins with this “little box” for alms. St. John sees alms for the hungry and the welcome for the stranger as given directly to the Lord Himself (259, c.2). In serving such, one serves the Lord. And in the Lord’s supply of “bread for food” (2 Cor. 9:10), he finds an exhortation by St. Paul to be content with what is necessary rather than to seek out rich foods (NPNE, 1, 12, 20, 372, c.1). For to “reap bountifully” (9:6) is not to exult in prosperity; for St. John, loving self-sacrifice is to be the permanent mode of being. The fruits of almsgiving include thanksgiving to God and fellowship with the receiver (373, c.1).

Jesus said, “Truly I say to you, unless you turn and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:3). St. John comments that jostling for position, vanity, and ambition are foreign to the childlike disposition; children are generally uncomplicated and humble, and eager to be taught (NPNE, 1, 10, 58, 360, c.1). St. John says the Lord means by “children” men who have these qualities, who are similarly “simple and lowly, and abject and contemptible in the judgment of the common sort” (360, c.2). To the Lord’s warning that it is better to be drowned with millstone around one’s neck than to cause “one of these little ones” to sin (Matt. 18:6), St. John says, “for many feeble-minded persons have suffered no ordinary offence from being treated with slight and insult” (360, c.2).

Persons with developmental disability typically exemplify, into their adult years, the childlike qualities Jesus calls for, and are thereby icons by which these qualities may be learned. But often their simplicity is despised, for cleverness serves to advance selfish ambitions, which

retain a fierce grip on the heart unless the cross and the Kingdom are seized with violence. They thus suffer neglect to the detriment of their sense of belonging and their development, and those who neglect them, unless they repent, face the judgment of God.

St. John refers to the sheep and the goats before Christ's glorious throne of judgment (Matt. 25:31-46) as "this most delightful portion of Scripture, [unto] which we do not cease continually revolving" (NPNF, 1, 10, 79, 474, c.1). St. John, in comparing sheep and goats, finds sheep more fruitful because of their wool, milk, and lambs. He also asks why brethren would be called "least," and answers that "the lowly, poor, and outcast" are the sort that the Lord most greatly desires to "invite to brotherhood" (475, c.2). The Lord's way of valuing people is contrary to what is typical in human society. St. John concludes that the merciless goats "are punished justly, the others are crowned by grace." The sheep, "for services so small and cheap," receive overflowing grace far beyond their merit (476-77). The gift far exceeds what our meager efforts earn; it is grace, not earnings for alms.

St John identifies the dealers of oil of the parable of the wise and foolish virgins (Matt. 25:1-13): they are the poor, and the oil is alms. He warns against wasting goods for "[. . .] luxury and vainglory. For [before Christ's judgment seat] thou wilt have need of much oil" (NPNF, 1, 10, 78, 471, c.1). He urges, "[. . .] Let us contribute alike wealth, and diligence, and protection, and all things for our neighbor's advantage. [. . .] For nothing is so pleasing to God, as to live for the common advantage" (472, c.2). Contributing all things would include the socialization of those whom one is in a position to socialize, in one's family, parish church, and neighborhood.

Typically, the exhortations to charity are accompanied by stern rebukes of vice, especially luxurious living in light of others' great need. St. John, hearing that the rich say that beggars are feigning their maladies, explodes. "I am bursting with wrath," he thunders, at those who pamper and fatten themselves and then scrutinize the poor for evidence of unworthiness. He warns of

Divine judgment (NPNE, 1, 12, 21, 123, c.2). St. John charges that they would rent out their own children for dancers and chariot races, and then are stingy with the needy (124, c.2). In conclusion, he pleads, “[. . .] stretch out a liberal hand to the needy; [. . .] escape the intolerable pains of hell” (125, c.2). Lengthy rebukes of this sort are not uncommon in St. John’s homilies.

St. John asks, “Whence then arises their loving to dwell in present things?” It is in their seeking lives of luxury and softness, which blinds their souls. He declares that neither the body nor food is evil, but luxury is of the devil (NPNE 1, 12, 32, 242). The extravagant, whom Jesus calls wicked servants, who eat and drink with the drunken, will be judged as hypocrites (NPNE, 1, 10, 77, 467, c.2). St. John had no sympathy for those who used their wealth for self-indulgence rather to help others, and said so, at length, many times, and in detail.

St. John also emphasized right motives for giving; generosity is weighed not by how much is given, but by the mindset of the giver (NPNE, 1, 12, 20, 357, c.1). He counsels, “[. . .] Mourn heavily, that thou mayest have continual cheerfulness.” For if our sins were our chief concern, all adversities would be put in perspective, as well as our inconsistent efforts at doing good and our paltry giving. Mourning and a thorough confession of sin lead to a genuine sense of being forgiven, joy in God, and a realistic view of oneself and others (NPNE, 1, 12, 8, 48, c.1). St. John recommends speaking freely of one’s defects and downplaying one’s achievements. If forced to address the latter, one should cite God’s grace” (NPNE, 1, 12, 28, 231, c.2). “Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). Therefore, St. John says, “[. . .] never perform any act of virtue with an eye to human glory.”<sup>18</sup> St. John refers this to the Lord’s call to invite the lamed and maimed, who cannot repay the favor, to dinner, rather than someone who can return the favor, or a well-known person who one can boast of having as a guest (NPNE, 1, 12, 20, 117, c.2). Of course, one could also become proud of one’s acts of

hospitality to persons with disability, but at least the expectation of reciprocation would be absent, or at least diminished.

St. John discusses how prayer and fasting undergird and relate to almsgiving. In order to keep the baptismal garment bright and beautiful, St. John recommends, "First of all, earnest prayer and thanksgiving for what God has already given us, and imploring him to help us keep these gifts secure." Gratitude and prayerful dependence is the heart of the matter for one's salvation and healing, and a means of victory in spiritual struggles (Harkins, 114-15, 7.25). He then adds, "Along with prayer goes generosity in almsgiving, which is our crowning good deed and the means of our soul's salvation." He cites the prayers and alms of Cornelius in Acts 10, both of which were remembered by God. One's alms play a role in one's salvation (Acts 10:4, Harkins, 115-16, 7.27). "[. . .] Almsgiving, [. . .] is by [prayer] furnished with wings" (NPNF, 1, 10, 77, 468, c.2). Thirdly, fasting, St. John says, allows us to experience hunger and empathize with the poor, and is thus an essential catalyst of genuine, compassionate almsgiving.<sup>19</sup> Right motives for giving are thus engendered through prayer and fasting.

St. John counts the wise use of wealth "the highest of all arts." One must crucify one's mind, heart, and will, driving out selfish ambitions, ugly thoughts of others, and everything within us contrary to God's will. Then, in the Holy Spirit, through generous thoughts and compassion, God will reign within us (Van De Weyer, 19). As St. Paul writes, one can, without profit, feed the poor, if one lacks love. St. John says giving must be attended "[. . .] with sincerity and much sympathy" (NPNF, 1, 12, 26, 148, c.1). For instance, he says, it is necessary to give persons of lower social status a hearing, respectfully, with affirmations of the truths they speak (NPNF, 1, 12, 366, c.2). Also, he notes that the seven men chosen in Acts 6 were chosen with fasting, carefully. For the dispensing of alms would only be profitable if they were gentle about it, and could bear widow's complaining without becoming provoked (NPNF, 1, 11, 14, 91, c.2). Giving,

encouraging, and assisting must be in the context of respectful relationship if it is to be “[. . .] of any avail [as] faith working through love” (Gal. 5:6).

Often St. John exhorts his flock toward the heights of spiritual life, but at times he would simply seek to lift their sights to the next level. “[. . .] Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us [. . .] celebrate the festival” (1 Cor. 5:7-8). St. John says, “It is festival [. . .] the whole time we live” (NPNE, 1, 12, 15, 85, c.2). He exhorts his hearers to avoid staining their baptismal, festal garments with unclean actions (86, c.1) and covetousness” (87, c.2). He then directs them toward apostolic almsgiving by reminding them that the Pharisees, whose righteousness Jesus said they must exceed, gave three tithes and other offerings as well: up to half their goods. So how will those who fail even to tithe fare before Christ’s throne? “With reason [Jesus] said, ‘There are few that be saved’” (NPNE, 1, 10, 64, 396, c.1).

Each is responsible for the poverty he encounters. St. John asserts that when faced with starving people, the Gospel calls for giving until there is nothing left to give; there is no excuse before God for holding back (NPNE, 1, 12, 17, 362, c.2). But in a following homily he simply calls his hearers to be content with what is necessary and dispense with what is not. But those who are mindful of the poor widow who gave all she had he would lead on to greater things: monastic poverty (NPNE, 1, 12, 19, 370, c.2). St. John’s accommodation is allowing necessities; but he would lead them to holy poverty. St. John says, in his baptismal lessons, that God, in “His wisdom and ineffable kindness [. . .] entrusts to us the care of what is more important in us [. . .] the soul.” By providing for all our physical needs Himself, He intends to transform his people from self-reliance to complete trust in His power to maintain their lives.<sup>20</sup>

Concerning inheritances, St. John says, “Let us not consider how to leave our children rich, but how to leave them virtuous. [. . .] Leave them no riches, that you may leave them virtue.” He expresses concern that wealth’s power hinders the development of virtue (NPNE, 1. 11, 7, 384,

c.2). St. John also that almsgiving during one's lifetime is better than giving after death, though this, too, is a loving act. But he counts those who take the latter course as somewhere between the sheep and the goats. St. John advises, "[. . .] as the best thing, that in your lifetime you give the larger half of your goods to the poor" (NPNE, 1, 11, 18, 485, c.2). He recommends the choice of the better portion, the greater sacrifice, according to the standard of the poor widow and her two mites. He directs parents to care for their children with a focus on human values rather than material ones, so that they would be socialized into the Paschal festival. And this focus would definitely extend to the church family and her members with developmental disability as well as others in difficult circumstances, not only in terms of charity to them, but also in terms of enabling them to be able to give their two mites as well.

