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Seat At The Table: An Inclusive Ministry to Families and Individuals with Disabilities at Plainfield Christian Church

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**Seat At The Table:
An Inclusive Ministry to Families and Individuals with
Disabilities at Plainfield Christian Church**

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Philosophy and Strategies for Christian Ministries

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Abstract

Churches are called to be a place of welcoming and belonging, but it is common for individuals and families with disabilities to not feel like they have a place in the Church. Seat At The Table is a ministry designed to address this problem and help families feel integrated into the local church. This ministry is a part of Plainfield Christian Church, located in Plainfield, Indiana. Seat At The Table desires to create a space for individuals and families to encounter Jesus and to form a deep and lasting relationship with Him. Along with this, they want participants in the ministry to learn to be Active in the Body, to Boast in the Gospel, to Live in Love, and to Engage in Community. This will be done through Sunday School – both Buddies and the Perfect Fit room, Vacation Bible School, Integrated Camp, Respite Nights, and Family Fest.

Introduction

In a world where those with disabilities and challenges are looked down upon, pitied, ignored, or shoved to the side, Jesus Christ argues that “the work of God might be displayed” through this exact group of individuals (John 9:3). He brings them back into the picture and says that they belong and have a seat at His table, no matter their differences and giftings. They have a right to know Him and have a personal relationship with Him.

There are “an estimated 1.3 billion people – or 1 in 6 people – [globally, who] experience significant disability” in their everyday life (“Disability”). In the United States alone, 1 in 5 “Americans report a chronic health condition or disability of some kind” (Whitehead, 377). These individual’s lives and the lives of their family members are impacted in profound and sometimes unimaginable ways. Regardless of what an individual is working through - whether that is developmental delays or challenges in physical, social, or emotional ways - they can often feel isolated and unloved. It is the job of the Church body to come alongside these families and individuals to care for, support, and minister to them; after all, believers are all of one body – 1 Corinthians 12:12. No one should have to walk through life alone, including those with disabilities. For these reasons *Seat At The Table*, mobilizes individuals and families with disabilities to take their place as an integral part of the local church in Plainfield, Indiana.

Seat At The Table

Seat At The Table, first and foremost, seeks to create space for individuals and families with disabilities to encounter Jesus. He is the primary focus and the reason for all that this ministry does. The goal of the ministry is for individuals from all walks of life and with all kinds of challenges and giftings to have a personal, growing relationship with Jesus. Everything else in this ministry is used to aid in this process. While working with this population, *Seat At The Table*

comes alongside families and individuals to support, include, encourage, and equip them. Supporting them will be done through resourcing individuals and parents of those with disabilities. *Seat At The Table* will include them by welcoming them into the church no matter the difficulties that they might face, as well as striving to give them a space in the church to worship that best fits their needs. This ministry will encourage them by spiritually feeding them and by giving them opportunities to engage with others who are like them and those who are different from them. Lastly, this ministry will equip individuals, families, and the congregation. Individuals and families will be equipped to know, love, and serve Jesus through sharing the Gospel and finding opportunities to use their giftings to further the Kingdom. The congregation will be equipped and educated to better incorporate and include these individuals and their families into the body.

Context

This disabilities ministry is run out of Plainfield Christian Church (PCC), located in Plainfield, Indiana. Plainfield is a small town right outside of Indianapolis, with a population of about 35,500 individuals (U.S. Census Bureau). Of those 35,500 people, 6.6% of them that are under the age of 65, have a disability (U.S. Census Bureau). This means that around 2,300 people in Plainfield alone are living with disabilities; this number does not include the surrounding towns that feed into Plainfield and the church. On top of that, these individuals with disabilities have families who need support as well. This church already has a disabilities ministry that is doing good work, but it could be expanded to serve a larger population.

The 21st century has led to amazing progress for individuals and families with disabilities, among schools, churches, jobs, other organizations, and even in social settings. Even though progress has been made, there is still much work to be done. Today, there are more and more

people who are educated on disabilities and how they affect individuals' lives, but there are still those who do not understand or chose to not be understanding. Amy Kenny points out that many people still hold to the belief of ableism, meaning “the belief that disabled people are less valuable or less human than [their] nondisabled counterparts” (1). Unfortunately, this belief is not rare and is often publicly articulated. Ableism fosters an environment where individuals are scared to or “feel uncomfortable talking to a disabled person” (Kenny, 6). It also encourages division, separation, and isolation, all of which do not belong in the Church.

Seat At The Table finds itself in the midst of this messiness and tension, all while desiring to bridge the gap between neurodiverse and neurotypical, between disabled and abled. This ministry seeks to show the church and the world that the glory of God can be seen through those with disabilities (John 9:1-3). This ministry seeks to bring unity among the division and ostracization. Just because this population is different does not mean that they do not deserve to hear the Gospel, to be loved, to be a part of a community, and to have a seat at His table.

Introduction to the Individual

Deb (29) and Ryan Barlowe (30) are a happily married couple with two children, Hazel (7) and Jackson (3). Deb is a stay-at-home mom and Ryan works long hours in order to support his family. Deb and Ryan are fantastic parents who love their children with everything that they have. Their son Jackson is playful, interactive, and curious. He is developmentally on track with his peers. Hazel is a beautiful and bright young girl who is different from her peers in a number of ways. She is developmentally delayed and often struggles to relate to others (Lockwood et al., 463).

