

Beatitudes for People with Special Needs*

BLESSED ARE YOU who take time to listen to difficult speech, for you help us to know that if we persevere we can be understood.

BLESSED ARE YOU who walk with us in public places, and ignore the stares of strangers, for in your friendship we feel good to be ourselves.

BLESSED ARE YOU who never bid us to “hurry up” and, more blessed, you who do not snatch our tasks from our hands to do them for us, for often we need time rather than help.

BLESSED ARE YOU who stand beside us as we enter new and untried ventures, for our unsuredness will be outweighed by the times when we surprise ourselves and you.

BLESSED ARE YOU who ask for our help and realize our giftedness for our greatest need is to be needed.

BLESSED ARE YOU who help us with the graciousness of Christ, for often we need the help we cannot ask for.

BLESSED ARE YOU when, by all things, you assure us that what makes us individuals is not our particular disability or difficulty but our beautiful God-given personhood which no handicapping condition can confine.

REJOICE AND BE EXCEEDINGLY GLAD for your understanding and love have opened doors for us to enjoy life to its full and you have helped us believe in ourselves as valued and gifted people.

The version presented here has been used by Catholic Charities Disability Services & Ministries, Diocese of Cleveland for over 30 years.

*Andre Masse, C.S.E. NAMR Quarterly, 1968. The wording is different, but Masse's is the earliest version found.

The Anyway Prayer

People are often unreasonable, illogical,
and self- centered;
Forgive them anyway.

If you are kind, people may accuse you
of selfish, ulterior motives;
Be kind anyway,

If you are successful, you will win some
false friends and some true enemies;
Succeed anyway.

If you are honest and frank,
people may cheat you;
Be honest and frank anyway,

What you spend years building,
someone could destroy overnight;
Build anyway.

If you find serenity and happiness,
they may be jealous;
Be happy anyway.

The good you do today,
people will often forget tomorrow;
Do good anyway.

Give the work the best you have,
and it may never be enough;
Give the world the best you've got anyway.

You see, in the final analysis,
it is between you and God;
it was never between you and them anyway.

The 10 Commandments of Creating Community

or How to Get Out of the System and Into Your Community

by Kathie Snow

See yourself as—and become—a “regular” (not “special”) person or family.

Expect inclusion. First and foremost, inclusion is a state of mind. See yourself or your family members as citizens of your community who belong!

Develop and nurture relationships with people in natural environments and typical activities: community activities, church, school, leisure, etc.

Use natural supports and generic services instead of services and programs from the system (like soccer, ballet, swimming, etc. in place of formal therapy).

What would we do if there was no system? Would we really go without or would we find what we need in our communities?

Ask for others’ help, and then give back to others—however you can—in return. Community is all about reciprocity!

Be specific about what you want and need from the community, but also be flexible.

Be patient with others and with yourself as we all try new ways of doing things. If your first effort fails, learn from the experience and try again.

Experience the “dignity of risk.” Be willing to try things you’ve never done before!

Be proactive, not reactive, when dealing with others. Think “win/win” not “win/lose.” Negotiate and compromise.

Act as if—no matter what—you cannot fail! See yourself as successful. Attitude is everything!

Welcome to Holland

by Emily Perl Kingsley

I am often asked to describe the experience of raising a child with a disability – to try to help people who have not shared that unique experience to understand it, to imagine how it would feel. It's like this.....

When you're going to have a baby, it's like planning a fabulous vacation trip – to Italy. You buy a bunch of guide books and make your wonderful plans. The Coliseum. The Michelangelo David. The gondolas in Venice. You may learn some handy phrases in Italian. It's all very exciting.

After months of eager anticipation, the day finally arrives. You pack your bags and off you go. Several hours later, the plane lands. The stewardess comes in and says, "Welcome to Holland."

"Holland?!?" you say. "What do you mean Holland?? I signed up for Italy! I'm supposed to be in Italy. All my life I've dreamed of going to Italy."

But there's been a change in the flight plan. They've landed in Holland and there you must stay.

The important thing is that they haven't taken you to a horrible, disgusting, filthy place, full of pestilence, famine and disease. It's just a different place.

So you must go out and buy new guide books. And you must learn a whole new language. And you will meet a whole new group of people you would never have met.