Proper motives and thorough consecration are, as St. John shows, essential preliminary preparation for the length and breadth of the call to almsgiving, in all its scope and dimensions.

The universal scope of God's grace is to be implemented in the Church; all are to be invited, welcomed, cared for, and enabled. St. John says, "In the spiritual marriage [. . .] our Bridegroom hurries to save our souls." Whether a person is ugly, or an outcast, an ex-convict, disabled, or burdened with sins, the Bridegroom tends to their healing (Bapt. Instr., 28, h. 1.15). He pours upon them His gifts, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, who is active in the weakest members of the Church. And again, "Even if a man [. . .] has fallen into the most extreme weakness, none of these things prevents grace from coming into the soul" (Bapt. Instr., 181-82, 12.29). Rich or poor, strong or weak, in body or mind, all may receive grace for growth in Christ. St. John says that on the day of baptism, the wealthy, accomplished man stands side by side with the poor man and the person with a disability; he knows bond with them, and does not look down on them, for together they are yearning to put on Christ.<sup>21</sup>

All are equally loved by God before the fount of life, and in the Church. St. John exhorts:

If you ever wish to associate with someone, make sure that you do not give your attention to those who enjoy health and wealth and fame as the world sees it, but take care of those in affliction, [ . . . ] in critical circumstances, [ . . . ] who are utterly deserted and enjoy no consolation. Put a high value on associating with these, for from them you shall receive much profit, [ . . . ] and you will do all for the glory of God. [ . . . ]. God Himself has said: *I am the father of orphans and the protector of widows* (Ps. 67:6).<sup>22</sup>

For St. John, the dimensions of almsgiving extend to all aspects of human need, from clothing, food, and shelter, to the needs of soul and spirit. St. John says, "Now charity is not bare words, [ . . . ] but a taking care of [people]." He suggests helping the poor, tending the sick, rescuing those in peril, supporting the troubled, and empathizing with both those who weep and those who rejoice (NPNE, 1, 11, 7, 380, c.1). He also notes that a good word is as powerful as money in lifting another's spirit in many cases (NPNE, 1, 11, 19, 495, c.2). Again, he says, "[ . . . ] Alms may be done not only by money, but by acts [such as] kindly stand by [or lending] a helping hand [ . . . ]." St. John encourages imitation of the Good Samaritan's response to the destitute and strangers. But, he says, exceed material help; acquaint him with heaven, help him don the robe of righteousness, and be sure to wear your own.<sup>23</sup>

Yet almsgiving effects one's personal transformation as well. St. John says, "There is no sin, which alms cannot cleanse, [ . . . ] it is a medicine adapted to every wound" (NPNE, 1, 11, 166, c.1). Genuine, sympathetic almsgiving heals. He also says, "Let us hold fast to Mercy: she is the [ . . . ] teacher of that higher Wisdom." He explains that habitual attention to the suffering leads to being able to bear slights, and finally, to the love of enemies. "Let us learn to feel for the ills our neighbors suffer, and we shall learn to endure the ills they inflict" (NPNE, 1, 11, 14, 92, c.1). Socializing others leads to one's transformation into the likeness of the Lord Jesus.

The gifts of the Spirit listed in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 are a non-exhaustive list which shows the dimensions of almsgiving. St. John asks, "What is, 'helps?' [He answers,] To support the weak. [ . . . ] This too is a gift of God" (NPNE, 1, 12, 32, 187, c.1). Helping, he says, must flow from real sympathy, which leads to a bond of charity and a thorough, mutual fervency between helper and helped, resulting in friendship (NPNE, 1, 12, 32, 191, c.2). A check sent to the Church's pan-Orthodox ministries is certainly almsgiving, but it must be a supplement to the face-to-face involvement in one's family, Parish, and community if it is to be real. By developing such bonds, in one's hands and heart, one becomes "[. . .] a loving and merciful soul, [. . .] a fountain for all his brethren's needs," St. John says (NPNE, 1, 11, 19, 495, c.2).

St. John, explicating "love in the Spirit," (Col. 1:8) contrasts it with "the social sort [of love]" (NPNE, 1, 13, 1, 259, c.1). Sharing a meal with the lame and the maimed would be an example of the former, a meal with friends and neighbors the latter (260, c.1). He then sets two contrasting tables, one with the poor and disabled, with a simple meal in wooden implements, and at the other, distinguished persons, and a feast set forth on silver and gold tableware, by servants (260, c.2).

St. John then asks which table one would sit at. He himself immediately chooses the first table, for that is where Christ is. Also, he says, he would feel more relaxed there; with the dignitaries he would feel small and anxious (261, c.1). At their table there would be vainglorious pomp, and he would feel obliged to overeat, which is the sin of gluttony, and is unhealthful (261, c.2). St. John says he would surely feel too bloated and dull to remember to leave the table with a word of thanksgiving, and vulgar songs would likely follow the meal (262, c.1). "O the shame!" St. John concludes (262, c.2). At the humbler table, in contrast there would be thanksgiving, satisfaction with simple sufficiency, and "much tender solicitude" St. John declares that the one

who would host such a meal in Christ's name would be able to stand boldly before Christ's Judgment seat (262, c.2). Simple gestures, such as this meal, added together in an effort to attend to all one's brethren's and neighbor's needs as best one can, together comprise genuine almsgiving in all its dimensions.

But there are priorities. St. John says that just as priests have a flock to feed, "[. . .] every one of us also [. . .] are entrusted with a little flock [. . .]." He speaks chiefly of the family; the man is to lead his sheep "to the proper pastures." St. John exhorts him to seek, from the beginning of each day, to single-mindedly "do and say something whereby he may render his whole house more reverent." St. John also directs the woman to seek "that the whole household may work the works of Heaven."<sup>24</sup>

In the home and among the family is where socialization primarily takes place. This is true for persons with developmental disability as well; but these families have extra challenges, and the Church family can and must help them. All families need help, but especially these. "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). St. John, in the explication of this admonition, in order to combat the "bad example from popular entertainments," says, "Let us give them a pattern to imitate; from their earliest years let us teach them to study the Bible."<sup>25</sup> The Bible characters would become their models, and Hannah, who "commended Samuel into the hands of God," would be a model for the parents. He advises that learning a trade or profession by which to prosper "is nothing compared to the art of detachment from riches" (Roth & Anderson, 68). St. John, the Golden-tongued, says, "A pattern of life is needed [. . .] character, not cleverness; deeds, not word; [. . .]. Don't sharpen his tongue, purify his soul." He points out that the biblical models were married people, and the lay person, who is immersed in the "tempests" of life (69), especially needs Scriptural fortification, even more than the monk. The image of God is

revealed in one's children, as parents instill in them gentleness, forgiveness, love, and a sense of the fleeting nature of this life. First, he says, educate oneself in godliness, then one's children; in this way, one will have a good defense before the Judgment seat of Christ (71). For St. John, this is the arena for socialization.

But the home is an arena of welcome, as well. St. John recommends that each home have a guest-chamber prepared with a bed and a table with a candlestick for the homeless or disabled; by this means, the family receives Christ (NPNE, 1, 11, 45, 277, c.1). Excitedly St. John adds, “[. . .] let us run about everywhere, let us drag them in, let us seize our booty: greater are the benefits we receive than what we confer” (277, c.2). Including such persons in our households would be a way to teach the children generosity. St. John would have us extend a hand, beyond the family, to our neighbors in need. And while people's resources vary, all are called, St. John says, “to show much mercy.” But God measures what one gives not by the quantity, but according to the giver's means. Even if one has nothing, the empathy of the “compassionating soul,” who weeps with those that weep (Rom. 12:15) and cares for such as prisoners, will win him from God a heavenly reward (NPNE, 1, 11, 19, 495).

St. John sees the wealthy as haughty, and tending to preoccupation with their possessions. But those with modest means tend to be more free of those vices and therefore are more focused on well-doing (495, c.2). Given the proper socialization, this applies to persons with developmental disability; there will be a yearning to help, to contribute. St. John notes that were one to have the “perpetual leisure” of the wealthy, one “soon would feel bored and restless.” Human beings were made to be active; “only in toil can our minds and bodies find contentment” (Van De Weyer, 21). Persons with developmental disability are made in God's image, and like everyone else, they grow and thrive through challenges and opportunities, both personal and social, and by having goals, working toward them, and reaching them.