This family has just started attending PCC. Before this, they did not attend church for a time because Hazel was not welcome in the church that they were previously at. This was due to

the fact that she was loud, distracting, and different from the other children her age. Hazel is autistic. Autism is defined as “a neurological and developmental disorder that affects how people interact with others, communicate, learn and behave” (“*Autism Spectrum Disorder*”). The Barlowe family has struggled with feelings of isolation, rejection, and anger as the church that they went to has turned them away and made their family feel unwelcomed because of their differences. On top of this, many of the Barlowe’s family members and friends do not fully understand what they are experiencing. This family does not have connections to other families with disabilities or people who understand how hard it can be sometimes.

Hazel Barlowe is seven years old and is loving life. She is currently interested in all things related to butterflies, books, and singing. She also loves to play with her brother Jackson. Developmentally she should be in Erik Erikson’s fourth stage called “Industry vs. Inferiority” (Yount, 64), but since she is developmentally delayed, she is currently in Erikson’s third stage “Initiative vs. Guilt” (Yount, 65). In this stage Hazel is full of curiosity and “into everything” (Yount, 65). She has a sense of wonder with most things. In this stage, Hazel will develop “confidence” as she tries new things and is given space to do so, with the help of those around her (Yount, 65). One of the things that Hazel’s parents would love to provide for her is the space to be around more people, both with disabilities and without them. They want her to be in a community that understands her and her needs, as well as loves on her and cares for her.

A family friend noticed that the Barlowe family is struggling and reached out to tell them about the ministry at PCC called *Seat At The Table*. The family was very interested to come see what it was all about. They were told of the many families who have found support in the church from families who are similar to them and families who look very different. They were also told of the many wonderful volunteers who care so well for the students and share the Gospel with

them. The Barlowe family is looking forward to trying this church out so that they can find a supportive group of friends, as well as find a space for their daughter to worship in a way that best fits her needs.

Personal Interest

Personal experience has led the author to be interested in the topic of disabilities ministry and has shown the author the great need for this ministry in the Church. The author has attended PCC her whole life, and she has served in their disabilities ministry. She also had the opportunity to intern at Southeast Christian in Kentucky, during the summer of 2022, and serve in their Shine Disabilities Ministry. The author recognizes that disabilities ministry can be very intimidating and can seem overwhelming, but she has learned that it can simply start with a hello which then leads to getting to know each individual on a personal level. The author also has a passion to care for the vulnerable or those on the outskirts, and this population is often viewed in this way. Even though they are viewed as marginal, they still have the right to hear the Gospel and to come to know Jesus for themselves, just like anyone else. They also have the right to serve in His Kingdom and to have a seat at His table. Through this ministry the author desires to help create a space for individuals and their families to encounter Jesus, to find community, to be supported, included, encouraged, and equipped.

Frankena Model

William Frankena, “a philosophy professor at the University of Michigan,” designed the Frankena Model, a model now used to clearly layout the philosophy of education and ministries (Sell, 67). The Frankena model has five boxes labeled A-E. These boxes each focus on a driving question related to the ministry that the model is exemplifying. The model better explains the

“purposes, premises, excellencies, processes, and practices” of the ministry (Taylor University Ministry Department, *Frankena Model*).

Frankena’s Box A is focused on the question what is “the ultimate purpose of the world, humanity, and ministry?” (Taylor University Ministry Department, *Frankena Model*). This box looks for what the Lord desires of the ministry and the people that make it up. This looks to “what should be” instead of the current state that the people and world are in (Taylor University Ministry Department, *Frankena Model*). Box B asks the question “What is the nature of the world and humankind?” (Taylor University Ministry Department, *Frankena Model*). The information in this box focuses on the context of the ministry - the people, their context, social setting, education, etc. It is a snapshot of what has shaped and formed their thinking and actions.

Box C asks, “What excellencies should a ministry seek to instill?” (Taylor University Ministry Department, *Frankena Model*). These are the goals or the vision of the ministry as exemplified in a particular person. Its content ultimately comes from Box A and Box B, and how the questions in those boxes are answered. Box D asks the question “How are these excellencies best instilled or produced?” (Taylor University Ministry Department, *Frankena Model*). This box is full of the methods that the ministry will use in order to reach their vision, mission, and goals. Box C and D both feed into Box E which asks the question “what are your concrete educational ministry practices?” (Taylor University Ministry Department, *Frankena Model*). These are the models and practices that will be played out in the ministry.

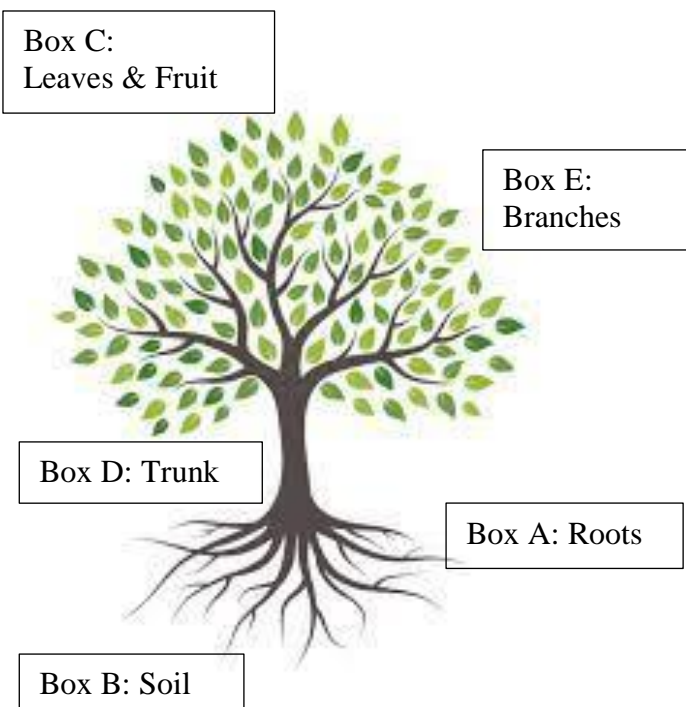
This paper will utilize the Frankena model in a way that helps to better explain the reasoning, thought process, and work behind this ministry. It will be used in a way to make

things clear and to drive home why the ministry does what it does. In order to better explain the Frankena model, this paper will use the illustration of a tree. The model looks as presented in Figure 1.

