

Ministry for Physical and Mental Disabilities

Every Life Has Dignity

From USCCB: *“Every person is created in the image and likeness of God and has an inherent dignity. Each member of the Body of Christ is unique, and therefore, families and parish communities are as well. We all have gifts and challenges, come in different shapes and sizes, and have varying needs. It is through this realization we come into community, centered on Christ, to accompany each other on our pilgrim journey”.*

This ministry is intended to support individuals and families with special needs or limitations with respect to the quality of their Mass experience or other parish involvement. These limitations might involve physical, for example, wheelchair bound or hearing or vision impairment, or all types of learning or cognitive intellectual disabilities including sensory processing disorder, autism, Down Syndrome, etc. Share your specific needs with our team or your suggestions for family support that you would like to be considered by this ministry.

The initial focus for this ministry has been special needs children and their families. Our working team of parents and professionals is referred to as the “Kindred Kids” team – kids who are allied, connected, affiliated, sharing similar and special needs. We have implemented a Calming Room for use during weekend Mass times. However, since the pandemic and cleaning protocols, this room is currently NOT available.

We had just begun to expand our parish-wide child care to include special needs children when the pandemic changed the plans. Child care that accommodates special needs children is one of the limiting factors for parents and families to become fully engaged in the many adult faith formation and community events made available to all parishioners. This priority will return once the restrictions associated with the pandemic allow for it.

We have a plan for a “Mass of Welcoming and Inclusion for all Abilities”. Watch in periodic bulletins for what this will include and how you may be able to benefit or to help make it a success once conditions allow this to be scheduled sometime in 2021.

Please scroll down to read inspiring stories experienced by some of our St. John Neumann families.

Continue to watch this space for status and upcoming opportunities. If you have questions or feedback please send your comments or questions to Al Brehl at allynbrehl@gmail.com or call Al at 614-570-4884.

Every Life Has Dignity

Every life has dignity by the very fact that by choosing to unite sperm and egg with a soul (the glue that binds the two into one flesh) God has chosen that life for a particular and unique purpose that only that unique human life can achieve. God sees all and knows how each part of the puzzle will fit together even when we crushed humans cannot see how a particular tragedy can possibly be part of His plan for us. It is essential to cling to the Lord and all he has taught us during these deepest darkest nights of the soul.

My family and I recently came through one such pitch black set of months. Our thirteen year old son Alex, who is afflicted with non-verbal autism, suddenly became much more violently and relentlessly aggressive than we have ever seen him before. He went through several medications and hospitalizations. We had to have police in our home on multiple occasions. During this time, as we begged and pleaded for help, we were placed on waiting lists and more than one medical professional told us this was routine when autistic boys enter puberty and we were advised to give up custody and place him in a group home. My husband and I questioned why the Lord had created Alex for this...to become so violent that he could kill someone. Why could I not teach my son? Why were we being forced to wait for help exhausted, burnt out and starting to become aggressive ourselves? Why Lord do we exist for this? When will you come back for us? Will we have faith left when you come? Please Lord only you, the giver of the gift of faith can make it so; please give and protect the gift of faith that we need; we are nothing apart from you.

We were given a provider in our home only after a humiliating series of police visits to our home and trips to emergency rooms. That first provider is a real gem. It quickly became clear to me that God wanted to bring this particular provider in the home to bless us and for us to bless him. The violence continued and it was still difficult, but I could see God's work at hand. Then God brought another provider in the home to challenge us spiritually and she clearly needed us as much as we needed her.

Life is not easy, but it is clear that God has used Alex and our situation to bring healing and wholeness to people He has brought into our path. It is also clear that He is ever teaching us to deepen and expand our faith and trust in Him. So that with the psalmist we might say, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil for your rod and your staff shall give me comfort."

The sheep in the pitch darkness, like us in the darkness of our situation, can't see where they are supposed to go because the darkness is too blinding. In fear they bleat for the Shepard to protect them from lurking predation, deep crags that may send them plunging to imminent death and thorns that might ensnare them. In relief they walk only when they feel the rod and the staff of The Shepard who alone knows the path to safety.



- Submitted by Kathy Falter

'Each child ... an addition of more love'

Stories by MaryBeth Eberhard

We didn't expect for it to end up this way. Twenty-two years, eight children and a life lived so deeply that the everyday beauty and suffering of it is at times both blinding and brilliant.

My husband and I met as college sweethearts. I knew from the moment we met that this was the man God had saved for me to love and be loved by. We planned on two children, maybe three. We moved back home after the birth of our first son. Our second arrived two years later, and then our third was on the way about 18 months after that.

Everything about that third pregnancy felt different. We were sure the baby was a girl, and, not having any concerns previously, there was no need for extra scans. I went into labor four weeks early, and no one was concerned. The doctor said, "Come on in. It's a great day to have a baby!" We knew the baby was breech, so we were prepared for another C-section.