St. John connects priestly, liturgical service with service to the destitute. "For the merciful man," while not clad in vestments, "is wrapped in the robe of lovingkindness [ . . .]." His altar is "not for display before men" (Matt. 6:1). "This altar is composed of the very members of Christ [ . . . ] laying, both in lanes and marketplaces [ . . .]." The hungry and naked are, as Christ said, with us always, and are always available as altars for sacrifice. And such sacrifices are a pleasant aroma rising up to God, as it is written, "Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God" (Acts 10:4). The poor, St. John says, are not for insulting but for reverencing, and for defending against those who would insult them. By defense, advocacy, alms, empathy, welcome, and hospitality, St. John says, one will "have God propitious to thee, [ . . . ] through the grace and love toward men of our [glorious] Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>26</sup>

To these robes and this altar are called all who are baptized and chrismated into Christ. Almsgiving, with much sympathy, extending in dimension to all things for our neighbors' and brethren's advantage, (i.e., socialization) is service to Christ Himself. St. John Chrysostom has made that clear by deed and word. His words become flesh as they are heeded, from generation to generation in the Church, to the coming of Christ and before His Throne, where they will testify to the victory of God's love on earth.

### **Contemporary Orthodox Discussion on Socialization as a Dimension of Almsgiving**

Many who have heard St. John Chrysostom's words, have responded, "This is a hard saying. Who can listen to it?" (John 6:60). The truth is challenging: "For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few" (Matt. 7:14). But those who take heed reap a harvest. Between Antioch and Constantinople of St. John's day and modern America society there are constants and similarities, but also significant differences. Communication technology has advanced, but the extended family cohesion characteristic of

his time and place has largely broken down in American society; and the monasticism to St. John which directed his people's attention is in its infancy in Orthodox America. Yet the call to give comprehensively remains, and the Church is called to support its families in the effort. Contemporary theologians and pastors have addressed the same issues that St. John did, but in light of a new context.

John Erickson, in an overview of the short history of stewardship in Orthodox America, describes how Russian immigrants adapted when funds from Russia dried up with the Communist Revolution.<sup>27</sup> The management crisis eroded trust between the hierarchs and the people. Parishes were built with sacrificial giving, but then became ethnic enclaves, without missionary vision. This pattern was typical across the Orthodox ethnic spectrum in America (127). But efforts at philanthropy gradually developed, directed exclusively to "one's own" at first, but later widened to pan-Orthodox efforts such as IOCC and OCMC (128-30).

Anthony Scott, in "Orthodox America: Philanthropy and Stewardship" (Scott, 187-206), probes the shortcomings of the standard approaches to giving, and discusses solutions. He decries the Parish dues system approach designed to minimally meet Church budgets as nominal, non-sacrificial and non-sacramental (195-96). Challenging the fundraiser-centered Parish, he writes, "Communal church activities that are revealed in the New Testament include worship, fellowship, mission, evangelization, study, and care for the poor and needy (198). Among the six reasons why people give that he lists, meant to stimulate new approaches, is "the training and experience received at home in stewardship and giving" (200). But if families are in a wrong mode, the Church must teach them the proper mode. Scott writes that it must begin with the leadership, in life and word, communicating the message, "I give sacrificially and still have great abundance of life. Why shouldn't other people give sacrificially and also find this joy?" (204). Scott, like St. John, points to the poor widow as the exemplar (205). The inclusion

and presence of a needy person in the Church is also a catalyst, summoning the compassion inherent in the image of God within the members.

Fr. Stanley Harakas, in "Ethics and Stewardship" (Scott, 165-86), theologically bases human stewardship on the uncontingent God's ownership of everything, the contingent man's responsibility to show forth God's likeness in the care of creation, and the out workings of a natural response of gratitude that results as we remember and participate in the Eucharist. "God awaits our response to his loving work of creation, providence, redemption, and salvation" (172-74). As stewards of a house- our "little flock"- we are responsible for the blessings God has given us (175-76). Harakas writes, "[. . .] direct giving to the poor, to agencies that assist those in need, and to the church's efforts at assisting the poor are ethical requirements." Assisting infers the hands-on care which is involved in socialization. Harakas quotes St. John Chrysostom to the effect that poverty and wealth are not bad and good respectively, but each can be either depending on how one uses them (184). As our Lord says, "Everyone to whom much is given, of him much will be required" (Luke 12:48).

Fr. Thomas Hopko, in "On Stewardship and Philanthropy: Forty Sentences" (Scott, 133-51), summarizes the Patristic understanding of the Scriptures on the subject. Some of the sentences directly apply to socialization and those with developmental disability. "To give alms is to do merciful acts" (141). It is more than writing a check. With St. John Chrysostom, Hopko declares such acts the responsibility of all. For those with nothing material to give, "a word in season" (Prov. 15:23), of encouragement or exhortation, can be given. This is St. John's "compassionating soul." Hopko writes, "Love [. . .] begins with one's family" (143). Therefore, solutions to human problems begin there. But on the other hand, Christians must be available to all, without discrimination. This is a call to extend ourselves outside our comfort zones, even to our enemies. It can start with talking at coffee hour at Church to someone outside one's circle,

different in lifestyle and opinion. Hopko explains that love of enemies involves merciful acts, prayer and even tears on their behalf (145). Some merciful acts are performed through "public and institutional strength" (147). In addition to corporate Church efforts, sometimes government programs are an answer to a family's dilemmas in their care for a developmentally disabled family member. And political advocacy for the underprivileged may be necessary and helpful as well. "Christians are themselves the poor," he notes; in dying with Christ one completely relinquishes everything, recognizing that all one has is from Him and for Him. The "poor" are "blessed" (Luke 6:20, Matt. 5:3). The intelligence, energy, and wisdom that enable wealth are gifts of God, and the resources obtained are to be shared, in the Church and elsewhere, for the purposes of God and the care of others, body, soul, and spirit. And even the least of the brethren will be regarded with respect by the one who genuinely counts himself as poor. Complete relinquishment is an attitude and behavior St. John Chrysostom promoted constantly, though he didn't use the term.

Fr. Alexander Schmemman asserts, "Liturgical catechesis is [. . .] the traditional method of religious education."<sup>28</sup> Corporate liturgical worship is the very essence of Church life (12). "Explanation" of the Faith must be in the context of "participation in the liturgical services," the "experience" of worship (13-14). The term "God" is an abstraction apart from its celebration in Divine Liturgy, which is "its own element." Of course preparation of the heart for worship at home is also necessary (16). "The rhythms of Church life" are, Schmemman emphasizes, the soil in which the Church school must be rooted. He pleads that explanation of the sacraments go beyond mere definitions so as to draw out their meaning for children's lives (18-20).

Paul Meyendorff, in "Offering Your Own of Your Own: Stewardship in the Liturgy" (Scott, 153-64), elaborates on Church life in its early years. People would bring basic staples such as bread, wine, wheat, and oil as offerings; the deacon, after selecting a certain portion for

Eucharistic participation, would see to the distribution of the rest to the clergy as sustenance and to the needy as alms (156). And all of this offering would be a thanksgiving to God, and “a paradigm of the Christian life,” which is a sacrificial mode of being. Sharing in Christ involves worship, suffering in His Name, and relinquishment of time, energy, and belongings for the good of others (163). The goal of this sacrifice is the restoration of people and all creation to communion with the Creator – socialization into the Kingdom of God. Being mindful of how central the sacraments are to the Orthodox Christian life is a reminder that this monumental task must be accomplished by the Divine energies, and not by human effort.

Vigen Guroian, in “Family and Christian Virtue: Reflections of the Ecclesial Vision of John Chrysostom,”<sup>29</sup> elaborates on the process of socialization. He sees St. John’s exhortation to parents to have interactive Bible story readings with their children as a plan toward participation in the normative world of the Bible. Guroian, referring to “the ‘ecclesial’ marriage [and] household” (139, 144), shows how St. John cites Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Aquila and Priscilla, and Hannah as normative people to emulate, especially in their hospitality and consecration of their children. (139-42) Guroian sees St. John’s view of corporate transformation as centered in the Church rather than in the structures of society at large (100).

Socialization must be on “christic and trinitarian terms” rather than on society’s terms, Guroian asserts (101). St. John Chrysostom also saw “the family as an ecclesial entity that figured centrally in the salvation process” (137). For St. John, the home, when the family faithfully practices the Gospel, mirrors the Church (138). Guroian shows the link between the guest-chamber in the home which St. John recommends and Abraham’s tent of hospitality. Also, in regard to Rebecca’s initial lavish provisions for Isaac, St. John is quoted as saying, ““everything good [. . .] came because of hospitality” (140).<sup>30</sup> Guroian champions St. John’s conviction that the family is central to mission. He also refers to St. John’s simile in which a

child's soul is city in which God seeks to place His throne, and the father is God's emissary (138).<sup>31</sup> Guroian sees in this the father's primary importance in the family. St. John is also quoted in regard to the husband's sacrificial relationship with his wife, based on the antitype of Christ and His Church (Eph. 5:32): "Suffer anything for her sake, but never disgrace her, for Christ never did this with the Church."<sup>32</sup>

Guroian contrasts "the ecclesial versus the sociological family." He writes, "The Christian family [. . .] is an arena of ascetic combat with the demons of personal and public life. This askesis not only perfects individuals but deepens community" (146). Character development is primary, and social function follows, for as St. John says, "When we teach our children to be gentle, to be forgiving, to love [. . .] we [. . .] reveal the image of God in them."<sup>33</sup> Guroian sees the Christian family as embattled and under attack from modern cultural "privatism, narcissism, and consumerism," and cannot, in its own power, effect change in society. Only by means of the character development gained by ascetic struggle, in which its members are conformed to the likeness of Christ, can the Christian family be a light to the world (150). Once Kingdom values have been established in the family, the divine value it places on its members with developmental disability serves as a witness to a world that devalues them for their lack of utility. Love lays aside that standard.