Conclusion

The Church has the job of loving on individuals with disabilities in the name of Jesus, even though the world might look down upon them or treats them as lesser

than. This paper will seek to explain how the disability ministry, *Seat At The Table*, located in Plainfield, Indiana, will do just that. It will also address the philosophy behind the ministry. The paper will be organized by the Frankena model using Box A – E, and will address the “purposes, premises, excellencies, processes, and practices” of the ministry (Taylor University Ministry Department, *Frankena Model*). This will be done while walking through the ministry with the Barlowe family, and addressing the needs of their family, especially Hazel’s.



Section 1: Box A Purpose

Introduction

For centuries, individuals have questioned why they were placed on earth and how they should steward the time they have been given. Many people have tried to find the answers to these questions but have repeatedly fallen short. It is crucial to seek out the answers to these questions in order to live life well and to flourish. Christians look to Scripture to teach them about humankind's purpose and to see the commands and expectations of believers. These things combined give individuals a sense of direction, purpose, and clarity. In light of these expectations and commands, God created all of humankind (those with disabilities and those without) with a purpose in mind; they were made to know Him, glorify Him, and make Him known to others. *Seat at The Table* seeks to help individuals and families with disabilities pursue this ultimate purpose, through supporting, including, encouraging, and equipping them.

Humanity's ultimate purpose also serves as a foundation for the philosophy behind a ministry, which can be seen in the Frankena Model. Box A addresses this question and "helps identify the 'big picture' of God's truth: Why we are here? Where should we be going?" (Habermas, 16). The information in Box A is a snapshot of what humanity should look like (Sells, 69). Unfortunately, the world is still broken, which means that humans are not living out their ultimate purpose; but even so, this box can be something that individuals strive for. It is a statement of what the ministry hopes the population that they are serving will look like when their "philosophy of education [is] enacted" (Sells, 69). In the illustration of the tree, Box A is made up of the roots. These roots are what all other parts of the tree springs forth from. Without

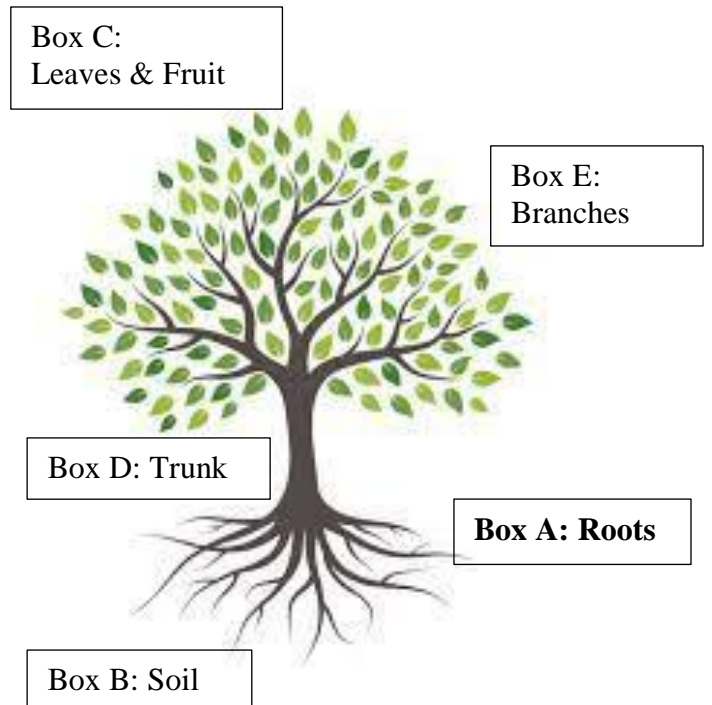
this being rooted in this strong foundation, the tree will be blown over in storms and will be damaged very easily.

Scriptural Basis

Scripture makes it evident that the Lord created humankind with a purpose and for a purpose. He was and is intentional in His actions. From start to finish the Lord cares about the little details involved in the lives of His children. Each of God's children

is a reflection of their Father; they were made in His image (Genesis 1:27 NIV). "While fashioned as creatures, [all] people were designed to intrinsically embody His likeness" (Hubach, 28). Just as each individual is different, the way that they reflect the Lord can look different. "These [ways can] include the ability to love, to create, to rule, to relate, to design, to reason, and so much more" (Hubach, 28). Genesis shows that God's children "were fashioned to experience purposeful, blessed lives" (Hubach, 28).

This purposeful life is laid out clearly all throughout Scripture. Romans 8:28 says that people are called according to a specific purpose (NIV). Even though this is the case, Scripture also makes it clear that individuals can reject the Lord's purpose (Luke 7:30 NIV). Believers are able to choose if they want to live out the purpose they were created for, or to live in a way that does not fulfill that purpose. When they live according to the Lord's purpose though, they can experience fullness of life in Him (John 6:35, Ephesians 3:16-19 NIV).



