

ANALYSIS OF CHURCH SUPPORT RESOURCES

Document	Author(s)	Country of origin	Description of Autism	Group(s) addressed	Engagement areas covered
Chapter: "Including people with autism" Book: <i>Making Church Accessible to All: Including disabled people in church life</i> Published by The Bible Reading Fellowship, Abingdon, UK, 2013.	Ann Memmott (Tony Phelps-Jones book editor)	UK	Implicit in the approach of the book is the notion of autism as 'disability'. However, Ann Memmott's chapter refers (page 76) to autism as a "brain design difference".	Broadly aimed at adults with some additional content relating to children.	Primarily addresses areas of <i>social engagement</i> and related sensory issues (e.g. sensitivity to noise, lighting etc. – as distinct to openness to intense experiences, which I have termed <i>sensory engagement</i>). Some consideration of <i>cognitive engagement</i> in the context of need for structured information about church programmes of events (what's happening when) and also some input on 'visual thinking' as a common characteristic of autistic people (e.g. understanding sermons and other written material, including the church website).
Booklet: <i>Autism and Faith: A Journey into Community</i>	Mary Beth Walsh, Alice Walsh and Bill Gaventa, Editors	USA	Described (page 6) as:	In principle both adults and children, but most content is actually aimed at children and/or	Main focus is on <i>social engagement</i> with some content around <i>cognitive engagement</i> – mostly in the context either of needing

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Published by The Elizabeth M. Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities at UMDNJ – Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, Department of Paediatrics and Autism New Jersey, May 2008. Second printing, June 2011.			“spectrum disorder” “brain-based disorder”.	parents of autistic children.	structure around church activities or help with learning difficulties.
Booklet: <i>How to make your Church Autism-Friendly</i> Published by Hope’s Reason, Ontario, 2017.	Stephen J. Bedard	Canada	Described (page 2) as a “brain disorder”. Quotes (page 3) Lev 19:14 (English Standard Version) “You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the LORD” as basis for caring for people with autism.	Mainly children. Some content re ‘mildly’ autistic adults.	Works on the basis of helping the reader to understand and therefore empathise with autistic people. It provides practical hints and tips, rather than an overall structured approach. A majority of these ‘hints and tips’ are aimed at addressing issues related to <i>social</i> and <i>sensory engagement</i> . There is no mention of how to address <i>cognitive engagement</i> issues.
Workbook: <i>Autism and Your Church: Nurturing the Spiritual Growth of People with Autism Spectrum Disorder</i> Published by Friendship Ministries, Grand Rapids, Michigan, revised edition 2011.	Barbara J. Newman	USA	Uses predominantly (pages 21 & 22) the label “ASD” and follows the description set out in the DSM. Bases its (pages 15-19) ‘call for	Acknowledgement of both children and adults.	Provides 10 Strategies (pages 29-77) offering practical help. Strategies 4 (pages 49-52) & 10 (page 77) aimed at <i>social engagement</i> .

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			inclusion’ on the principles: • Being made in God’s image (Gen 1:27) • Being made for a purpose (Eph. 2:10) • Being made to belong (Rom 12:4-5) • Being ‘fearfully and wonderfully made’ (Ps 139:14).		Strategy 3 (pages 43-47) aimed at <i>sensory engagement</i>. Strategies 5-9 (pages 53-75) aimed at <i>cognitive engagement</i> issues – but in relation to helping people to understand the functioning of the church and ‘the meaning’ of the ‘texts of our tradition’. Includes a section on “Behavior Management” (pages 79-85), which can relate to a <i>social engagement</i> issue arising from either <i>sensory</i> or <i>cognitive</i> dissonance or overload.
Workbook: <i>Steps: Forming a Disability Ministry</i> Published by Pen It! Publications, USA, 2018.	Dr Linda Barboa Shelli Allen	USA	Use of ‘people-first’ language (‘person with autism’ – page 10) rather than the UK-preferred ‘autistic child’. Autism described briefly in line with DSM as a ‘disorder’ (pages 10 & 75) and also listed	Broadly general, but specifics seem mostly to reference children.	Main focus (pages 35-50 & 54-68) is on how to set up a ministry team to lead on Disability Ministry. Classroom Design and Intake Information forms recognise the need to address <i>social, sensory</i> and <i>cognitive engagement</i> issues.