John Boojrama, in Foundations For Christian Education, focuses on socialization in the family and the Church. Every stage of life offers opportunities to learn: children watch, adults also seek growth (18). The family and the Church, in that order, are the matrix of socialization. Formation is the goal, not just information (10). The subject matter consists of learner need and practical Church life – worship, fellowship, service, or whatever is helpful -- weaved together (23). Boojrama writes, "Roots in the Church can be built only by a step-by-step participation in the life of the Church, as well as by an increasing understanding of what that Church is" (21).

Orthodox Christian socialization is, in general terms, the process of human growth toward the uniting of oneself and others to Christ and His Church. Experience, then instruction, is the order by which this happens. Children, who are intuitive rather than analytical, learn by watching adults. Abstract concepts are beyond them (42-43). It is essential, therefore, to include them in Church events. Home training and interaction is the primary arena for this (33). With the development of trust and self-concept a secure basis is laid for personhood. Learning the Lord's Prayer by rote is one of the steps to sharing the adult world (50). Self-worth develops through accomplishment, acceptance, and a sense of belonging to both family and Church (45-48). The Church's symbols and their constancy are assimilated; later, concepts grow. The growth beyond egocentrism is facilitated by the shared experience of symbolic structures (43-44). And the divine depth invites eternal growth and discovery of the image of God within. The sensual-- art, music, vestments, color, and tastes, experienced in the Liturgy-- is the way (53). Christ became flesh; touch is essential. Liturgy, fasting, prayer, and service, at Church and at home, socialize a person for the Kingdom. And God gives personal conversion to the willing (55).

The home is the center stage. The two key elements essential to socialization in the family are a father's commitment to the Faith and to love, and a loving relationship between husband and wife (80). The egocentric child operates totally under authority until about age seven, and then begins to gradually share responsibility (93). The child learns trust through faithful parents, and identity in shared events. These are a springboard to risk-taking outside the home, and to relationships with others (83-84). But the family is a fragile thing; divorce, day care, television and computer games hinder socialization. A family can also be crowded with emotions. The Church and the lateral relationships it provides undergirds its families (91-93). Parish-based family-centered catechesis, balancing cognitive and affective elements, and addressing family

efforts to worship, play, learn, and serve together, are a priority for the liturgy after the Liturgy if the parish is to be healthy, cohesive, and growing (95-97).

Boojrama also explores the applicability of the works of the developmental psychologists for the Church. He describes the stages of moral thinking, and the format of case study discussions with their guided but open-ended questions, and concludes that they are effective in accelerating growth toward the higher stages of moral decision-making (150-52).

Boojrama stresses the inclusion of children in all Church activities and regular family prayers, as well as in creative home celebrations of Church feasts, which reinforce their meaning. He calls for inter-generational interaction through play, celebration, projects, and learning activities (166-69). Family-centered catechesis along these lines is simply more effective than information and individual-based western influenced Sunday school, he asserts (31-32, 166). He encourages parental sharing meetings, inter-generational discussions on practicing the Faith as a family (with topics such as parental reinforcement of education, discipline, and the father's role) (171). Boojrama also suggests the Church could be a clearinghouse for family support specialists, as needed, and that workshops by these specialists would be helpful (170). This is especially true for families with members with developmental disabilities, who often face extra challenges incorporating those persons into family and Church activities. And it is imperative that the effort be made, for even if the persons lack the potential to ever reason abstractly, their experience of the Mysteries can be just as rich. For the mysteries are of divine depth, always inviting one to greater participation, and fuller comprehension of their meaning. The experience transcends conceptualization.

Fr. John Breck, in "Down Syndrome at Pascha,"<sup>34</sup> describes Marie, a Down syndrome woman from Paris. He remembers her tears and immersion in the Holy Friday services.

She was entirely dressed in black. Her face was streaked with tears, her head was bowed, and her arms hung down at her sides. As she approached the shroud, she slowly made the sign of the cross three times, prostrated herself before it, and for a moment kept her head to the floor. Then she rose, kissed the face then the feet of Christ, and finally venerated the Bible and the cross (66-67).

Marie knew God in Christ, crucified, buried, risen, and ascended. Persons with developmental disability are granted this by the Holy Spirit to do this, if given the opportunity.

### **The Socialization of Persons with Developmental Disabilities- Life and Liturgy**

"Thine own of thine own we offer unto thee, on behalf of all, and for all."<sup>35</sup> Bread and wine, the fruit of our labors, are brought forward, and the Holy Spirit transforms them into the body and blood of Christ, offered for all humanity, all creation. In this way the members of Christ's Body give thanks together. As St. John Chrysostom reminds us, Divine love is expressed in the equal sympathy among all members which is the fruit of our conviction that "the parts of the body which are weaker are indispensable" (1 Cor. 12:22).

Ministry to persons with developmental disability is not a peripheral, optional aspect of the Church's call; it is essential, for the ministry of such persons is indispensable. The beauty of Orthodox worship is not marred by the occasional utterances of young children or persons with developmental disability; the compassionate accommodation of the Church is an ennobling aspect of this liturgical work of the people. St. John Chrysostom teaches that earnest prayer and fasting is a preparation for extending oneself in the love of God and others, including persons with disabilities, and ultimately, even our enemies. The Divine energies dwelling in and channeled through the Church's weaker members partake of an inscrutable depth which surpasses utilitarian considerations, and call for loving, reverent response.

Kathleen Deyer Bolduc recounts her family's experiences after the birth of their moderately retarded son Joel.<sup>36</sup> She writes, "Accepting a child's disability involves the death of a dream" (ix). (In anticipation, parents visualize their highest hopes, the ideal child.) The reality became clear through tests by professionals when Joel was three. Kathleen bargained with God: "I will do anything [ . . . ] if you heal my son. Look at all I've done already, Lord" (38). Joel became a persistent hair-puller; people were afraid of him (46). Kathleen struggled with depression (48-49). She and her husband Wally's different coping strategies caused a serious strain on their marriage; there were violent arguments (54-60). Counseling helped, "through repentance and forgiveness" (63). The hair-pulling strained their Church's resources; feeling unsupported, the Bolducs moved on to another Protestant Church which they found more helpful (64-71). Forceful advocacy was, at times, required to ensure Joel's optimal educational progress (a teacher was fired) (75-78). Kathleen struggled many years with guilt over decisions regarding newborn Joel's high bilirubin count, which contributed to his disability (79-80). The Bolducs also participated in family counseling sessions with their other sons Matt and Justin, who resented the special treatment Joel receive (89-92). Joel had a special buddy at Church-- Jeff (96-98). Later Kathleen and Wally found a Christian family support group for parents of children with disabilities (105-07). Kathleen's story also includes accounts of a rare vacation, a birthday party, a closer glimpse of Joel. Feeling overwhelmed and scrambling to solve dilemmas is a typical mode for the Bolducs as well as other parents of disabled children.

Robert Naseef is a psychologist with an autistic son, Tariq, who will never talk, and whose cognitive deficits are more serious than Joel's.<sup>37</sup> In this situation there was a divorce; Robert remarried. The couple also has three daughters. Tariq would require placement in a residential program. Naseef, in his account, describes his process of coping, searching for professional help, and charts his inner turmoil over time. He systematically lays out for others in similar

situations some options for coping and finding meaning. The help he offers is not theological, but is authentically human. For instance, in chapter 2, "Lost Dreams and Growth" (15-36), Naseef offers a "Feelings Checklist." There are sixty feelings listed; he writes, "The feelings checklist is a way to help people explore their emotional responses to their child" (22). The chapter also includes his and other's stories. The next chapter, "The Other side of Sorrow," gives descriptions of the stages of grief, with illustrative stories (37-62). The next two chapters are devoted to the parental relationship with the special child, and following ones address fathers, the couple, siblings, support groups, and relating to professionals, respectively. The final chapter is more personal. Though a sense of grief can still be felt, he writes:

Tariq's gifts to me were not in packages, but, rather, they have continued to unfold and develop over time. Like a tree, they have sunk roots and grown inside me. Tariq has taught me the meaning of unconditional love. I have learned to honor his sacred right to be loved for who he is. My attachment to his achievements dissolved over time. This was hard to let go in our world driven by appearance and money. Tariq has made good progress. He will probably go to a sheltered workshop after his graduation [. . .] (255).

In the epilogue Naseef brings forth a valuable term: differently abled (261).

These families could become Orthodox Christians; the challenge is to prepare to make a place for them and the gifts of their differently abled members. The Holy Scriptures, the Tradition, and the liturgy calls for this. What bonds with the Church can be forged for such as Joel and Tariq? Is an official "special buddy program" necessary? Each parish situation is different. Surely most have families with disabled members already. If, as St. John says, alms are the oil for our lamps, godly fear and the love that comes through abiding in Christ must propel all Orthodox Christians to develop the awareness, the adaptability, and the creativity to incorporate the indispensable gifts of persons with disabilities- developmental and otherwise.

