

PRAY Life-giving God, thank you for the beauty and diversity of Earth, our home. Help us work to become one human family, one community that cares for all that you give us. Amen.

SPiRiT

By Jennifer Rooney and Joan Mitchell, CSJ

It's 6:45 a.m. High school students pour into a big, lecture room for a film and presentation on teaching autistic children. Nearly 200 students arrive before seven. They come because they want to go to prom—the Starry Night Prom for people with disabilities.

To do any of the jobs at the prom, students must attend six to ten mornings and lunch time training sessions.

“Autism is a spectrum disorder,” says the speaker. “Some kids will never learn to speak or be toilet trained; others learn, go to school, and get jobs. But they can't learn through words and have to learn to imitate through rewards and consequences. A teacher can never be sure an autistic child is getting it. One child's parents were delighted when their child stopped and pointed at something he wanted rather than grabbing it; he'd learned that.

“With disabilities, if all else fails, smile,” the speaker concludes. “That says I care about you.”



Addie Cox, Annette Betting-Fuentes, and Lizzy Anderson talk to *SPiRiT* about Starry Night Prom.

The prom itself runs like clockwork because Peg Hodapp organizes every detail. Ms. Hodapp is a vice president for mission at this Lasallian school and the prom is her idea. It stresses school values—faith, service, community.

“Most of us are involved in Lasallian Ministry,” explains Annette Betting-Fuentes. “Starry Night comes out of this group.”

Starry Night started out as a dinner for 70. For the 15th event, over 1,300 guests filled two gyms and school hallways.

Ninth grade students wear black skirts or pants and white tops. They do food service. Tables for food and beverages line the far wall. An orchestra of 25 student musicians plays in the gym filled with chairs and tables. In the upper grades girls wear their prom dresses, boys their suits or tuxes.



DRESSING and DANCING





Senior boys run parking and flag cars up the driveway to the school door. SUVs and pick-ups roll up full of families accompanying a differently-abled family member. Some require wheelchairs and go to the south entrance. Small buses from group homes arrive with men and women, youth and adults, stepping out in formals and suits.



Annette welcomes each guest. She prefers this prom to her own. More students in prom dress escort the guests to check in, receive corsages and boutonnieres, and find the two gyms—one for food, one for dancing.



Annette and her dad often helped her older sister with clean up after Starry Night. “I got pre-involved,” says Annette. “When I started school at DeLaSalle, it wasn’t a question of if I would participate but now it is my turn. People from every different social group get involved. We work as a team. Most people do Starry Night all four years and look forward to seeing our guests.”



“It’s not just building relationships with our classmates,” says Addie. “We see people we remember from the year before. It’s guaranteed your second year someone will remember you.”

“And will want to dance with you,” adds Annette.

“Sometimes it’s hard to do our jobs for both girl and boy students because our guests want us to dance with them,” says Addie, who usually helps people take photos.



Lizzy likes escorting guests. “We meet them at the front door, welcome them, and develop a relationship. Then we escort them to the gym. The band has been coming the past three years. The guests love them. They play great songs.”

“Starry Night is great because it’s an annual thing,” explains

Addie. “Everyone is so invested. We start planning in September. It’s not just students but staff, and the caregivers and guests start calling.”

Who can come? “Anyone from 8 to 80 with any disability is welcome,” says Lizzy. “And their families.”

“They have a broad spectrum of disabilities,” says Ms. Hodapp.

“By the end of senior year we know so much about different types of disabilities,” says Addie, referring to the early morning training sessions.

“Why are people often hateful toward people with disabilities?” asks Lizzy. “Obviously they don’t understand. By the end of four years, I think, ‘Why was I so ignorant about this four years ago.’”

The early morning sessions train volunteers to stop and think before they make a judgment. “Some people have narrow-minded attitudes about disabilities,” says Lizzy. “A film we saw was eye opening.”

“People are not defined by the disabilities,” says Annette. “The prom is a night to be together and celebrate life.”

All three like Starry Night better than their own prom. “It’s a drama free night,” explains Addie. Her favorite part of the evening is the Grand March. “Many guests call us up to walk through the arch as their date. Everyone is so excited.”

“Last year two of us became friends with a guy as we waited to go through the Grand March,” remembers Annette. “He kept coming back and asking us to dance.”

“I sat with a guy who was sitting in the hallway on a bench. He was sad because his girlfriend didn’t come. We talked and got to know each other. I saw less and less of his disability and more and more

SUNDAY GOSPEL

8th Sunday in Ordinary Time

A good tree produces good fruit.

NARRATOR: Jesus told his disciples a parable.

JESUS 1: Can one blind person show another blind person the way? Won't they both fall in a ditch? Students are not above their teacher. When they complete their studies, they are equal to their teacher.

JESUS 2: Why do you see a splinter in your neighbor's eye but not notice

the girder in your own? How can you say to your neighbor, "Let me take the splinter out of your eye," when you yourself do not see the girder in your own? Hypocrite, first take the girder out of your own eye; then you will see clearly to take the splinter out of your neighbor's eye.