Knowing God

Knowing the Lord is the first part of a believer's purpose, because everything else flows from this relationship. In the beginning humankind communed with God without separation. This was how the Lord intended it to be, but then sin entered the scene and creation was separated from their Creator (Genesis 3:22-24 NIV). Sin fractured and marred the relationship between God and humankind, and it brought along with it brokenness and pain. In the midst of this, there was nothing that humans could do to fix it. However, the Lord did not leave humans to suffer alone in this brokenness. He gave them an invitation out of this pain and separation, and into a right relationship with Him by sending His Son as a living sacrifice (John 3:16-18 NIV). "God [H]imself came to be with us – to walk with us once again as [H]e had done in Eden in the beginning" (Jethani, 101). This act bridged the gap between the Creator and the creation, and they are now able to commune once again. In this communion, the Lord reveals Himself to His people. Acts 17:27 says that the Lord created humankind "so that they would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him" (NIV). When an individual is found a relationship can start to be formed with Him. This relationship leads to a deeper intimacy and knowledge of one another, and a desire to treasure the Lord above all else (Jethani, 106). When humankind truly knows their Creator, they can experience eternal life (John 17:3 NIV). This eternal life and knowledge of their Creator is something that humans can boast about (Jeremiah 9:23-24 NIV) it is a gift that has been given to them by their Father.

This gift of knowing the Father is for all of His children, including those who are disabled and those who are not. Individuals with disabilities still have the opportunity to know their Creator and to be in a deep, loving, and meaningful relationship with Him. Just because these individuals are different than others around them does not mean that they are less. The

Lord loves all of His children and longs to be in relationship with them. Even before an individual is born, He cares for them and knows them (Psalm 139:13-16 NIV). He does all of this regardless of their abilities, skills, talents, and traits.

Glorifying God

Knowing the Lord can lead to praising the Lord, which leads to bringing Him glory. Glory is a divine quality of the Lord that ultimately manifests itself in the “abundance” of His “honor,” majesty, and “power” (Gaffin, 508). Believers bring Him glory by being imitators of Him, “the fact that man is in the image of God means that man is like God and represents God” (Grudem, 189). When individuals imitate God, they are glorifying Him which can be defined as bringing “praise to God for His worth and works” (Harrison, 342). Paul tells believers in 1 Corinthians 1:11 to imitate him as he imitates Christ; therefore, believers are to be imitators of Christ (NIV). Believers were not made to be exactly like their Creator, but they were made to reflect Him and His qualities through the life that they live, and thus bring Him glory.

In 1 Corinthians 10:31, believers are commanded to do everything for the glory of the Lord (NIV). The Lord is worthy of glory and honor because He is above all things and created all things (Revelation 4:11 NIV). Believers are given the opportunity to glorify Him through their words, actions, thoughts, and feelings. In fact, they are expected to tell others of His glory and His wonderful works (2 Chronicles 16:24 NIV). The Lord intentionally created all of His sons and daughters for His glory, and so that they could bring glory to His name (Isaiah 43:6-7 NIV). This includes those with disabilities. They are still able to reflect and imitate their Creator in order to bring Him glory. Even though it might look different from other populations, they are still glorifying the Lord. Hazel Barlowe has the capacity and opportunity to glorify the Lord in the way that she speaks to others, acts towards them, carries herself, and controls her thoughts.

Again, this will look different for each individual and the severity of their disabilities or needs. Regardless of these things though they are still capable of bringing the Lord glory. For all believers “living for God’s glory is the greatest achievement we can accomplish in our lives” (Warren, 69).

Making God Known

Knowing the Lord and having a relationship with Him commonly leads to glorifying Him; and individuals who decide to glorify Him with their whole life make His name known to others through word and deed. In fact, believers are commanded to make His name known throughout the nations. In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus commands His disciples to go out and make other disciples, and to teach them about Himself (NIV). “God expects His people to share in [H]is quest to save the lost” (Webber, 292). As imitators of Him, believers should seek out the lost and point them to their Savior. Jesus sends out believers, just like the Father sent Him (John 20:21 NIV), they are His ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20 NIV). Believers are told in John 13:33-35 to love others; they are to do this “at all times and in all places until Jesus returns” (Schaeffer, 14). This is not a suggestion, but instead a command. Loving others “goes hand in hand with the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ” (Schaeffer, 38). Believers are to love others as they have been loved by their Creator (John 4:7-11 NIV) and this involves sharing the Gospel with others.

Sharing the Gospel can be an intimidating and overwhelming task for any individual. When broken down though, the Gospel is simply sharing the love of God (Father, Son, and Spirit), with others. Accepting the call to share the Gospel can look drastically different from person to person. Some might shout the message from the rooftops, others might do it through relationships or acts of service. Still, others might share the Gospel through loving others.

Regardless of what it looks like, or who is doing it, all believers have the capacity of sharing the Gospel. Living with a disability does not disqualify an individual from spreading the Good News, it just means that it might be done in a unique way, and this will still advance the Kingdom.

Conclusion

The Lord created all humans with and for a purpose – including those with disabilities. Hazel, along with every other individual, was created to know her Creator and to have a relationship with Him. In knowing Christ, Hazel is given an opportunity to glorify Him, or bring glory to Him through her words, actions, and thoughts. In bringing glory to her Creator, she is given the opportunity to make Him known to those around her. Scripture makes it evident that these commands and expectations are key parts of being an active believer. Without them, individuals are not fulfilling their true purpose, which is to know Him, glorify Him, and make Him known to others. *Seat at The Table* desires to help families and individuals with disabilities figure out how to walk fully in their purpose.

