



CONCORDIA
DEACONESS
CONFERENCE
Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

BLUES News

BLUES NEWS

An official publication of Concordia Deaconess Conference (CDC). Distributed six times a year, it serves our members by circulating professional submissions, devotional thoughts and articles, and member announcements.

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OUR CONFERENCE

Concordia Deaconess Conference is a free association of certified and LCMS rostered deaconesses, who subscribe to and live by the confessional position of the LCMS.

As a Recognized Service Organization of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, CDC works to provide opportunities for spiritual, personal, and professional growth and fellowship for deaconesses and support for diaconal service in Christ.

Donations for the work of the conference, a 501(c)(3) organization, may be mailed to

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SOCIAL NEEDS

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WELCOMING THOSE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Several years ago, our congregation received three adult regular visitors with special needs, who were referred to us from another LCMS church. That congregation had too many steps to their sanctuary, and our congregation would be able to provide transportation from the group homes where these individuals lived to church.

Members of our congregation accepted the presence of these visitors, but they did not know how to interact in a welcoming way with these “strangers” who had different skills, different needs, and different ways of communicating.

Our special visitors came to church because they wanted to worship with us and learn more about Jesus. But, they were unable to manage the mechanics of following the order of service. So we made largeprint three-ring binders with the words of the liturgy printed out, and I started sitting with them to help them find their pages for the hymns. Soon my children were assisting me. Congregation members became accustomed to seeing us in the front pew.

Then, one Sunday our regular organist needed a substitute. I was scheduled to play the organ, so we would need help in the front pew. By that time, others had seen the routine and were willing to move up to help out. Gradually, people got to know Sara and Jackie and Francis, and would say hello to them before or after church. They were becoming part of the congregation.

These special adults stayed late after church for their own Bible class with the pastor and were later baptized and/or confirmed. Once we were used to seeing them around and having them as a part of our worship and activities, they were folded into our church family.

Part of welcoming people with special needs is actually getting to know them, and getting to know how to interact in a positive and helpful way. The deaconess, then, can serve,

not only by getting to know those with special needs personally, helping and welcoming them, but she can also be the model for others to follow so that they too can personally welcome people in our congregations.

Submitted Anonymously

ANNOUNCEMENTS

We pray God’s blessing on the deaconess training program at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and on Deaconess Gillian Bond, as she begins her work as the Director of Deaconess Studies at the seminary.

Congratulations to Cheryl D. Naumann who received a Concordia Historical Institute (CHI) Award of Commendation for her article titled “Lutheran Deaconesses in North America: Assessing Loehe’s Influence.” The article appeared in *Currents in Theology and Mission*, Feb. 2012, Vo. 39, No. 1, and was selected by the CHI Awards Committee “as an award-winning example of material produced to further the understanding of American Lutheranism.”

The 2014 CDC Annual Conference will be held Thursday through Friday, June 19-20, at the Sheraton Orlando Downtown, in Orlando, Florida. The cost will be \$250 (double room) or \$275 (single room), including registration, room and board. Note: Spouses register to attend, but do not need to pay the registration fee.

SPECTRUMS AND INCONSISTENCIES

Mary J. Moerbe

In some places, it is common to talk about introverts and extroverts, introversion and extroversion. These are terms used to describe a person's social life or approach to it.

It is not a matter of one group being social and the other not, as though introverts prefer books to friends. Instead, introverts often require alone time to rest, while extroverts thrive on energy from continual interactions. And, because different things may be draining, these two groups may consciously choose different activities.

A new term has popped up: omnivert, or one with characteristics of introversion and extroversion. However, I think there is a term these articles overlooked: inconsistent! Sometimes I need to be alone to rest; sometimes family or friends give me the rest and peace I need. Still, these terms and concepts can be helpful in reminding us that rest can look different and in considering how we can tailor activities to include both groups of people.

Of course, no single term encompasses a person's social needs, and context varies widely for everyone. While people may fall along spectrums generally, they may also move along it in different circumstances.

Relatedly, the articles I found most helpful about autism talk about an autism spectrum. Such articles offer a perspective shift to help prepare you to meet someone new without pretending the points on the spectrum are fixed in some permanent way. In short, terms help *prepare* us, while paying personal attention *equips* us for interacting with others.

Cont. on far right



FINDING KANSAS:
TWO BOOK REVIEWS
CONSIDERING AS-
PERGER'S SYNDROME

The first by Nancy Nemoyer

*Finding Kansas: Living
and Decoding Asperger's
Syndrome* by Aaron Likens
(Perigee Trade, 2012)

What is Asperger's Syndrome? What does it have to do with Kansas? Asperger's syndrome: aspergərz/, noun

1. a developmental disorder related to autism and characterized by higher than average intellectual ability coupled with impaired social skills and restrictive, repetitive patterns of interest and activities.