JESUS 3: For a good tree does not produce decayed fruit, nor a decayed

tree produce good fruit. A tree is known by its fruit. They do not collect figs from thornbushes, nor pick grapes from brambles. A good person brings forth goodness from the good in his or her heart. An evil person brings forth evil from his or her heart. The mouth speaks out of the abundance of the heart.

Luke 6.39-45

of him as a wholehearted, awesome person," says Lizzy.

The doors open at five, the Grand March at six. The dance goes on all evening. Guests come from school special education programs, Special Olympic teams, and more than 30 group homes. Some are individuals living on their own with a disability. "Our only problem is wishing we could let more people come," says Annette.

For Lizzy, "The whole Starry Night Prom characterizes our school. It's an accepting community."

What does one couple who come each year like? "The dancing and the dressing."



QUESTIONS 1 What would you appreciate about volunteering to help with the Starry Night? 2 How do differently-abled students fit in your school? 3 How does Starry Night build relationships and understanding? 4 How does Starry Night contribute to the spirit of the high school? 5 Why is it easier to see someone else's faults rather than our own? 6 On what basis does Jesus judge who is a good person? On what basis do you judge others?

Responses

by Mark Wong (After "Sure You Can Ask Me a Personal Question" by Diane Burns)

I'm fine. How are you? No, I am not a refugee. No, I am not an illegal immigrant. No, not Japanese. No, not Korean. No, definitely not Chinapino. No, none of that, I am Chinese. Yeah, you were pretty close. I was not born in China. I was born in Hong Kong. It used to be a colony of England. No, I am not trying to take over your country. No, I am not a communist. No, I do not own a dry cleaners. No, I do not own a restaurant. You like Chinese food? Well, good for you. You had Chinese last night. What a coincidence, so did I. No, it is not as fattening as people say. Do you see a lot of fat Chinese people? Well, don't believe everything you hear. Yes, I do use chopsticks. No, I do not have a pet panda. Yes, I do speak Chinese. Yes, I do speak it at home. You want me to say something? You want to know what it means? It means, leave me alone.

The Church is a communion of saints.

Every time we pray the Apostles' Creed, we profess that we believe in the communion of saints, an invisible community of love and friendship that extends beyond death. The communion of saints is the body of believers whose faith we begin to share when we are baptized.

The word communion has the word union as its main root. The suffix comm adds the idea of with.

Among Christians all baptized people living in union with the Church and working to keep the commandments are saints. For example, Paul addresses his letter to the Corinthians to the "church of God that is in Corinth and to all the saints throughout Achaia." In the communion of saints Christians are one with all the believers of all time.

The saints share one faith. Before we share a sign of peace at Eucharist, the celebrating priest asks Jesus "Look not on our sins but on the faith of your church." At Eucharist all share one loaf and one cup, one Body and Blood of Christ.

The saints share their gifts for the common good. Paul compares the Christian community with the human body to help the saints in Corinth see that their gifts can work together.

Just as the body is one and has many members, but all the members, though they are many are one, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jew or Greek, slaves or free. All of us have been given to drink of one Spirit .

1 Corinthians 12.12-13

The word church means the assembly, the people that God gathers in the whole world and who believe Jesus is the Christ. Church, then, refers to the whole universal church in union with the pope and to local parish

communities of faith in union with their bishops. It refers especially to the people of God assembled to celebrate the sacrifice of the Mass.

In every Eucharistic Prayer after the consecration, we pray for the whole church. We pray for all who have come together to share in the Body and Blood of Christ, for the whole church and its leaders. These believers form the Church of the living.

We also pray for our "brothers and sisters who have gone to their rest in the hope of rising again." We ask mercy for them. We ask to share their inheritance with Mary and the saints who are with God. In fact, we pray in union with them and with Jesus Christ. It is the whole communion of saints that celebrate Eucharist.

The Feasts of All Saints and All Souls (November 1, 2) celebrate our communion with all who have died in faith. When loved ones die, we experience deeply our inseparableness from them. We remember and pray for them at every Eucharist and on these special days. These believers form the church in purgatory being purified and the church in glory sharing life with God. Together we form one Church.

We are born into the communion of saints at baptism the way we are born into a family at birth. The Church exists today because down the centuries people have believed Jesus' message, have found God present in creation, have felt in themselves stirrings of the Spirit for justice and lasting community. As Christians, we share the faith of the saints of the past. Often we, the living, find mentors among the people in earlier generations whose Christian lives help us live our own.

The word "Church" designates the assembly of those whom God's word gathers together to form the people of God. And with themselves, nourished with the body of Christ, become the body of Christ.

Catechism of the Catholic Church #???

LIVE IT!

- 1 Invite to class or visit some of the oldest people in your parish. Ask these elders to tell you about the history of the parish, especially about some of the holy people who made a crucial difference in your community.
- 2 Compare your parish community to the human body. Who is the head? Who thinks, speaks, and leads others in your parish and school community? Who are the hands in your parish or high school? Who reaches out to others? Who are the eyes with vision? Who imagines new solutions to problems? Who are the feet? Who makes things happen?
- 3 Who among the living or dead is a mentor to you?
- 4 Research your patron saint. What does he or she stand for? Pray at Mass for your loved ones who have died. Visit cemeteries.