It's just a different place. It's slower-paced than Italy, less flashy than Italy. But after you've been there for a while and you catch your breath, you look around.... and you begin to notice that Holland has windmills....and Holland has tulips. Holland even has Rembrandts.

But everyone you know is busy coming and going from Italy... and they're all bragging about what a wonderful time they had there. And for the rest of your life, you will say "Yes, that's where I was supposed to go. That's what I had planned."

And the pain of that will never, ever, ever, ever go away... because the loss of that dream is a very very significant loss.

But... if you spend your life mourning the fact that you didn't get to Italy, you may never be free to enjoy the very special, the very lovely things ... about Holland.

Some Mothers Get Babies With Something More

by Lori Borgman

My friend is expecting her first child. People keep asking what she wants. She smiles demurely, shakes her head and gives the answer mothers have given throughout the pages of time. She says it doesn't matter whether it's a boy or a girl. She just wants it to have ten fingers and ten toes.

Of course, that's what she says. That's what mothers have always said.

Mothers lie.

Truth be told, every mother wants a whole lot more. Every mother wants a perfectly healthy baby with a round head, rosebud lips, button nose, beautiful eyes, satin skin and straight feet. Every mother wants a baby so gorgeous that people will pity the Gerber baby for being flat-out ugly.

Every mother wants a baby that will roll over, sit up and take those first steps right on schedule (according to the baby development chart on page 57, column two). Every mother wants a baby that can see, hear, run, jump and fire neurons by the billions. She wants a kid that can smack the ball out of the park and do toe points that are the envy of the entire ballet class.

Call it greed if you want, but we mothers want what we want.

Some mothers get babies with something more.

Some mothers get babies with conditions they can't pronounce, a spine that didn't fuse, a missing chromosome, a palette that didn't close or a tiny crooked foot or two. Most of those mothers can remember the time, the place, the shoes they were wearing and the color of the walls in the small, suffocating room where the doctor uttered the words that took their breath away. It felt like recess in the fourth grade when you didn't see the kick ball coming and it knocked the wind clean out of you.

Some mothers leave the hospital with a healthy bundle, then, months, even years later, take him in for a routine visit, or schedule her for a well check, and crash head first into a brick wall as they bear the brunt of devastating news. It can't be possible! That doesn't run in our family. Can this really be happening in our lifetime?

I am a woman who watches the Olympics for the sheer thrill of seeing finely sculpted bodies. It's not a lust thing; it's a wondrous thing. The athletes appear as specimens without flaw – rippling muscles with nary an ounce of flab or fat, virtual powerhouses of strength with lungs and limbs working in perfect harmony. Then the athlete walks over to a tote bag, rustles through the contents and pulls out an inhaler.

As I've told my own kids, be it on the way to physical therapy after a third knee surgery, or on a trip home from an echo cardiogram, there's no such thing as a perfect body. Every body will bear something at some time or another. Maybe the affliction will be apparent to curious eyes, or maybe it will be unseen, quietly treated with trips to the doctor, medication or surgery. The health problems our children have experienced have been minimal and manageable, so I watch with keen interest and great admiration the mothers of children with serious disabilities, and wonder how they do it.

Frankly, sometimes you mothers scare me. How you lift that child in and out of a wheelchair 20 times a day. How you monitor tests, track medications, regulate diet and serve as the gatekeeper to a hundred specialists yammering in your ear. I wonder how you endure the clichés and the platitudes, well-intentioned souls explaining how God is at work when you've occasionally questioned if God is on strike. I even wonder how you endure schmaltzy pieces like this one — saluting you, painting you as hero and saint, when you know you're ordinary. You snap, you bark, you bite. You didn't volunteer for this, you didn't jump up and down in the motherhood line yelling, "Choose me, God. Choose me! I've got what it takes." You're a woman who doesn't have time to step back and put things in perspective, so, please, let me do it for you.

From where I sit, you're way ahead of the pack. You've developed the strength of a draft horse while holding onto the delicacy of a daffodil. You have a heart that melts like chocolate in a glove box in July, carefully counter-balanced against the stubbornness of an Ozark mule. You can be warm and tender one minute, and when circumstances require, intense and aggressive the next. You are the mother, advocate and protector of a child. You're a neighbor, a friend, a stranger I pass at the mall. You're the woman I sit next to at church, my cousin and my sister-in-law.

You're a woman who wanted ten fingers and ten toes, and got something more.

You're a wonder.