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			(page 75) under the heading 'Common Disabilities'. Additional, more detailed, description (page 102) with reference to 'processing sensory signals'. Biblical basis of inclusion uses (pages 9 & 10 – King James Version) – Ps 139:13 ("You knit me together in my mother's womb") – plus 'made in God's image (Gen 1:27) and 'made for good works' (Eph. 2:10).		
Article: "Church in the Making: A Niche of Welcome" Published in <i>Christian Century</i> (April 2, 2014): 45.	Carol Howard Merritt	USA	None provided in the article – but the Open Gathering community described clearly	Mainly autistic children with 'visible' needs (with special needs generally, not just autism) – but also seeks to minister to	Description of church community called Open Gathering – addressing largely <i>social engagement</i> , access and inclusion.

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			has an educational component.	parents of autistic children (e.g. through provision of respite support).	
Article: “Review of ‘Autism and your church’” Published in <i>the Christian Education Journal</i> 4 no 1 (Spring 2007): 170-173.	Tim Stranske	USA	Some general description of visible autistic behaviours (child sitting alone, rocking, repeating phrases etc.). Supportive of Newman’s argument for inclusion based on ‘made in God’s image’ – as being an argument from principle, rather than proof-texts.	Children.	Mainly <i>social engagement</i>. Stranske suggests that Newman, in an effort to be understanding and inclusive about ‘autistic behaviour’, has not addressed the issue of sin. This seems to rest on the (highly disputable) assumption of substitutionary atonement as the basis of our relationship with God.
Article: “A Place for Everybody: A Church at the Intersection of Faith and Disability” Published in <i>Congregations</i> 38 no 3 & 4 (2011): 28-31.	Mark I. Pinsky	USA	Autism described as an ‘intellectual disability’.	Children – in particular 11-year-old Walter.	Recognition of <i>social engagement</i> issues. Some reference to <i>cognitive engagement</i> in relation to need for structure and engagement with the liturgy and practice of baptism and (later) confirmation.

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Website: “Autism and Christianity” url https://www.autismandchristianity.org)	Ann Memmott	UK	General description as a ‘brain design difference’ – and note that it is ‘not a mental health condition’. Highlights typical traits associated with autistic people (loyal, honest, careful, specialists etc.). Broad assertion that ‘I believe that everyone is created equal’.	General.	Briefly covers <i>social</i>, <i>sensory</i> and <i>cognitive engagement</i> issues. Comments on <i>cognitive</i> issues relate mainly to the need for certainty and structure in terms of ‘what is going on’. Personal notes refer to the importance of ‘what Jesus told us to do’ – emphasising the tendency to systematise and look for ‘rules’. Also notes, “I just chat to God. For me, he’s a friend. Or I chat to Jesus. I’ve never been entirely sure what the Holy Spirit is, but that doesn’t worry me too much”.
Article: “Autism, the Mass and Religious Education” Published in the <i>National Catholic Reporter</i> (October 16, 2009): 26.	Tom Gallagher	USA	“Autism is a complex developmental disability linked to neurological disorders in the brain. . . . Symptoms include repetitive behaviours and difficulty with	Autistic children.	Focus on preparing children to take part in sacraments such as the Eucharist. Addresses <i>cognitive engagement</i> issues in the context of children needing visual representations to help understand the required content.

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			communication and social interaction’.		
Article: “First Communion for Autistic Child?” Published in <i>The Catholic Answer</i> (March/April, 2009): 20–21.	Father Francis Hoffman	USA	Implies that autism is a ‘handicap’. Discusses the notion that ‘low-functioning autistic children . . . do not need the grace of the holy Eucharist because they are not responsible for the morality of their actions and therefore subjectively cannot sin’.	Children preparing for first Communion.	Addresses some points of <i>social engagement</i> (such as the need to belong, even if the formality of the Eucharist is not required on the basis of a lack of responsibility for sin). Addresses some <i>cognitive engagement</i> issues from the perspective of how to deal with learning difficulties.
Article: “Churches try to meet the needs of autistic kids” Published in the <i>National Catholic Reporter</i> (September 19, 2008): 19a.	Adelle M. Banks	USA	Gives little detail.	Children.	Describes The Haven as “a ministry for members with developmental disabilities such as autism, Asperger's syndrome or other conditions that may make sitting through a typical church service difficult or impossible”. Gives little detail of what this involves.