Section 2: Box B Premises

Introduction

Imagine a mature tree, full of deep green leaves, big branches, and a thick trunk. This tree has weathered storms and stood tall for decades. It is rooted firmly in the soil that surrounds it. This soil is the context that the tree finds itself in and it affects how the tree will continue to grow and thrive. When looking at the Frankena model, Box B can be compared to the soil. Box B is “comprised of

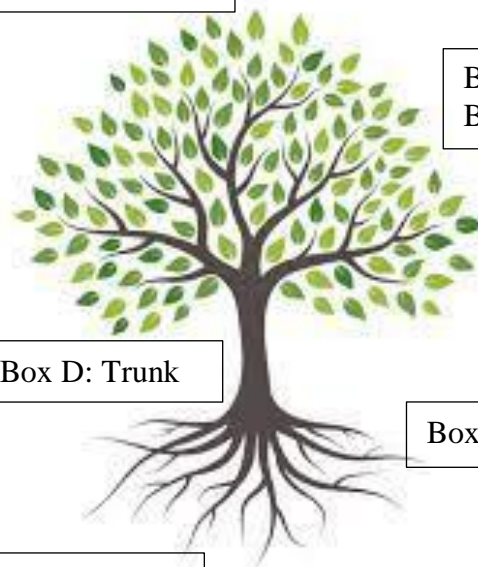
Box C:
Leaves & Fruit

Box E:
Branches

Box D: Trunk

Box A: Roots

Box B: Soil



the beliefs that inform one’s understanding and interpretation of life” (Glassford, 537). This box communicates “the nature of people and the world that they live in,” in light of the specific context of the ministry and the individuals that it serves. The areas of life that this box addresses include “philosophical, theological, psychological, sociological, anthropological, [and] educational premises or core beliefs.” Much like the soil that surrounds a tree’s roots, the context that surrounds a ministry will greatly affect how it functions, grows, and thrives. It is important to address or lay out the context clearly. Without doing this, *Seat At The Table* could be in danger of missing the point of why the individuals that they serve need this ministry (Taylor University Ministry Department).

Box B looks at the nature of the individuals and the world in a holistic way. While all of these areas of life and premises are important to include, this paper will not be able to address every one of them. Instead, it will focus on five main premises that are deeply relevant to *Seat At*

The Table and the individuals that this ministry serves. These five premises focus on the inherent value that comes with bearing the *imago dei*, God's love for His children, the ability for all believers to use their gifts for the Kingdom, the necessity of relational disability ministry, and the importance of the Church welcoming in families and individuals with disabilities.

The Imago Dei

The first premise of *Seat At The Table* has to do with the nature of persons. All individuals are made in the image of God, and therefore have inherent worth and value in Him. This belief comes from the creation account in Genesis 1. In the process of creating humans the Lord says, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness" (Genesis 1:26 NIV). God then "created mankind in His own image; in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them" (Genesis 1:27 NIV). From the beginning all of humanity was created to bear the image of God, but what does this mean? Dearborn argues that "having been created in God's image and likeness involves both identity ('image') and a destiny ('likeness')" (415). It shapes who individuals are, as well as what they do as they reflect their Creator. The responsibility of bearing the image of God gives human life a sense of direction, specifically to reflect the One who created them "and to participate in God's purpose" (Dearborn, 416).

Bearing the image of God means carrying an "identity marker for all humans" (Dearborn, 416). All humanity is given this gift - "male and female, rich and poor, mighty and lowly, [they] are all intended to be living pictographs of Yahweh" (Dearborn, 416). No one is excluded from having the gift of bearing the image of God due to their social status, IQ level, skin color, age, skills, or abilities. "No matter our capacities, we each bear God's image individually as integrated persons of body and soul/spirit" (College, "Theology of Disability.") Another way of saying this is that "the image of God is not a measurable set of characteristics, but rather is

reflected and expressed through the uniqueness of each individual, including one's inabilities and disabilities" (Hedges-Goettl, 16). This act is a whole person and whole being act. It is not done with just part of an individual's life, rather every single individual bears the responsibility of reflecting the image of God in all that they do. Not holding to the view that all of humanity is included in this can lead individuals to "discriminating against" and "disrespecting" those with disabilities, even though this is unacceptable (Welie, 20).

Those with disabilities should not be seen as lesser than since they also carry the image of God with them wherever they go. As image bearers, they have an inherent worth and value, found in the King that other people cannot take away from them. As an image bearer they are reflecting what is good. After all, in the beginning when the Lord created humanity, He stepped back and said that "it was very good" (Genesis 1:31 NIV). Hazel Barlowe, a 7-year-old with autism, was made in the image of God. Regardless of her disability, she has the capability and capacity to reflect the image of God and mirror His character, because she was marked with His image when He created her. Even though Hazel might have more challenges than a neurotypical or nondisabled individual, she still has inherent value and worth because the One who created her loves and cares for her. This is the same view that *Seat At The Table* has for any individual who is involved in their ministry. Their goal is to care for and honor any person that they serve because everyone is made in the image of God.