Father John Chryssavgis' booklet The Body of Christ: A Place of Welcome for People with Disabilities<sup>38</sup> is an invitation to this call. If, he writes, "those whom we consider as being unfamiliar or [. . .] different or perhaps disabled – are marginalized and even excluded, whether by our attitude or by lack of accessibility [. . .] even by passive omission, the Church is not what it is called to be. The Church is denied its reality" (1). He affirms that all "bring specific and special gifts or talents to the Church" (2). Moses, for instance, who had speech problems, was chosen to lead Israel. Also, the grumpy disabled man for whom the desert father Abba Agathon carried and ran errands turned out to be an angel (5, 7). Chryssavgis writes, "We should be aware of the manifold practical responsibilities often unnecessarily placed on families that deal with disabilities [. . .]." These include both physical and emotional burdens (6-7). He asks, in relation to the call for full participation of people with disabilities in the Church's liturgical, administrative, educational, and pastoral life, "And are we imaginative, sensitive, and flexible in our considerations?" (8). In interaction with people with disabilities, he counsels "openness," and asking if one can help before just doing it (10); he also recommends that each parish have an advocate for them (8). Fr. John concludes, "Whenever I reflect on a person with disabilities, I think primarily of persons, not of disabilities" (14). The booklet is a brief introduction to the subject, and a parish would do well to have a number on hand.

Twenty years ago Fr. Stephen Plumlee, a psychotherapist, wrote an article which is posted on the Orthodox Church of America website entitled The Handicapped and Orthodox Worship.<sup>39</sup> He notes that the multisensory nature of Orthodox worship provides for those lacking in certain senses, since the whole range is present. There are concrete actions, music, and fragrance alongside rich theology; there are words relating to everyday life and words that can carry one through the incarnate Christ into the ineffable heavenlies. The Holy Spirit can address the heart through all, or some, or even just one of these. The symbols of Orthodox worship- lighting

candles, making the sign of the cross, kissing icons, prostrations- are enacted by all. There is no need for separate services. This spiritual sensuality offers mentally retarded persons much to respond to: repetition, concreteness, physical contact; the staples of their unique pedagogy inhabits the services. But he decries the lack of educational materials designed for persons with disabilities in the Church, specifically the lack of Braille service books.

In his homily on the wise and foolish virgins St. John Chrysostom urged as alms "all things for our neighbor's advantage" (NPNF 1, 10, 78, 471, c.1). These things- the support of families with disabled members, the education of these members, and the call to life together with them will be addressed in the remainder of this thesis.

### **The Socialization of Persons with Developmental Disabilities- Supporting the Family**

Families with disabled members have additional struggles; this can lead to growth in character or to an unraveling. Personal choices are made that are decisive. But the support of other families and wise persons can reinforce the right decisions and outlook.

St. John Chrysostom says, "[lay people are] always battling innumerable tempests" (Roth & Anderson, 68); he recommends Bible stories as the anchor for the storm. He also says, "This, then, is our task: to educate both ourselves and our children in godliness, otherwise what answer will we have before Christ's judgment seat?" (71). This applies to all Christian families.

The socialization of the developmentally disabled child- and their siblings- is a sacred charge for parents, sponsors, the Parish Priest, and the families of the Parish who support this family and its disabled member. Sister Magdalen writes, "If the aim of our life is to reach divine life, this means that every moment has extremely great significance."<sup>40</sup> She applies this to the most

basic things, such as preparing meals lovingly and prayerfully (27). To parents she writes, "Marriage is a way of salvation" (11), and in "Christian parenthood [. . .] example is everything" (33). She exhorts them to help their children to see "Christ and the saints as friends, to whom they can tell anything, and who love them even more dearly than their parents love them" (53). The children are also to be included in parish activities, such as giving money, visiting older and ill members, and in social events (69).

Sister Magdalen warns that "one can do serious spiritual harm by not speaking to a child according to his measure" (50). John Boojrama also promotes play and games as appropriate modes for early Christian education, and applicable to "everything from the social to the liturgical growth of a child." They are "the foundation for the child's moral education" (Boojrama, 137). Contrary to Puritan practice, a child is not a miniature adult. There is a time for nurture, both playful and serious, and there is a time for catechesis. The stages of growth of a person with developmental disabilities are in one sense more extended, but in another sense parallel with those of his peers, for he physically matures with them. Great sensitivity is needed in overseeing both participation in interaction with peers and in the introduction of devices which will provide adjustment to developmental level. This is true in nurture, education, and in life in general; "help" may be needed, but not so much as to make the person feel different and set apart. To be special can become not an honor, but a stigma.

How can the Orthodox Christian parish church support its families with differently abled members? A large part of the answer lies in the way the Church is called to support all its families. John Boojrama's call to an active focus on family-centered parish catechesis and group discussions in light of the fact that socialization in the home is more decisive for the development of Christian character and continuance with the Church than Sunday school participation remains highly pertinent. His identification of the father's spiritual health and the

health of the parent's relationship as the key factors in successful socialization of all family members are also large factors to be acted on. The frequent times of crisis faced by families with disabled members can be faced as both they and the parish families that offer them various kinds of practical support they need are grounded in the unshakeable foundation of Orthodox Christian community life- in its' mysteries, symbols, practices, prayers, and teachings, both dogmatic and social. And this grounding will include an understanding of the implications of these treasures for life in the home and in the surrounding community (Boojrama, 61-106).

The website of the Self-ruled Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America<sup>41</sup> offers a number of resources that support these goals. At Antiochian Village there are family timeAWAY weekends, family camps, and a marriage enrichment retreat. There is a Department of Marriage and Family Ministries. The Chaplain and Pastoral Counseling Ministry's resources include the website of the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy.

On the parish level John Boojrama suggests integrating into Christian education programs various forms of family-centered discussion groups toward a real grasp of the practical, day-to-day, implications of ecclesial Divine life (Boojrama, 169-70). The Orthodox Church in America Website's Family Life page<sup>42</sup> includes articles such as "Spiritual Aspects of Fatherhood," by Albert S. Rossi, Ph.D., "The Christian Family: Some Beginning Reflections," by Dr. John L. Boojrama, and "Marriage Enrichment in an Orthodox Parish," by Fr. Andrew Harrison. This latter article is a guide for planning a weekend marriage enrichment retreat in the local parish. In such ways the Orthodox parish can actively fortify struggling families and cultivate healthy families, which in turn can support families in crisis.

Kathleen Deyer Bolduc, in A Place Called Acceptance: Ministries with Families of Children with Disabilities,<sup>43</sup> describes the stages of grief: denial, anger, guilt, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (9-12). "Acceptance is a time of dreaming new dreams for the child, and building on

the child's strengths" (11-12). But before this, families need accompaniment through the entire process of grief. The beginning, from diagnosis to therapy options, she describes as "intense emotional upheaval." She also writes of "chronic grief" in which earlier stages of the process resurface. The timing and intensity of these stages varies, even among spouses, which causes relational strain. Some "get stuck" in denial or anger (12). Bolduc suggests counselors and parent support groups as means of working through the process (13). Her suggestions for pastoral care include Naseef's book Special Children, Challenged Parents, a pastoral visit to the home with regular follow-up phone calls to monitor the situation, involving a parish member knowledgeable in family systems to share in the pastoral care, the availability of local social service agency contacts, utilization of local community support groups, baby sitting and respite care by fellow Church members, and family-to-family teams in the parish (28). A family systems approach recognizes the family as the center of everyday life for each of its members, and also explores its role in Church and society. The complex web of relationships within and without the family is charted and assessed by this approach (Boojrama, 75).

Robert Naseef systematically examines the components of the family system personally and professionally in Special Children, Challenged Parents. Of special interest is his experience in crafting together a "fathers with disabled children support group" discussion. In the back of the book are resources, including websites of organizations such as Ability On-line Support Network, The Beach Center on Families and Disability, Developmental Delay Resources, Disability Resources, Federation of Families, National Fathers Network, Parents Helping Parents, Parenting Special Needs, Respite Care, and The Sibling Support Project (278-84).

Two other websites that families may find helpful are <[www.thearc.org](http://www.thearc.org)>.<sup>44</sup> (The Association of Retarded Citizens) and <[www.coping.org/specialneeds/coping.htm](http://www.coping.org/specialneeds/coping.htm)>.<sup>45</sup> (James J. Messina,

Ph.D.); both are very comprehensive resources for persons with developmental disabilities and their families. The latter website looks at coping strategies for the entire life cycle.

Families with disabled members benefit from interaction with others in the same situation, and unless their parish is located in an area with a cluster of Orthodox parishes, they will have to find this kind of support outside the Church. And while there is a concern that the Orthodox Christian family may encounter the expression of values foreign to their Faith, the others they encounter are also made in the image of God and share the human condition and human aspirations, and because of this can be supportive and helpful. This would also apply to groups which include or are comprised of various kinds of non-Orthodox Christians. In this case, the values are similar, and the differences subtler. The Orthodox parish priest may want to monitor these kinds of involvements, so as to reinforce the good and screen out the bad. These outside involvements challenge the families of the parish to find ways to remain the primary community for the family, such as baby-sitting and respite care. The sacrificial dimensions of almsgiving laid out by St. John Chrysostom are an Orthodox Christian touchstone for a parish's response.

The Church's pastors, the bishop and the parish priests, provide this lifeline from the Lord and the holy Fathers to the people, through the Mysteries and their teachings and counsels. They will be looked to by the family for answers at critical times. While it is necessary for the Priest to have ready a certain general command of the range of responses to all manner of crises for those in his care, he should also have for a list of professionals- medical, psychological, educational- to whom a family in crisis can be referred. But the close presence and prayers of one's spiritual father at such times will be a continually felt need at such times. And for families with disabled members, this will be often.

