



**Manual for
Volunteers in
Religious Education**

Chaplaincy Department
Lufkin State School
Lufkin, Texas

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Welcome to the Religious Education Program of Lufkin State School...

...and congratulations on stepping into a new experience and into a circle of warm and loving friends. These friends may seem different from your usual group of friends, but as you come to know them the differences fade away. The purpose of religious education is to call forth the unique person that is created of God in each human being and to help this person grow in the community of faith. To be part of this process is a treasured privilege. The minds of mentally retarded persons follow the same course of development as ours, but the process is slower and some will not progress far. But watching their personalities emerge and each taking the next step in growth can be a source of excitement to you as a teacher.

Another reward of this new experience is to learn that helping is never a one-way street. You come wanting to give so much. As you do, you soon will become aware that you are receiving as much as you are giving. One well-known mother of a retarded child said, "The presence of Rosemary in our family was a constant illumination." Another famous mother and author has said that she learned from her child respect for every human mind, that all people are equal in their humanity and all have the same human rights. She learned that the mind is not all of the human creature; there is the whole person, and mentally retarded persons often compensate by other qualities such as goodness.

You will also learn from them:

humility: they use fully what they have;

patience: they know how to keep trying;

honesty: why do we hide so much of what we are?

compassion: they care about each other.

Teaching Skills

- Study the purpose of your unit.
- Skim the unit.
- Sketch in outline as below.
- Your group coordinator will talk with the coordinator about plans and resources.
- Teachers and group coordinator will meet to plan unit sessions.

Purpose	Bible Verse	Conversation and Stories	Objects, Films Pictures (Visuals)	Music	Expression/ Doing (Activity)
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Sample Sessions for Large Dormitory Classes

For Mildly and Moderately Mentally Retarded

Informal Time

Conversation, sharing events, birthdays, get-wells, etc.

Individual attention to special needs

Together Time

Music: game songs, chapel songs, rhythm instruments

Song emphasizing theme of unit

Conversation recalling preceding session

Introduce new concept (verbally, visually, other)

Bible Verse

Prayer

Activity Time

Large group activity or divide into two or three groups for two or three activities or experiences

Closing Circle

Repeat theme song

Repeat Bible verse

Closing song

For Low Moderately and High Severely Mentally Retarded

Informal Time

Conversation, greeting each one

Together Time

Conversation with focus on awareness: date, day of week, weather, environment

Music: fun songs, action songs, rhythm instruments, birthday song, listening music, chapel songs

New song to reinforce unit

Thought for the session: brief story or one concept; repeat for four sessions with varying media: filmstrip, flat pictures, role play, puppets, artwork, etc.

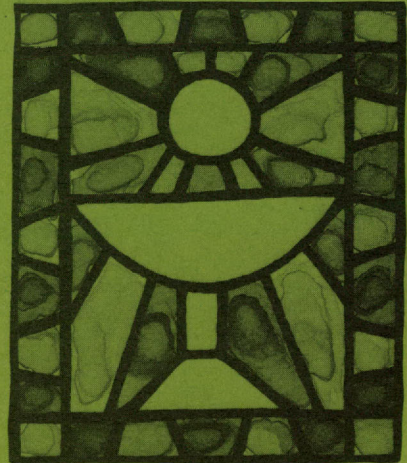
Closing

Teaching religion in a Texas state residential facility carries with it many considerations every volunteer must understand.

The rights of the Lufkin State School residents must be guarded:

- Attendance at religious activities must be voluntary for all who are capable of decision making.
- Lufkin State School must offer, if possible, worship and religious programs in accordance with the tradition, background and desires of the residents.

Therefore, the Chaplaincy Department is interdenominational and offers programs for Protestants, Jews and Catholics.



The mentally retarded persons with whom we share our faith may:

- Learn slowly and not as much as the average person.
- Develop slowly physically, lack coordination and have physical handicaps.
- Adjust with difficulty to life's demands and society's expectations.
- Learn many useful things at their level and with their limitations.

The American Association on Mental Deficiency's current definition of mental retardation is "significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period."

In Texas an individual is considered legally to be mentally retarded if the person's IQ is below 69 and level of adaptive behavior also is low.

Social or adaptive behavior, a classification of mental retardation, is most difficult to assess. It is the person's ability to cope with social needs and demands as they relate to self-help skills, to adapt to others, to work in some job capacity and to function with some independence in the community.

Reliable intelligence tests are given to determine the existence of mental retardation. An examination is given to learn the toxic, genetic, infectious, traumatic or other physiological causes of mental retardation. The adaptive behavior is examined also.

Above all, he or she is **not** an object of pity, an object of charity or an eternal child, but a person with dignity who is developing at his or her own rate.

Recommended Curriculum

The Interdenominational Resources for the Christian Education of Persons with Special Learning Needs was written by 12 denominations and published by the Cooperative Publication Association. This material provides two series, *Adventures in Christian Living and Learning* for trainables and *Exploring Life Series* for educables. It includes Part I and Part II. The material could cover a two-year period and is written for three age levels.

This curriculum is divided into units. A unit is teaching material based on one subject, with many coordinated methods and resources, and written for use in about a three-month period. This curriculum will be helpful to all religious classes. Volunteers may borrow it from the Chaplaincy Department library.

- Protestant classes may use the *Interdenominational Resources* as a basis. It helps keep the teaching interdenominational. Other curriculum materials are available from the Chaplaincy Department, and when more feasible, teachers may use their own curriculum.
- For special Catholic training *Teaching Religion to the Exceptional* from the Archdiocese of San Antonio is recommended. It is available from the Chaplaincy Department.
- Jewish volunteers will follow the Jewish calendar and center their teaching on the preparation and celebration of the festivals of the Jewish year.