Aaron Likens might state, "If you've met one person with Asperger's syndrome, you've met one person with Asperger's syndrome." The diagnosis above sounds so complete, but the variations among individuals on this high functioning end of the autism spectrum require teacher, friend, deaconess, pastor, or parents to listen carefully and seek to understand. This book by Aaron Likens, the son of an LCMS pastor, is not a how-to book, nor a text book. It is an intimate revealing of the inner workings of a young man with the diagnosis that he refers to as his "sentence." Not initially written to be published, he describes it as his survival tool, so he could put into words what he could not express any other way. As he prepared it to be a book, his goal became that more people would understand who he is.

Some chapters start with an

insert by his dad, which creatively gives the reader the context of Aaron's self-revealing. It is not a book about faith, yet you can't miss his LCMS-ness as he talks about meeting a special girl who really listened to him at a church convention where his dad had a booth, and one chapter is titled "What does it mean?" He muses, "Things really do work out. Most of the time, however, it's not like we think they should. But then, since when did God start asking his creation how to do things?"

In an easy-to-read, engaging writing style, he presents his theories about the way he approaches life, based on real situations in which he finds himself either conflicted or safe: girlfriends, work, fear, school, loss, love, and well as his theories like Game Theory, Film Theory, the Theory of Firsts, and a theory of being on stage vs. being in the audience of life.

A few quotes will give you something to chew on and hopefully woo you to learn more: "Even from the earliest of ages, I became attached to things rather than people." "I don't remember people, but there is no problem remembering rooms, smells, or sounds." He has an uncanny ability to recall information and to remember in great detail events and the emotions that accompany a memory, as fresh as if it were yesterday. Thus, the pain of difficult situations repeats when a single memory sets off an avalanche of vivid related memories. Sometimes, it's easier just to hide away, than to face the

avalanche. He says "To be me? One word: painful." It is a book expressing pain and a book of hope with the window of hope opened by understanding.

Conversation can be difficult. Every introvert has experienced this, but it is magnified for Aaron as he thinks through every possible response that he could make on this subject, and then considers what the other person might say and so on. Reading social cues is garbled as he wonders "Who is supposed to talk next?" Or "Is this conversation over now because everyone got quiet?" Then it gets out of hand when a third person enters the conversation, usually disabling him as he considers the myriad of conversational options. He says, "The trap of my mind is the over-thinking."

Early in the book, Aaron had a hard time holding a job, because of the intricate social and communication skills required, and the sheer stress of the unknown. Later, by following his love of racing (he grew up in Indianapolis), he had the opportunity to drive in a series just under NASCAR and eventually became a flag man, a role where he is singularly self-assured and in charge. Now, he is also a sought after public speaker on the subject of Asperger's Syndrome as a part of his goal to bust the stereotypes about Asperger's Syndrome. But he is still awkward in one on one conversation. What a contradiction.



FINDING KANSAS:
LIVING AND DECODING
ASPERGER'S SYNDROME
BY AARON LIKENS

The second by Liz Borth

What about Kansas? With amazing insight, he describes the contradiction, like this: "To illustrate my point, let's say a person is paralyzed. However, for reasons unknown, the person is perfectly fine anytime they are in the state of Kansas. If you saw this person while in Kansas, you'd flat-out tell them, 'Hey, you're not paralyzed!' At the time the comment would be true, but the person knows that the second he leaves the state he's paralyzed again When in my comfort zone, I am like that man in Kansas."

Once you have gotten to know Aaron Likens, you will want to keep up on his story and you can. Read his blog, "Life on the Other Side of the Wall," where the story continues to fascinate. Just today he writes about his new girlfriend who really understands him and says "understanding is so vital."

A Second Book Review on
Likens' *Finding Kansas*

My intention for reading this book was to learn a little more about what goes on in my grandson's mind as he is diagnosed with high functioning autism: Asperger's syndrome. However, my hope for insight into my grandson (age 12) evaporated rather quickly, as the author of this book is a mid-twenties young man recording memories of his youth. No one can write about their past as that person they once were. The experiences of life since then influence how you remember the event and how your record it. If you have ever discovered a journal or diary from your youth, you will marvel that the voice coming from the page was once yours. You might even wonder why a particular event was worth writing about, since you have no recollection of it now.

When I realized I would not find helpful hints for helping my 12 year old grandson, I also realized this book is not for me or anyone else to know what to do. Aaron writes to share what it is like from the inside. The book is a journal of Aaron's reflections of himself, and he hopes and pleads that readers try to understand him.

The journal entries are not to be read as a chronological story for they are proposed questions or theories of self observed behavior. This is not a book with a conclusion or happy ending. It is a collection of insightful, analyzing thoughts and beliefs on a mental condition.