One Orthodox Christian model for family support is the Challenge Liturgy Ministry, in which families from eight Greek Orthodox parishes on Long Island, NY participate.<sup>46</sup> Once a month

families (who were the catalysts for the ministry) gather with their disabled members for “a liturgy that is conducted in a supportive, accepting environment that is appropriate to their needs.” Afterwards, there is a reception which “provides families with an opportunity to develop friendships, socialize, and exchange information.” There are speakers who give talks on pertinent, practical issues, “such as guardianship, group home placement, estate planning, Medicare/Medicaid [. . .]” (3). Also, there are catechism sessions which can include “stories depicted in icons, Saints’ name day, items used in the Liturgy, elements of the Liturgy, etc.” A spring picnic, a Christmas party, a self-help group, and a Parish lawyer who “provides pro-bono legal services for guardianship” are also elements of this ministry (6). About forty challenged individuals, from ages 4 to 43, participate. The website also lists a missions statement, historical milestones, program benefits (for participants and Parish), program goals, and an outline for a Challenge Liturgy Program Workshop for the development of similar programs in other places. A contact email and phone numbers are provided for those who are interested.

### **The Socialization of Persons with Developmental Disabilities: Christian Education**

Once baptized and chrismated, Orthodox Christians receive the Eucharist, even as infants. This is in anticipation of spiritual growth-- in all its aspects, including the physical, intellectual, emotional, and social-- toward maturity in Christ.

John Boojrama writes, “People learn differently at different ages; they learn more efficiently, effectively, and meaningfully as they mature [. . .]” (10). In fact, he notes that in the early Church “all educational efforts were directed at adults” (14). Before the development of abstract reasoning capacities nurture and socialization take precedence; children observe adults relating together with the symbols of the Church and receive all the multisensory phenomena of life as the family practices them at Church and at home. By kissing icons, making the sign of the

cross, and saying the Lord's Prayer, even if somewhat by rote, they learn they are members of an Orthodox Christian family (54).

Father Anthony Coniaris' Making God Real in the Orthodox Christian Home<sup>47</sup> is an excellent resource for reinforcing the Faith in the home—concretely, for children and persons with developmental disabilities who will never reach the stage of abstract reasoning. “Discovering our Talents” (46-48) guides parents in helping their children to discover their uniqueness, the kind of activities they gravitate to. “A Weekly Family Home Evening” (19-21) recommends an evening together devoted to the Faith, with prayer, songs, Bible stories, play, discussion, and the like. “The Family Icon” (83-85) discusses the sacred value and utility of the traditional Orthodox Christian family altar. St. John Chrysostom's recommendation that parents preoccupy themselves with plans to encourage faith and virtue in the home with activities like interactive Bible stories can be implemented by means of the many ideas in this book.

John Boojrama asserts that the western Sunday school model, which the Orthodox Churches have adopted, in effect force-feeds children with theology that they are not ready for, and recommends family-centered discussion time instead (15, 77). He suggests that formal catechesis should proceed with the emergence of abstract reasoning ability at about the age of thirteen (40). But what of those who never reach this stage? Should separate, simpler catechesis lessons be developed for them? This line of reasoning coincides with the tendency of the parents of normally abled children to fear that differently abled children will interfere with their child's learning, and then advocate for separation. Children themselves tend to be more accepting of differences. If this reaction and advocacy is resisted, the differently abled and normally abled children will grow up through Church school together, and the normally abled child will receive the indispensable gifts of the weaker member, the differently abled child—such things as the gift of patience with the differences of others, seeing the world from another point

of view, and many other intangible gifts. And the differently abled child will be a living stone built into the wall of the Temple of Christ, rather than in the special little chapel out back, where he will feel different and apart. "I was a stranger and you took me in" (Matt. 25:35). A child that is disruptive needs help; a teacher's assistant trained for the unique situation would be helpful in such a case. Everything possible should be done to make Matthew 25:35 a reality in Church School. And the differently abled child will be given an opportunity to grasp the complete curriculum and catechesis as best they can, in their unique way. There may be more absorption than the evaluation tools that are used can measure.

Teachers can be equipped with a greater variety of teaching tools to connect with children who are differently abled. Special-needs teacher and consultant Lisa Krenz (interviewed by Jan Johnson in the article, "Caring for Special Needs Kids," on the website [www.forministry.com](http://www.forministry.com))<sup>48</sup> gives some brief, helpful suggestions on integrating such children into Sunday school classrooms. She touches on the need to be active and multi-sensory, navigating the difficulties of activity transitions by maintaining a routine, and utilizing volunteers. Krenz also wrote an article available from the Lutheran Special Education Ministries<sup>49</sup> on "Adapting Curriculum and Instruction for Students with Special Learning Needs." It deals with learning environment, presentation of materials, reading, memory work, written assignment, and assessment. Again, the emphasis is on multi-sensory approaches.

For children with developmental disabilities, three simple guidelines can help a teacher in adapting: keep lessons concrete, and accessible to the senses; keep lessons immediate—directly related to the child's present environment and everyday life; use some extra repetition.

On the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Church website, in the Christian education department, in the section for Church school teachers, an overview of the workshop "Educating Ourselves and our Children in Godliness" can be accessed. In Course 1, "Introduction to

Teaching," one finds among the topics covered, "four ways in which children learn, and their appropriate uses." This speaks to the differently abled. And in the April 2006 edition of The Word<sup>50</sup> the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese magazine, in the monthly letter of Carole Buleza, the Christian Education director, one is introduced to Khoureye Gail Meena, a department associate "for multiple intelligence strategies and special needs children" (18).

The use of multiple intelligence strategies for the differently abled has great promise for the development of the appreciation for and communion with the Church's weaker members that St. Paul and St. John Chrysostom envisioned and called for. As the person with developmental disability's intelligences are identified and given attention by Church school workers, abilities are focused upon and cultivated for the entire Church to see and celebrate, and to count, with St. Paul, as indispensable (1 Cor. 12:22). Fear and the segregation it can engender can be dispelled. Parents will take heart, fellow members will be enlightened, and the Parish Priest will announce the good news that the body of Christ is in reality what it is called to be- a place where all "have the same care for one another" (1 Cor. 12:25). For unlike society in general, in which utility and success in some kind of production gives persons worth, in the Church, there is meaning and rejoicing in the smallest gestures that evidence Divine love, such as the widow and her two copper coins (Luke 21:1-4), which the Lord magnified.

The multiple intelligences approach was developed first by Howard Gardner, and elaborated on for personal exploration by Thomas Armstrong.<sup>51</sup> It is a new, well-researched form of analysis and development of the range of human giftedness that many have sought to explore and nurture all along, a quest that has been at times neglected in regard to those whose intelligences do not fit into our society's utilitarian system. This approach is a resource for the varied members of the Body of Christ. The nine intelligences are verbal,(Armstrong, 27-43),

spatial (44-61), music (62-76), kinesthetic (77-93), logical-mathematical (94-108), social (109-127), intrapersonal (128-46), natural and existential (224-39).

Intrapersonal intelligence is the awareness of one's self, by which one discerns the character of one's thoughts and motivations, as well as one's sins, and is crucial for confession, repentance, and spiritual growth. Social intelligence is crucial for the love of one another, and for empathy and counseling. Musical intelligence is for making a pleasant joyful noise to the Lord. Spatial intelligence allows for the writing of icons and illumination by them. The physical aspects of worship involve kinesthetic intelligence: the sign of the cross, prostrations, processions. The verbal, logical-mathematical, and existential intelligences are involved in Orthodox liturgical worship, in preaching, in comprehending and communicating theology, and in the social functions of letter writing, encouraging, and consoling. Natural intelligence is involved as one weighs the source of the elements of physical worship: bread, wine, trees, eggs. The saints who lived in deserts and forests who befriended animals developed this intelligence. There are countless more applications of each as members of the Body of Christ live out the Faith in everyday life. The rudimentary signs of these intelligences in young children can be discerned by those who are closely involved with them. One could make a case for more intelligences, as well: "humor, creativity, cooking, [. . .] intuition, olfactory, [. . .] memory, wisdom [. . .]" (255). Armstrong gives many examples of each intelligence, and suggests exercises for the cultivation of each of them.

Others have applied the approach for Christian application. Barbara Bruce employs the theory for children's Bible study in 7 Ways of Teaching the Bible to Children.<sup>52</sup> Bernadette T. Stankard employs the approach for faith formation and prayer in How each Child Learns: Using Multiple Intelligences in Faith Formation<sup>53</sup> and Multiple Intelligences: Who I am is how I Pray.<sup>54</sup>

Though not all the content in these works are compatible with Orthodox Christian tradition, much is, and the methods used for exploring the multiple intelligences are instructive.

A multiple intelligence inventory in early childhood could aid both parents and Christian educators in exploring the intelligences of children with disabilities. Two or three relative strengths could be identified; these children would then be seen in terms of their abilities rather than their disabilities. Such inventories, crafted for a specific age level, could be also be devised for later stages for reassessment. The Learning Disability Resource Community website<sup>55</sup> has a multiple intelligence inventory that can be adapted for this specific use.

This focus on strengths can build confidence in all persons concerned. But ultimately teachers need to address all of the intelligences to some degree for each and every child for the sake of a well-rounded education. One cannot neglect a child's social skills just because it is not a strength, for instance. But frustration and reaction could attend predetermined goals in these areas; expectations must be realistic, and addressing strengths regularly sustains confidence.

St. John Chrysostom recommended interactive Bible stories, utilizing questions. A parish would do well to have a trained storyteller. A person with developmental disabilities is likely to have difficulty with reading. Personal icons of Christ, the Theotokos, and the person's patron saint, and a personal icon book are traditional Orthodox Christian alternatives to literature.