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Article: “Feeling the sacraments can be enough” Published in the <i>National Catholic Reporter</i> (May 22-June 4, 2015): 5a.	Amy-Morris Young	USA	Little detail but described as an ‘intellectual disability’.	Children – stretching to young adults.	Describes the process of developing an approach to Eucharist to include 26-year-old Nick. Focus is on <i>cognitive engagement</i> with the Eucharist liturgy.
Article: “Make room in the pew, and smile” Published in <i>US Catholic</i> (April 2009): 28.	Darcee Thomason	USA	None offered, but a description of some behaviours of a 6-year-old girl (Rachel) who is ‘severely autistic’.	Children.	General comments aimed at <i>social engagement</i> .
Article: “Raising Peter: What my son taught me about my faith” Published in <i>America</i> 212 no 6 (Feb 23, 2015): 27-29.	Mary Beth Werdel	USA	General description of Peter’s difficulties, deficits and challenges in development. Describes prayers for ‘normalcy’. (page 29)	Children – Peter, aged 4.	Relates to how Peter’s <i>sensory</i> issues (hearing the bells) were dealt with. Describes a shift in <i>social</i> and <i>cognitive engagement</i> from prayer for “normalcy” to prayer for “flourishing”.
Article: “My Asperger’s and my ministry: Why I dread pastoral visits” Published in <i>Christian Century</i> (May 13, 2015): 11-12.	Dennis Sanders	USA	Describes an adult (the author) with Asperger’s syndrome. General description, “Asperger’s is not	General audience.	Broad description of issues involved regarding particularly <i>social engagement</i> from the perspective of church leadership.

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			just a communication disorder; it's also a sensory disorder" (page 11).		
Web-based document: "Welcoming Autistic People in our Churches and Communities" Published by Diocese of Oxford on the web at url https://www.oxford.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Autism-Guidelines-2019.pdf	Ann Memmott	UK	Document clearly states up front that "Autism, which is sometimes called Asperger syndrome, is a brain wiring difference. It is present at birth and remains different for life. It is not a mental health condition". Provides a very rounded view of both the challenges faced by autistic people and the positive traits that they may offer.	Addresses both children and adults.	Provides a fairly comprehensive coverage of the aspects of church life from the perspectives of <i>social</i> , <i>sensory</i> and <i>cognitive engagement</i> . The <i>cognitive engagement</i> aspects relate to the need for order and clear instructions in church life and services, and also to the likely difficulties involved in accessing/understanding some aspects of 'the faith' as presented. There is no suggestion that an autistic person 'thinking differently' may imply a different theological perspective.
UK Programme launch event: Champions Club	Craig Johnson	USA	Based on 'launch seminar' only – impression is that autism is seen as an 'affliction', so capable of being	Programme initially targeted at children with special needs – but the Champions Club model can be extended to Teens	Difficult to assess in detail without reviewing the curriculum, but launch event touched on <i>sensory</i> , <i>social</i> and <i>cognitive engagement</i> issues –

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Programme created by Lakewood Church, Houston, Texas and currently being launched in the UK. Summary following attendance at a publicity event, rather than a review of literature.			healed – but also to be accepted as God’s grace meant to demonstrate His glory (as in ‘thorn in the flesh’ in 2 Cor 12:7 and also the words of Jesus about the blind man in John 9:1-3).	with special needs and also to Adults with special needs.	although the suggestion seemed to be that this is in the context that the <i>cognitive</i> aspect was about how to assist people with learning difficulties to access a ‘given’ faith/tradition, rather than suggesting that the ‘autistic cognition’ called for or allowed a different ‘take’.