Love for all of His Children

The second premise of *Seat At The Table* is a scriptural premise. It states that the triune Lord loves all of His children – including His children that live with disabilities. Throughout Scripture it is clear that the Lord cares for the vulnerable and the outcasts. There are four groups that the Lord specifically has a heart for, and they are repeated throughout the pages of the Bible; these

groups are the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the foreigner (Zechariah 7:10 NIV). These are the main groups that would have been considered vulnerable in biblical times, and the Lord made it clear that His people were to care for the vulnerable because He loves them. In the Old Testament God's people are commanded to "seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause" (Isaiah 1:17 ESV). They are also commanded to "give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute" (Psalm 82:3 ESV). They are to stand up for the vulnerable and to defend them because the Lord loves and cares for them.

The Bible also speaks of how the Lord cares for these vulnerable groups as well. Psalm 146:9 says, "The Lord watches over the sojourners; He upholds the widow and the fatherless" (ESV). He is also described as the "Father of the fatherless and protector of widows" (Psalm 68:5 ESV). In the New Testament, Jesus goes out of His way to care for the vulnerable. This can be seen in who He heals, interacts with, teaches to, and travels with. Jesus was not afraid to interact with the "unclean" people of the society; in fact, He welcomed them in and gave them a seat at His table. This is because "the Lord is good to all; He has compassion on all He has made" (Psalm 145:9 NIV). Jesus was the physical example of this. "Throughout his ministry Jesus revealed God to be one who identifies with the lowly and oppressed to elevate and deliver them (Dearborn, 416).

An example of Jesus doing this can be seen in the very beginning of Mark. Mark decides to end his first chapter with a story of Jesus stepping towards an outcast in love, because He was "deeply moved with tender compassion" (1:41 TPT). In this passage, Jesus meets a leper who is an outcast from society. He is vulnerable, alone, unsupported, and uncared for. He probably has not felt human touch in a very long time. Even though this man was considered to be unclean,

Jesus reaches out and touches him. Jesus meets him in the state that he is in and cares for him. He looks past the messiness, the pain, the discomfort, and the opinions of those around Him, and he loves the individual in front of Him. The Triune God is loving towards all of His children, even when they are outcast from society and are in a vulnerable situation. He does not expect them to have their life in order before He can begin to love them.

Another example of Jesus love for those that are vulnerable can be seen in Mark 2. Here Jesus heals a man who has most likely been paralyzed his whole life. In this time period and this culture, it was common for individuals to believe that sicknesses, diseases, or disabilities came from a sin that was committed, either by an individual or someone in their family (Garland, 97). In light of this common belief, this man's whole life would have been defined by his disability that people thought was brought on by sin. In a culture based on honor and shame, he would have been considered very dishonorable and shameful in anyone's eyes (*Jesus and the Gospels*, 70). When Jesus meets him for the first time though, He does not treat the man like others would have and did. Instead, He does the most compassionate thing possible for the man and immediately forgives him of his sins. Jesus allows him to drop the burden/title of sinner that he has been carrying with him his whole life. Then, Jesus moves on to the physical needs. He addresses both types of needs, because "To forgive the sin is to remove its consequences – the paralysis. Healing therefore comes as the result of the forgiveness of sins" (Garland, 97). By doing this, Jesus is showing the man an immense amount of love, probably more than he has experienced in a long time.

The triune God loves all of His children – including His children that live with disabilities. He is not scared of the struggles that they face or the hardships that they will endure. In fact, He steps into their situation and cares for them in the midst of it all. Hazel Barlowe is one of those

children that He loves so deeply. As a part of *Seat At The Table*, Hazel will be taught about the Lord's love for her, as well as shown it through the ministry of those that get to serve her and the other ministry friends. Her noisy moments, unique ways of communicating, and her preferences do not scare the Lord away or make His love any less. In fact, the Lord loves Hazel just the way that she is, and He has created her in this way. He knows her intimately and wants to show her His love. *Seat At The Table* wants to partner with Him and help Hazel experience His love.

Gifts for the Kingdom

The third premise of *Seat At The Table* states that every member of the body has gifts to contribute to the Kingdom. When these gifts are not recognized, the body suffers; Hedges-Goettl puts it this way, "The Church is disabled when persons with disabilities are not included" (14). In Scripture, the belief that all members of the body have gifts is clearly stated in 1 Corinthians 12. Here Paul is writing to the Corinthians and communicating to them that all believers of Jesus Christ are of one body. While belonging to one body, they all have different gifts or functions that are used to aid the body in some way (Thomson & Elwell, 835). A few examples that Paul uses are the feet, the eyes, and the ears. Each one of these has a different function on its own, but when it is combined with the whole body, it has the same purpose and is able to do exceedingly more. Paul is making the point that while spiritual gifts are different, "a Christian with one gift is not more or less important than another Christian with a different gift" (Keener, 485).

In the midst of talking about all believers working together as one body, Paul recognizes a group of people that could easily be overlooked. In verses 22-26, Paul talks about those that are considered weaker, less honorable, or unrepresentable. These are the members that often get pushed to the side due to the "inconveniences" that they cause, the odd noises that they make, or the fact that they can be distracting to those around them. Paul could have easily said that these

parts of the body were still included but played a small and insignificant role in the big picture. Instead of doing this though, Paul elevates that status of this group and says that they are “indispensable,” have “greater honor” bestowed on them, and are “treated with greater modesty” (vs. 22-23 ESV). Paul says that this is done so “that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together” (vs. 25-26 ESV). These indispensable members play a significant role in the Kingdom and have gifts to use in this process.