Religious Education for Mentally Retarded Persons

“It is important that persons who are mentally retarded not be denied the right to face the future in the assurance that God is with them.”

-from Interdenominational Resources

To push our faith back to the basics is a good exercise for teachers as well as for those we teach. We need to examine how we communicate this faith: the words, the stories and the symbols we use. Often we speak to our needs and situation in a language we understand. We must ask:

- What are their needs?
- How will they hear our words?

The needs of all people are also the needs of mentally retarded persons: attention, acceptance, affection and joy of achievement. The rejection they have experienced often in the community and their failure and frustration make these needs more urgent. Every person in his own way, at his level of ability and experience, should be encouraged to know that God is, that His love is constant, that every person is worthy in His sight and that God loves and values every person as he is.

Our Chaplaincy Department has watched many persons become aware of God, of His care and acceptance. We have seen them live in the assurance that God is with them. The fact that few can verbalize these feelings makes their faith no less authentic to us – or to God!

Sample Sessions for Small Classes

Schedule may be adapted for all levels.

Informal time

Offer choice of three interest groups related to unit: puzzles, games, free expression in art, etc.

Together time

Music, songs, rhythms

Recall preceding sessions

Share experiences of informal time

Introduce new concept with stories, film strips, pictures, etc.

Recall Bible verse, discussing ways the group has experienced this

Closing

Prayer and/or song

The large dormitory class focus is on music, relationships with caring people, reinforcement for chapel services, verses, stories and activities that are practical.

Small class focus is on providing more normal settings, social interaction, chances to experience the concepts and words from the Scriptures, a structure for the discovery of each person's uniqueness and opportunities for expression.

General learning principles that will be helpful are:

Limitations in Learning

Short attention span

Difficulty in reasoning and judgment

Inability to think abstractly

Difficulty in understanding verbal explanations

Slow learning

Poor communication skills

Difficulty in transferring ideas

Effect in Teaching

Change activity frequently. Keep stories brief. Use many activities; music, games, art, role playing.

Give directions clearly. Help them to reason when this is necessary. Difficulty in reasoning, plus the fact that what is said is understood literally, keeps us from telling stories of healing. (Yes, Jesus cared for the sick and helped them, but please do not build false hopes.)

Symbolic terms have little meaning. Words have only one meaning: "light" is a light bulb; "Why are there so many pictures of Jesus carrying a stick?"

Use visuals: objects, pictures, filmstrips. Role play. Limit verbal part of session.

Use much repetition. Present one concept in a session. Add one concept in sequential steps.

Help persons grow in expressing their ideas. Help them learn new words, people's names and to tell about experiences.

Choose uncomplicated Bible stories. Instead of a different Bible story each session, repeat one using various media for several sessions. Help to transfer the idea to their life experience.

Need for the familiar

Repeated failures and poor self-image

Limited social experiences

Establish a routine for your class. Know the importance of regular teachers. Changes need to be made slowly.

Avoid discussions of hell and guilt or stories of an angry God that would increase fears. Offer praise and encouragement frequently.

Use stories from their experiences. Make up stories from their everyday life. Expose them to as many experiences as possible—flowers and squash from the garden, slides from your vacation. Treat each one with dignity. Most are adults and not children. Help them learn acceptable social behavior.



The Lufkin State School Chaplaincy Department works with you in this ministry to the residents.

Our staff is ready to help with curriculum, music, resources or problems. Available at the Chaplaincy Department office are:

information packets•curriculum described•resource books•film strips•projector records•record player•cassette tapes•tape recorder•teaching pictures files of magazine pictures•felt board•art supplies•song sheets

These may be reserved for a class by telephoning the Chaplaincy Department office.

Come and browse, and don't miss these favorite books:

Cole, *Music for Children With Special Needs*

Hahn and Raasch, *Helping the Retarded to Know God*

Monroe, *A Church Ministry to Retarded Persons*

Orange County (Calif.) Schools, *Music for Exceptional Children*

One Last Word:

Don't be tense about your class. Enjoy it. Of most importance is the fact that you are there and that you care. God will use your efforts in His own way.

"In His hand, is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind." (Job 12:10)

This means you as teacher as well as your students.

To be a volunteer teacher in the Religious Education Program a person needs:

To have a faith to share.

To know the person with whom the faith is to be shared.

To understand “religious education” for a mentally retarded person.

To develop teaching skills.

A Faith to Share

If you volunteered to be a part of this program, the Chaplaincy Department assumes you have a faith to share and you are a caring person. This is where we begin.

The faith to be shared surely comes from the message, the Word, the religious tradition that has answered the questions and needs of our life experience. This also is true of persons who are mentally retarded.

Before coming to this conclusion, however, we must push our faith back to the basics. It is at this level of our belief where we meet the needs of the mentally retarded person and where we can work together on an interdenominational basis.

You are joining other volunteers from several community churches and religious organizations who provide weekly religious educational opportunities for Lufkin State School residents.

These volunteers are under the supervision of the coordinator of Religious Education, Chaplaincy Department.

This is one of many programs of the Volunteer Services Department of Lufkin State School.

As a volunteer in the Religious Education Program, I understand my responsibilities will be to:

1. Attend an orientation on mental retardation and religious education.
2. Be dependable in my assignment. I will notify the chairperson or the Chaplaincy office (634-3353, ext. 390, 339) if I cannot keep my assignment schedule.
3. Attend training and planning opportunities offered periodically by the Chaplaincy Department.

My assignment _____ Time schedule _____

My group coordinator _____ Telephone _____

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P.O. Box 12668
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Lufkin State School is a residential facility for mentally retarded persons. It is located on a 167 acre-site eight miles north of Lufkin, Texas on State Highway 69. It is under the jurisdiction of the Texas Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation and is an equal opportunity/affirmative action employer.

Lufkin State School

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