



Special Needs Child **PARENT PAGE**

Parents have the unique responsibility for the education of their children; they are the first educators or catechists. They teach by their witness of the faith, through their values and attitudes, by their Christian example of love for Christ and his church. When children are baptized, parents accept the responsibility to raise their children in the practice of the faith...(National Directory for Catechesis 234-235)

Dear Parents,

In a special document entitled *Letter to Families*, Pope John Paul II wrote: "Parents are the first and most important educators of their own children, and they also possess a fundamental competence in this area; they are educators because they are parents"(16). You are the first and best role model for your child in these growing years. Your role as parent to love, teach, and lead your child to Jesus is a remarkable and noble vocation.

Children with special needs, like all children, are a mixture of joy and tears. As parents, prepared or not, we rise to the occasion of being not only our child's parent, but friend and teacher. At times we might have felt insecure and lacked confidence in ourselves to adequately meet our child's physical, educational, psychological and spiritual needs. But, obviously God has more faith in us as parents than we have in ourselves. With his grace, we are able to rise to the occasions. We are people of vision and the strongest advocates our children will ever know. Our faith is the cornerstone of our lives as parents. It is certainly by example that our children learn to love God and enter a life-long relationship with God.

As parents, you are the strongest symbol of Catholic faith to your child. No one loves your child more than you do, no one wants to see your child reach his/her full potential more than you do, and no one can offer your child the faith better than you. This is where the faith begins for all of us, so it must be no different for the child with a disability. We know that we teach with our lives. We bring God's love alive through our care and affection. We teach with hugs, blessings and prayers, with the symbols of the faith displayed in our homes. When we appreciate our children and shower them with praise, they experience God's love. As their parents, you are the human example of the love our heavenly Father has for them, and they need to experience God's love every day of their lives. Remember, the way you present the teachings of the faith to your child will be critical to how they will respond to Jesus' invitation to know Him and to love Him.

Children with special needs, like all children should know:

- ✠ That there is a God who loves them
- ✠ That God is our Creator and loving Father who is always there for them
- ✠ That God always listens to them, even when it seems as though family members or teachers don't hear them
- ✠ That God speaks to them through their parents and through the Church

Our diocese provides many resources and materials that will help you better understand the faith and work with your child at home. The Department for Persons with Disabilities (412-456-3119, e-mail mrggurich@diopitt.org) is available to help with any resources, questions or concerns you might have regarding your child's catechetical experiences. Other resources such as the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, an adaptation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* can be obtained through the Department for Educational Media at (412) 456-3120 or by e-mailing jhirst@diopitt.org.