At the beginning of 1 Corinthians 12, Paul says in verses 4-7:

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

Paul is telling the Corinthians that every believer is given a gift from the Lord to use for the Kingdom. He notes that one individual’s gift can and will look different from another person’s giftings, but this does not harm anything. Instead, it is actually a beautiful thing that, once again, helps the body. Even though these gifts can look very different from person to person, Paul does note that there are three similarities. These similarities include that they “are bestowed freely by the Spirit’s grace, are intended to be used in a Christ-like attitude of servanthood. And are the result of God’s powerful working in a person’s life” (*1 Corinthians: The NIV Application Commentary*, 243). God graciously gives gifts to His children, through His Spirit, in order to serve those around them, and to advance the Kingdom.

Seat At The Table believes that all members of the body are important and play a significant role in furthering the Kingdom with their gifts. In today’s culture when discussing individuals

with special needs, it is easy to “emphasize their specific disability and fail to see their abilities” (Hubach, 182). Even though this is a tendency for people to do, it does not change the fact that an individual’s disabilities or challenges does not exclude them from the body and does not limit them from using their gifts. If the Church was to ignore this group of individuals’ giftings, they would be missing out on something beautiful. Instead of excluding individuals with disabilities, the body of Christ should be looking to include them in any way possible. When doing this, it is important to keep in mind that “contributing to the body of Christ by expressing one’s spiritual gifts can appear in ways that take us by surprise. The packaging of the gift at times causes us to miss it – or worse – dismiss it” (Hubach, 183).

In order to guard from the mistake of dismissing or missing others’ gifts, the Church needs to be a place that equips and encourages people in the use of their gifts. This includes those with disabilities. *Seat At The Table* hopes to provide spaces for individuals like Hazel to better understand what their unique giftings are, and then to give them a space to use their gifts in order to further the Kingdom. Through interacting with Hazel, it is obvious that she is a gifted comforter and friend. When she sees someone who is hurting, she is quick to check on them and encourage them in her own unique way. This can be seen as the spiritual gift of compassion and encouragement. Instead of ignoring this gift and only focusing on neurotypical individuals’ gifts, the body of Christ should also be encouraging Hazel in her giftings and helping her to use them to the best of her ability.

Relational Learning

Seat At The Table’s fourth premise is educational. It states that disabilities ministry serves a wide audience, but each individual needs a tailor-made plan for relationship and learning. When working with individuals with disabilities, it is important to keep in mind that each individual has

different needs, desires, and wants. Some individuals will have trouble communicating, others will have trouble controlling or regulating their emotions, and others may have trouble physically. No matter the need of the individual or student, *Seat At The Table* longs to serve them in a way that best meets their needs, cares for them, and shows them God's love.

Hazel Barlowe is a beautiful young girl with autism. Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) can be defined as “a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by persistent impairments in reciprocal social communication and social interactions and restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interest, or activities” (Potvin & Ratto, 317). In light of this definition, it is important to note that all individuals with autism will present their symptoms in different ways. ASD is on a spectrum, so there will be individuals with more severe symptoms than others. For Hazel, her symptoms usually consist of limited language, fixation on topics or items such as butterflies and trains, as well as difficulty when it comes to relating to others. These things combined can make it hard for Hazel to make and maintain relationships with her peers and adults (Potvin & Ratto, 321). One other thing that Hazel struggles with is “unusual responses to sensory input” (Potvin & Ratto, 322). One example of this is loud noises. When Hazel is in a situation where there are many loud noises going on, she can feel overwhelmed, and she will begin to cover her ears and sit on the ground.

Though there are many challenges that come with Autism Spectrum Disorder, there are also strengths that come with it as well. Some of these include “an exceptional memory, an excellent eye for detail, advanced visual-spatial skills, and strong abilities for logical and hierarchical reasoning” (Potvin & Ratto, 323). Hazel has an amazing memory that allows her to recall all kinds of facts and information about topics that she is interested in. She also has a keen eye to notice when things are out of place or done incorrectly.

It is important for *Seat At The Table* to carefully consider Hazel's strengths and weaknesses, as well as some of the things that can feel overwhelming for her, in order to minister to her affectively. *Seat At The Table* strives to do this with any member that they serve, and they do it so that the individual is able to interact with Jesus in a way that feels safe and welcoming to them. One example of this in Hazel's case is noting that loud noises overwhelm her. In an attempt to serve her well, one of the things that can be done for this is to offer Hazel headphones in situations that are loud or ask her if she wants to step out of the room before a loud noise occurs. Intentionally thinking through these things and working to make the environment welcoming for Hazel allows for a relationship to be built between Hazel and the volunteers. It also shows her and her family an immense amount of love and care.

A Place of Belonging

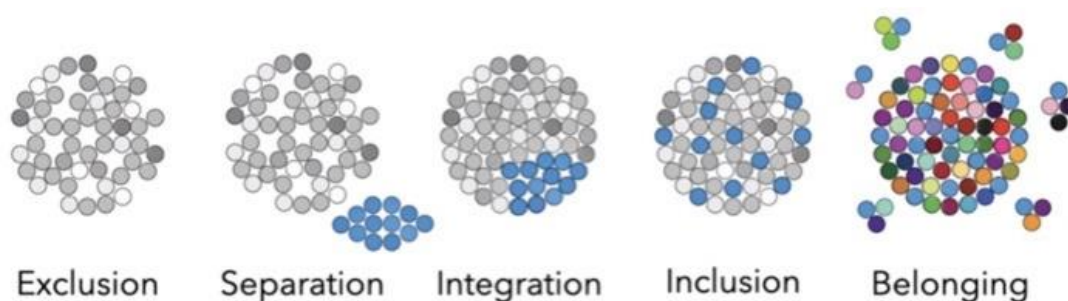
Seat At The Table's fifth premise addresses the social/cultural context surrounding the ministry. It states that the Church should be a place of belonging for individuals and families with disabilities. For decades, the Church and the members within it have done a poor job of making individuals and families with disabilities feel like they belonged. Instead of welcoming these families with open arms, the families have been ostracized, cast out, and made to feel isolated due to the 'inconveniences' and 'awkward' moments that their challenges brought. Instead of the Church being a place of community, support, love, and encouragement, it was a place of exclusion and separation for these families. Thankfully within "the last fifty years ... the postures and practices of communities in relation to disability have changed dramatically" (Carter, 4). Immense progress has been made, but there is still more work to be done.

