



Advent Week 4: Praying for People Who Feel Isolated

By Sister Christine Kavanagh

Contemplation

I have been privileged to minister with people with developmental disabilities for 45 years at [ReFocus, Inc.](#) I would like to share with you a story of a young man we support who has developmental disabilities, is transgendered and is a fabulous advocate for himself and the disability community. His name is Andrew, and this is his story in his own words.



"Bullying," art by Andrew, a client at ReFocus, Inc.

5 years old: I know I am not like other girls. I just feel I'm very different, but I don't really understand why.

11-14 years old: My body is changing. They call it puberty. I hate my body. The kids at school bully me. They call me awful names because I have trouble learning.

20 years old: I meet people online. I run away from home. They take advantage of me. I feel so alone.

Early 20s: I'm so depressed; I don't want to live anymore. I don't know anyone else who feels like I do. I am cutting myself to help ease the pain. I attempt suicide. I take pills. I end up in the psych ward of the hospital. The doctors find me a therapist. For the first time, I tell someone what I'm feeling. She understands.

24 years old: I meet many people who are like me. What a relief it is to know that I am not the only one who feels like I do. I meet people who are gay, lesbian, transgendered. I start to talk to my Mom and Dad again.

Today I am 37 years old. I am proud to be Andrew. I live in Shared Living with Kate and Kelly. They are so accepting and encouraging to me. I have a great life. I have friends. I am a Special Olympian and play several sports. I am who God made me to be. I know that is true. That is what God wants for me.

Prayer

God of peace, teach us your ways this Advent season, that we may renounce whatever separates us from you and from our brothers and sisters. When I meet someone who is different from me and start to make judgements from my lack of knowledge and experience, help me to stop myself. May I be open, loving and accepting. May I come to understand their life, experiences, joys and struggles. May I love the diversity that you have created in us, the varying abilities/disabilities, the different gender identities and sexual orientations, and truly know the gift you have given us in making us all unique, interesting, creative and loving with all our differing abilities. God, teach us to walk in your path.

Call to Action

Find an organization like ReFocus near you that offers support for men and women who have varying abilities. Commit to supporting their work in time, treasure or talent at least one time in the new year. The Special Olympics helped to increase Andrew's confidence, so that may be a good place to connect.

Many men, women and children who are living with disabilities like Andrew and the organizations that support them require government funding and/or Medicaid to survive. These programs risk being cut significantly by the tax bill that was just passed in the United States. Call your senator and express support for these much needed services that benefit some of the most vulnerable of our society.