As John Boojrama emphasizes, catechism includes not only the traditioning of information, but also integration into the Body of Christ. Knowledge of the Nicene Creed, (the Symbol of the Faith) the Mysteries, and the value of weaker members, are all sacred mandates. The symbols of the Faith, of ineffable Divine reality and depth, beckon all to greater fullness of Divine life in Christ. The differently abled and the normally abled are both called to this-- together.

**The Socialization of Person with Developmental Disabilities—Life Together**

The Church has stood behind the family, sharing their grief and joy, all their denial, anger, and acceptance. Several families provided baby-sitting and respite care as it was needed. Their child with disabilities was not only accommodated, but also appreciated in his Church school years. He evidences personal knowledge of Christ, the Theotokos, and his patron saint, and what the Mysteries are about. In the Divine Liturgy, he recites the Nicene Creed the best that he can. He can make the sign of the cross. He treasures his personal icon book. He has been recognized for his spatial and kinesthetic intelligences, and is the unofficial Church photographer. His pictures are always on the bulletin board. He has served as an Altar boy, and has carried the Cross during the Great Entrance. He has love to give; he is loved in return.

This is an ideal picture. Often many of the elements of this picture are missing. The adult with disabilities may have irritating mannerisms. Will he still be loved in the Church?

Kathleen Deyer Bolduc, in [A Place Called Acceptance](#), elaborates on what children with disabilities bring to their family and Church. "They model unconditional love; teach us how to live in the moment; [they] provide rich lessons in what it means to be human." To those who take the time to interact with them, she writes, there is given new light on "small accomplishments," and "the miracles of everyday life." These interactions with children with disabilities take one deeper in God, and bring joy and fulfillment (19).

The benefits of the Challenge Liturgy Ministry are listed in their pdf file. They include the many opportunities to serve, such as catering receptions, giving parties, donating food and cooking it, buying gifts, and singing in the Challenge Liturgy and at the Christmas party. "Our Greek dancers perform at the Christmas party," the anonymous writer proudly states. The ministry also draws together the families of those with disabilities, including siblings and fathers who had previously been drifting away from Church participation (8-9).

Bolduc counted the personal character rewards. The Challenge Liturgy writer counted the service opportunities, and noted how families were drawn together and to the Church. These parents testify to the gifts their children with disabilities bring to themselves and the Church.

The Antiochian Teen SOYO website<sup>56</sup> describes the nine day Special Olympics camp they coach at each summer. Michelle Nicola, a coach, in a letter expresses amazement at the athletes' enthusiasm. She writes, "[. . .] the athletes were teaching me to live and love life." She also saw their struggles with daily living tasks, and was impressed by their determination, and planned to emulate it as she started college.

The Orthodox Church in America website section for youth, The Hub, describes a ministry of Holy Transfiguration Orthodox Church in Livonia, Michigan in the article "Ministering to Residents of an Adult Foster Care Home," by Father Michael Matsko.<sup>57</sup> He writes, "Basically what we have done is incorporate these five men and their caregivers into the life of our Community." They go to sporting events with them; the men come to services, and help serve at special events. At Christmas the Church gives the men gifts, and the men also give gifts. The men are seen as made in the image of God; Church members learn "not to fear their mental illness." A youth group member writes,

The simplest gestures bring such joy to each of them, which taught us to cherish the countless blessings we often take for granted. The endless smiles, stories, and moments of laughter have bestowed upon us a greater reward than any material item can ever replace. God has truly blessed us by bringing these men into our lives and teaching us the value of friendship and love.

In these two ministry examples non-family members have discovered the gifts of persons with disabilities. It would seem a natural extension for those who coach and help at the Antiochian Teen SOYO Special Olympics camps to begin ministries in their Orthodox Christian

parishes similar to the one in Livonia, Michigan. In this way an experience becomes a lifestyle, and encounters become bonds of love. Short-term ministry is meant to be habit forming.

The Eastern Orthodox Foundation near Indiana, PA was founded by Father George Hnatko in 1966. They provide a personal care facility and a transitional living center, where they serve the "disadvantaged [ . . . ]. Many are mentally handicapped." Shelter, clothing, and food are provided, along with medical, spiritual, recreational, financial, vocational, and counseling services. "Training in self-care" is also given to those who need it.<sup>58</sup> Persons with developmental disability can become indigent through neglect and abandonment; this ministry serves such persons and many others outside the parish setting.

Jean Vanier, who founded L'Arche, a network of communities for people with developmental disabilities, and co-founded Faith and Light, a ministry that sponsors regular meetings for families and friends of people with disabilities, in Becoming Human<sup>59</sup> describes the process he experienced when he laid aside his quest for success through professional attainment to befriend and live together with two men from an institution. He discovered their profound loneliness and pain due to rejection, and the path to healing-- relationship, friendship, listening, and appreciation—for both them and himself. He writes, "This meeting with God, I find, is not first and foremost for those who are most clever and honourable but for those who are weak and humble and open to love [ . . . ]" (97). The disabled men he lived with taught him these things; he extols the freedom from the competitive life he had known. Not that it was easy; the irritations of some of the relationships drove him to discover and deal with his own brokenness. He learned, as St. John Chrysostom suggested, that loving needy people leads to the deeper spiritual gift of loving one's enemies. In the last chapter, "Forgiveness" (135-63), he writes, "Forgiveness begins as we become aware of our fear and barriers" (150). Through such things as the kindness of another and times of quietness, one can, by sensing "deep energies within"

which is blessedness, be free of "fear, anger, indifference, vengeance, or feelings of despair and unworthiness" (152). As a result of living and interacting with persons with developmental disability, Vanier found that for all involved, the mirages of various feelings of superiority and inferiority are revealed as illusory; members of the community begin to come to terms with the reality that their lives consist of both hurts received and hurts given to others (158). And this allows for forgiveness and reconciliation; but it is an extended process.

Wolf Wolfensberger, in The Theological Voice of Wolf Wolfensberger,<sup>60</sup> writes, "Mentally retarded people play a uniquely prophetic role in this age" (12). Wolfensberger pioneered normalization and social role valorization in the field of mental retardation (4). He feels this age has made an idol of technology, and that it is not only out of control, but now has the potential to destroy the human race in numerous ways. He writes, "The systems we are creating escape the human capacity of management" (13). He sees it as another version of the Tower of Babel, one "God is about to confront" (15). God will do this through the simplicity and gentleness of mentally retarded people, whose lives are the very antithesis of the idol of progress. He tells some astonishing stories which he sees as prophetic, such as the very severely retarded man, who, beyond his level of capability, said, "This is my body" (24). "God has chosen the foolish things of the world [. . .] to bring to nothing the things that are" (1 Cor. 1:27-28).

Wolfensberger describes the early Christian hospice movement, and quotes St. John Chrysostom: "If there were no poor, the greater part of your sins would not be removed. They are the healers of your wounds" (54-55). He asserts that the Reformation, by its rebuttal of monasticism, in effect replaced the Christian hospices with commercialized human services. The epidemics of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries brought a pattern of segregation, and the Social Darwinism of the nineteenth century sounded a genetic alarm that led to the

justifications of the Euthanasia of handicapped people in the early twentieth century (57-58). This remains an issue today. Wolfensberger sees all this as a persecution of prophets (28).

In opposition to rationales within Christianity for segregation, Wolfensberger states categorically, "We know in fact, the segregated people not only learn less, but that [ . . . ] segregation results in people [ . . . ] becoming [ . . . ] devalued." He writes, "Revaluation of people is not readily achieved in isolation" (65). He also reports, "[ . . . ] The 1977 Task Force on Human Life report of the Anglican Church of Canada [ . . . ] explained why and how Christianity tells us that retarded people are not human and should not live" (58). He shows a pattern—segregation, devaluation, abortion and euthanasia.

The Orthodox Church must stand against this pattern and its roots—segregation. One who supports the mercy killing of persons with disabilities because of their suffering is in effect saying, egotistically, "Life cannot be meaningful for one who is (unlike me) not normal." Those who are differently abled are not necessarily suffering; one can rejoice in one's God-given abilities, and come to terms with limitations.

When the choice is made to welcome and value the differently abled, the privilege of marveling at the flowering of life "out of dry ground" (Is. 53:2) is often granted. But even if the situation of a person with developmental disabilities evidences mostly struggle, the Church is called to fulfill the mandate of Matthew 25:31-46, and welcome this person who seems so strange. This stranger is Christ. The struggle, the effort, that love requires in such a case, most likely requiring a team effort, will in the final analysis reinvigorate the bond of love that makes an Orthodox Christian parish a family.

## **Conclusion**

Metropolitan Philip Saliba of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese has said, "If we claim that we love God and our neighbor, but fail to translate that love into acts of mercy and compassion, we are living a false faith, a dead faith. This is why St. Basil the Great says, 'If I live alone, whose feet will I wash?' The Lord washed the feet of the disciples. Whose feet will you wash?" (Allen, 413). This can mean many things, all of which require physical action.

Persons with developmental disability are one group of people who need their feet to be washed. This call also applies to all persons with disabilities and to all who are poor in some way. In fact, all of one's neighbors need their feet washed at times. But St. John Chrysostom did specify the poor as the altar on which all may make continual sacrifices to God. A person with developmental disability is poor in intellectual function, and often may have other difficulties, but he may be rich in another way. The focus on persons with developmental disabilities has been an opportunity to consider specific, concrete aspects of their situation and how the Church can wash their feet. To wash feet is to give some form of tangible help.