Curiously, Aaron's queries are not so different from questions most have been seeking answers for for centuries. This young man displays a depth of knowledge and philosophy. He teaches the reader to look beyond limited expectations of "normal" to see the amazing uniqueness God has gifted to us all.

I am tempted to stretch beyond the boundaries of human understanding and propose Asperger's syndrome is closer to "in His image" than so-called "normal" behavior. In fact, what is considered by many teachers, employers, and peers as faulty behavior is actually what most humans demand of each other. Aaron and others with Asperger's display a mental obsession for order that demands following the rules. An entry near the end of the book accurately describes life for, and with, anyone who suffers with mental challenges: "I am different. I have a different understanding of the world."

Although mentioned, the background and upbringing of this young man is not a prominent or major factor in these writings. However, Aaron leaves us with one piece of advice that is more profound than it sounds: "I am lucky my parents let me be me."

SANTIAGO 2:8
(RVR1960)

8 Si en verdad cumplís la ley real, conforme a la Escritura: Amarás a tu prójimo como a ti mismo, bien hacéis;

CONT. SPECTRUMS &
INCONSISTENCIES

We live in a world that often values based on beauty and intellect, but those who are different—whose beauty or intellect may be hidden by different social needs—are not valued. The fact is that children on the autism spectrum contemplate or attempt suicide at a rate 28 times greater than that of typical children.

These are kids. They need to be with their parents, learn about the world, etc., but their social needs affect how that can be accomplished. Sadly it seems to me that our society seems to have the special social need of relearning how to be social! Too often we dehumanize rather than put the best construction on everything. We bully or ignore when opportunities present themselves.

We all need forgiveness, and we all need forgiveness in the ways God gives it: through pastors and the Word through His truly human Son. Thanks be to God that, no matter what our needs are, He gives us His gifts. He gives us His Son. He gives rest, understanding, and equips us for every good work.

Extroverts may focus on people gifts for their rest, while introverts look to God's quieter gifts in nature or a good book, but each can rejoice in God providing for their needs. As we suffer at times, as the darkness of this world becomes most evident, we can be at peace, knowing that Christ is the answer to social needs too. He will be with us just as we need Him to be when that time comes.

Mary J. Moerbe



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Prayer requests can be emailed to the prayer coordinator at cdcprayers@comcast.net.

Digital pictures can go to photos.cdc@gmail.com for publication or other conference uses.

Newsletter submissions and suggestions can be sent to editor.bluesnews@concordiadeaconesslcls.org.

Members may purchase extra cross pins (\$10) or insignias (\$7) from Heidi Bishop at 101 N. Spring St, Elgin, IL 60120.

FROM OUR SPIRITUAL COUNSELOR

Rev. Kevin Loughran

Dear Sisters in Christ, When I first learned about the topic for this month's *BLUES News*, I thought, "What can I contribute here?" You see, even though my parish leases space to an ABA academy, we occasionally have children on the mild end of the Autism spectrum attend our Day School, and of course I serve families that have children who are autistic, I'm embarrassed to admit I know very little about Autism and its associated strata of disorders. However, in reflection I do know what it is like to parent a disabled child and so I write from that perspective.

Of course, many of you met our darling Penelope at this summer's conference. Certainly she is a delight, a blessing that at times leaves my wife and I befuddled as to why the Lord would entrust her into our care. But you must also understand that she does have special needs and those needs have drastically changed our family dynamic.

We had three teenagers when Penny was born. Much like Autism her disability of cerebral palsy was silent, until the time

she started to miss certain milestones. It was then that we began to recognize that our daughter was "different." Predictably it was at that point that all sorts of thoughts—bad thoughts—began to crop up. For many years, my wife was bothered by "what ifs": "what if I had gotten more rest during my pregnancy," "what if I had eaten different food" and so on and so forth. Such thoughts often accompany mothers of special needs children as the reality of how life has changed continues to set in.

As time has gone by, we have had any number of well-meaning friends and parishioners offer their help. Frankly, what most parents of special needs children need is support in the form of prayers, a connection to other like-situated parents and respite care of some sort. The latter is more problematic than one might think, as all special needs children require an extra level of care that is often not thought of by those offering to help. We've had any number of false starts where people have offered to help with Penny only to find that her needs were greater

than they first imagined. This led to disappointment on the part of the friends trying to help as they felt they had failed us, as well as our disappointment that hoped for relief did not materialize.

This is where carefully directed diaconal care might truly benefit a parish where special needs children and their families reside. Depending upon the community, resources may be discovered and provided for the family in the form of support groups. Also a few key congregants who are gifted in providing care might be identified and trained in the disability afflicting that particular child and family. This will provide support that the family needs.

Above all, families with disabled children require what all other people do: your prayers, your love, and your support. As we pray for you, please pray for us!

Your servant in Christ,
Rev Kevin R Loughran
Spiritual Counselor