The moment the delivery room changed, I knew something was wrong. I could feel it. "Boy or girl?" I kept asking. My husband sunk to the floor, and a nurse put a wet towel across his forehead. I remember laughing, thinking two births and now this is going to make you squeamish?

"I'm sorry. I'm so very sorry" were the first words spoken to me by the doctor. We were told our baby was paralyzed. His legs twisted behind his neck and his spine folded where his ear was touching his hip. He had no movement. Teams of doctors and nurses rushed in. He needed to be transported. Before they left, I remember asking one more time, "Boy or girl?" We gave birth to a son.

Our son was born with a rare neuromuscular condition, arthrogryposis,



Eberhard family members (from left) are Gabriel, Samuel, Paul, Ryan, Sarah, Joseph, Lily, MaryBeth, Elizabeth and Peter.
Photo courtesy Eberhard family

which causes contractures of the joints and atrophy of the muscles. Thirteen years later, and after 37 surgeries and procedures that have taken place in many places, we have just finished his last surgery. He now sits up straight in his power wheelchair, functioning as a typical 13-year-old young man who just needs help with some daily tasks.

When Gabriel was born, I remember worrying about my older boys, and a wise friend counseled me, "They will be better men for it." And indeed they are.

During those 13 years, the Lord blessed us with twin girls, one of whom is in heaven and one who sits by my side as I type this essay. Then came my Joseph, who was born right before we moved out of state for Gabriel's care.

I received a call from a friend just a couple of weeks after we had moved.

She said, "I know you have much going on right now, but a mutual friend is adopting a little boy from one of Mother Teresa's homes in Armenia, and there is an 8-year-old girl there who has arthrogryposis. Would you consider adopting her?"

In all humility, I just had a baby, moved, and was walking into another surgery. Adopting another child with special needs was not on my radar. I remember thinking, "What kind of friend are you?" But I promised I would take it to my husband and we would pray.

My husband immediately opened his heart and reminded me of our promise to the Lord that should another child like Gabriel come across our door, we would be open because we knew how to help. Two years later (and two more children later), Elizabeth joined our family.

Our last pregnancy was very high

risk, and we were able to move back to Columbus to give birth to our daughter. With my life, our baby's life and that of an adopted child who was due to come home in a couple of weeks on the line, to say we placed our life at the foot of the cross is no exaggeration.

My husband looked at me, and our eyes welled up with all the possibilities. Our doctor is a holy man whose eyes glistened with joy every time he lifted one of my babies into the air. We were in good hands.

My children do not treat one another any differently than they treat others. Occasionally I will even hear an incredulous "Just because Gabe and Liz have arthrogryposis doesn't mean they don't have to do the dishes."

We have raised our children with the notion that everyone has some type of disability; some you see, some you don't. We all have struggles. I pray that they all have eyes and hearts open to see life through this lens.

The "How do you do it" or "You must be a saint" comments no longer shake me. They make me smile. The reality is, having many children doesn't make me better than any other mother. Each child in our family always has been spoken of as an addition of more love. Love doesn't divide. Love multiplies exponentially.

I know that my marriage has been blessed by the love of these sons and daughters, but even more so, I know that their hearts have been formed closer to one another through this shared journey. Based on their everyday *fiats*, they are well on their way to becoming better humans.

MaryBeth Eberhard is a grateful wife and mother. She attends Sunbury St. John Neumann Church and lives in the country, where she home-schools her eight children.

Acts of kindness help parents keep pro-life promise

It's early, and I am up again moving my son's sore, tired body. This surgery is hard to heal from. The body takes time to recognize a new shape. Time truly does heal.

In the meantime, my husband and I wander back and forth like strangers in the night, rotating his body and trying to keep him comfortable. I remember telling him that this surgery was necessary and that I would walk through it with him. Even in the exhaustion, I need to honor my words. God always provides.

I have been reflecting a great deal on

God's provision lately – the Respect Life cause specifically. I see many examples of holy families who dedicate their lives to this crucial cause. Families pray outside abortion clinics, or fund a bus filled with the latest ultrasound equipment so a young mother can hear her baby's heartbeat. These acts of mercy are ever so important and necessary. However, in the spirit of St. Therese, I am all about the little ways we can live out being pro-life.

When Gabriel was born and I sat in the NICU rocking him night after night, I remember a 2 a.m. tap on the

shoulder as I rocked him to sleep. A dear friend had driven his motorcycle to the hospital and came to take a shift singing and rocking so I could get some much-needed sleep. His act of mercy, still in my heart, stands as a testament to his character.

Through the years, friends and strangers have mailed checks, helped pay for flights, cleaned our home, watched our children, dropped off a meal, provided care packages for the kids, mowed our grass and even put together Christmas for us while we were traveling home from the hospital

close to Christmas Eve.

All these tasks were done out of the goodness within their hearts. They thought of my family and came and did a small good deed. That good deed sent ripples through the hearts of my children. They now seek to go and do the same: "Momma, can we just stop by? Momma, could we grab a gift card for them? Momma, I'm just going to go help; she looked tired after Mass."

The support for a family who faces