A tool that could help the Orthodox Christian parishes of America to serve persons with disabilities is a website that builds on the Scriptural and Patristic inspiration for this service with a list of resources, a means of connection for families with disabled members, Orthodox Christian educational tools, lists of Orthodox Christian ministries for the disabled, and stories of successful integration and growth. This thesis is in preparation for such a website which will hopefully be a means to "spur one another to love and good works" (Heb. 10:24).

"[. . .]. The parts of the body which seem to be weaker are indispensable [. . .]. [. . .] God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the inferior part, that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members have the same care for one another" (1 Cor. 12:22-25). May all Orthodox Christian parishes devise means to make St. Paul's clear mandate a reality.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1952 [Old Testament], 1971 [New Testament]) Matthew 6:1–18.

<sup>2</sup> John Boojrama, Foundations for Orthodox Christian Education (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1989), 36.

<sup>3</sup> Ageloglou, Priestmonk Christodoulos, Elder Paisios of the Holy Mountain (Mt. Athos, Greece: Holy Mountain, 1998) 138.

<sup>4</sup> Demetrios J. Constantelos, Byzantine Philanthropy and Social Welfare (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1968) 29.

<sup>5</sup> Ignatius of Antioch, Epistle to the Smyrneans 6:2, in Constantelos, 14.

<sup>6</sup> Tertullian, *Apologeticus* 39, 5–6, in Constantelos, 14–15.

<sup>7</sup> *Decrees and Canons of the Seven Ecumenical Councils, The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, series 2, XIV (Grand Rapids, MI, 1956) 50, in Constantelos, 69.

<sup>8</sup> *Martyrium Sancti Martyris Zenobii*, MPG, CVX, Col. 1 1312A, cf. col. 1309B, in Constantelos, 182.

<sup>9</sup> Wendy Mayer and Pauline Allen, *John Chrysostom* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000) 3.

<sup>10</sup> Basil the Great, *Regulae Fusius Tractatae*, MPG, XXXI, 35, col. 1004C, 37.1, col. 1009C, 155, co. 1184B in Constantelos, 89-90, 154–55.

<sup>11</sup> Gregory Nazianzenos, *Oratorio* 43, in *Laudem Basilis Magni*, MPG, XLVI, Co. 580b, in Constantelos, 182.

<sup>12</sup> J.N.D. Kelly, *Golden Mouth: The Story of John Chrysostom—Ascetic, Preacher, Bishop* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995) 5–6, 15.

<sup>13</sup> In *Col. Hom.* . 8.1 (PG 62.351), in Kelly, 136.

<sup>14</sup> Fr. George Florovsky, “St. John Chrysostom: The Prophet of Charity,” in *St. Vladimir’s Seminary Quarterly*, 14, Nos. 3/4 (1955), 182.

<<http://www.orthodoxytoday.org/articles4/FlorovskyChrysostom.php>>.

<sup>15</sup> Joseph J. Allen, ed. *And He Leads Them: The Mind and Heart of Philip Saliba* (Ben Lomond, CA, Conciliar Press, 2001) 311.

<sup>16</sup> Phillip Schaff, ed. *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* (NPNF) Series 1, Volume 10, *St. John Chrysostom’s Homilies of the Gospel of Saint Matthew*. (New York, NY: The Christian Literature Company, 1888)

<sup>17</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, Divine Rhetoric: The Sermon on the Mount as Message and as Model in Augustine, Chrysostom, and Luther (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001) 141.

<sup>18</sup> Paul Harkins, ed. St. John Chrysostom: Baptismal Instructions (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1963) The Sixth Instruction, 10.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Van De Weyer, comp. On Living Simply: The Golden Voice of John Chrysostom (Liguori, MO: Liguori/Triumph, 1997) 78.

<sup>20</sup> Harkins, 8.22, 128.

<sup>21</sup> Harkins, 2.13, 48.

<sup>22</sup> Harkins, 6.12, 97–98.

<sup>23</sup> NPNF, 1, 11, 25, 166.

<sup>24</sup> NPNF, 1, 10, 77,468.

<sup>25</sup> Catherine P. Roth & David Anderson, trans. “Homily 21 on Ephesians 6:1–4” St. John Chrysostom: On Marriage & Family Life (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003) 66-67.

<sup>26</sup> NPNF, 1, 12, 20, 374.

<sup>27</sup> John Erickson, “Generosity, Accountability, Vision: Historical Perspectives on Orthodox Stewardship in America,” Good and Faithful Servant: Stewardship in the Orthodox Church ed. Anthony Scott (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003) 119–32.

<sup>28</sup> Alexander Schmemman, Liturgy and Life: Lectures and Essays on Christian Development through Liturgical Experience (Department of Religious Education, Orthodox Church in America, 1993)

<sup>29</sup> Vigen Guroian, Ethics after Christendom: Toward an Ecclesial Christian Ethic (Grand Rapids, MI: William P. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993) 133–54.

<sup>30</sup> Roth and Anderson, 104, in Guroian, 138.

<sup>31</sup> John Chrysostom, “Christian Address on Vainglory and the Right Way for Parents to Bring up their Children,” in Guroian, 140.

<sup>32</sup> Roth and Anderson, 47, in Guroian, 146.

<sup>33</sup> Roth and Anderson, 71, in Guroian, 150.

<sup>34</sup> John Breck, “Downs Syndrome at Pascha,” in God with Us: Critical Issues in Christian Life and Faith (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003) 65–67.

<sup>35</sup> A Pocket Prayer Book for Orthodox Christians, (Englewood, NJ: Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese, 1956) 88.

<sup>36</sup> Kathleen Deyer Bolduc, His Name is Joel: Searching for God in a Son’s Disability, (Louisville, KY: Bridge Resources, 1999)

<sup>37</sup> Robert A. Naseef, Ph.D., Special Children, Challenged Parents: The Struggles and Rewards of Raising a Child with Disabilities (Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Company, 2001)

<sup>38</sup> Fr. John Chryssavgis, The Body of Christ: A Place of Welcome for People with Disabilities (Minneapolis, MN: Light and Life Publishing Company, 2002)

<sup>39</sup> Fr. Stephen Plumlee, “The Handicapped and Orthodox Worship,” in Resource Handbook for Lay Ministries Parish Development—Volume I, 1986

<<http://www.oca.org/RHPrint.asp?ID=65>>.

<sup>40</sup> Sister Magdalen, Children in the Church Today: An Orthodox Perspective (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1999) 9..

<sup>41</sup> The Self-ruled Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America <<http://www.antiochian.org>>.

<sup>42</sup> Resource Handbook for Lay Ministries—Family Life, in <<http://www.oca.org/RHSection.asp?SID=15&Section=FamilyLife>>.

<sup>43</sup> Kathleen Deyer Bolduc, A Place Called Acceptance: Ministries with Families of Children with Disabilities (Louisville, KY: Bridge Resources, 2001) 9–12.

<sup>44</sup> The Arc <<http://www.thearc.org>>.

<sup>45</sup> James J. Messina, Ph.D., “Tools for Parents of Children with Disabilities and Special Needs” in Tools for Coping with Life's Stressors <<http://www.coping.org/specialneeds/coping.htm>>.

<sup>46</sup> The Challenge Liturgy Program <<http://www.goarch.org/en/resources/conferences/clergy/laity/2004/pdf/20040726ParishMinistries.pdf>>.

<sup>47</sup> Anthony Coniaris, Making God Real in the Orthodox Christian Home (Minneapolis, MN: Light and Life Publishing, 1977)

<sup>48</sup> Jan Johnson, “Caring for Special Kids,” in <<http://www.forministry.com/Article.asp?Record=2966>>.

<sup>49</sup> Lisa Krenz, “Adapting Curriculum and Instruction for Students with Special Learning Needs, in Lutheran Special Education Ministry <<http://www.luthsped.org>>.

<sup>50</sup> Carol Buleza, “From the Directors Desk,” The Word April 2006: 18.

<sup>51</sup> Thomas Armstrong, Ph.D., 7 Kinds of Smart: Identifying and Developing Your Multiple Intelligences, Revised and Updated with Information on 2 New Kinds of Smart (New York, NY: A Plume Book, 1999)

<sup>52</sup> Barbara Bruce, 7 Ways of Teaching the Bible to Children (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 1996)

<sup>53</sup> Bernadette T. Stankard, How Each Child Learns: Using Multiple Intelligences in Faith Formation (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2003)

<sup>54</sup> Bernadette T. Stankard, Multiple Intelligences: Who I Am is How I Pray (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2005)

<sup>55</sup> Learning Disability Resource Community <<http://www.ldrc.ca>>.

<sup>56</sup> 2006 Special Olympics Camp <<http://www.teensoyo.org>>.

<sup>57</sup> Father Michael Matsko, “Ministering to Residents of an Adult Foster Care Home,” in Resource Handbook for Lay Ministries—Community Service <<http://www.oca.org.RHPrint.asp?ID=110>>.

<sup>58</sup> “Meet our Guests” & “EOF Services” in Eastern Orthodox Foundation <<http://www.eofoundation.org>>.

<sup>59</sup> Jean Vanier, Becoming Human (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1998)

<sup>60</sup> William C. Gaventa, MDiv. & David L. Coulter, MD, eds., The Theological Voice of Wolf Wolfensberger (Binghamton, NY: The Haworth Press, 2001) 12.

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