Erik Carter created a helpful image to better understand what church communities should look like in a study that looked at their levels of inclusion and acceptance. This image is helpful

in thinking through the process of moving from being a community of exclusion, to being one of belonging. Figure 2, entitled “Five prevailing portraits of community,” displays this (Carter, 4).

As seen in the image, there are five stages or categories that he found. These stages include exclusion, separation, integration, inclusion, and belonging. In his image, the blue circles represent individuals with disabilities, and the gray circles are individuals that are not disabled.

The final stage of belonging shows all different colors included in the mix, highlighting the fact that all members of the body are different in some way, and when they are united, it is beautiful.



Exclusion

The first model that Carter addresses is the stage of exclusion, or “ministry apart” (5). This takes place when a church makes it hard for families or individuals to access their space. Exclusion can be done in a number of different ways; a few examples include “wounding remarks, penetrating stares, refused supports, revoked invitations, denied baptisms, and referrals elsewhere” (Carter, 5). This stage isolates the families and individuals, making them feel that they do not have a place within the church. They are then pushed out of the group and out of the church. As sad as this stage may be, it does happen to families within the body. One study found that “one in three parents had left their congregation because their child with intellectual disability was not welcomed or included” (Jones, et al.) Carter argues that this form of ministry is not ministry at all, because it “is unfaithful to the Gospel” (5). As discussed previously in this paper, Jesus made it a habit to reach out to those on the outskirts, and His body is called to do the

same. Carter even goes so far as to say that “for individuals and families who experience exclusion, the impact on their faith, their friendships, and their flourishing can be profound” (6). With all of this in mind, families should never be made to feel excluded from the body.

Separation

The second model of Carter’s image is separation, or “ministry to” (6). Separation in a congregation usually looks like a separate ministry for those with disabilities. This typically looks like a Bible study held outside of normal church hours for individuals with disabilities, or a once-a-year big event for families and individuals with disabilities. It is not a ministry that merges the two populations of people, but rather lets them work beside one another. This form of ministry is best described as a “parallel ministry ... in which the lives of members with and without disabilities rarely intersect” (Carter, 6). Although this ministry can be formed out of a good intent, it still makes individuals and families with disabilities feel outcast in some regards. Carter argues that this is due to the fact that the separation model leaves little room for “opportunities for reciprocity and relationships” to form between disabled and non-disabled people (6). These relationships are one of the core aspects to belonging, and when they are missing, people rarely feel as if they belong.

Integration

The third model of Carter’s image is integration, or “ministry among” (6). Integration is a step in the right direction when it comes to belonging, but there is still something left to be desired. This form of ministry often looks like individuals with disabilities being included in a part of the sermon, but then being dismissed to go to their own area for their ‘real learning.’ Another example of this can look like a specific class for individuals with disabilities, which again does not cross over with individuals who do not have disabilities. Even though “people

with disabilities are present within their congregation at the same times as other members, a certain degree of distance remains” (6). Once again, this ministry is closer to belonging, but it still does not give individuals and families with disabilities all of the opportunities that they deserve in the Church.

Inclusion

Carter’s fourth model of ministry is inclusion, or “ministry with” (7). Inclusion ministry is best described as “ensuring individuals with intellectual disability are encouraged and supported to participate in the same breadth of valued experiences as anyone else. It reflects a noticeable shift in posture – for ministry *among* to ministry *with*” (Carter, 7). One way of looking at disability ministry within this context of this model is to see it as a ministry that supports Hazel, “to be a part of all the congregation offers” (Carter, 7). The one drawback with this stage of ministry is that it can open the door to individuals with disabilities being in the same physical space as everyone else, but not truly participating how others are given the opportunity to.

Belonging

The fifth and final stage of Carter’s image is belonging, or “ministry with and by” (7). Belonging ministry is doing life together, side by side in every aspect and in every way. It is giving all kinds of individuals the opportunity to work, serve, love, worship and learn together. In Carter’s research with parents of and individuals with disabilities he found that there are “ten aspects of belonging” in a church community; these include “to be present, invited, welcomed, known, accepted, supported, cared for, befriended, needed, and loved” (Carter, 8). When a church seeks to uphold these ten values, they are reflecting the heart of God and giving a family a space to feel deeply rooted and connected.

Plainfield Christian Church desires to be a place of belonging for all people, and *Seat At The Table* strives to implement that with families and individuals with disabilities. Hazel Barlowe and her family should not be marginalized or outcast from the Church body due to their differences, instead they should be welcomed in with open arms and given a place to belong. “Marginalization runs counter to the heart of God and His design for the Church. The Scriptures establish God’s compassion for the disabled as well as His desire for their inclusion in the household of faith” (Hulshof, 8). Instead of pushing the Barlowes to the side, *Seat At the Table* will welcome them in and create a space for Hazel to worship and connect with the Lord in her own unique way, while still worshipping side by side with others who are similar and different from her.

Conclusion

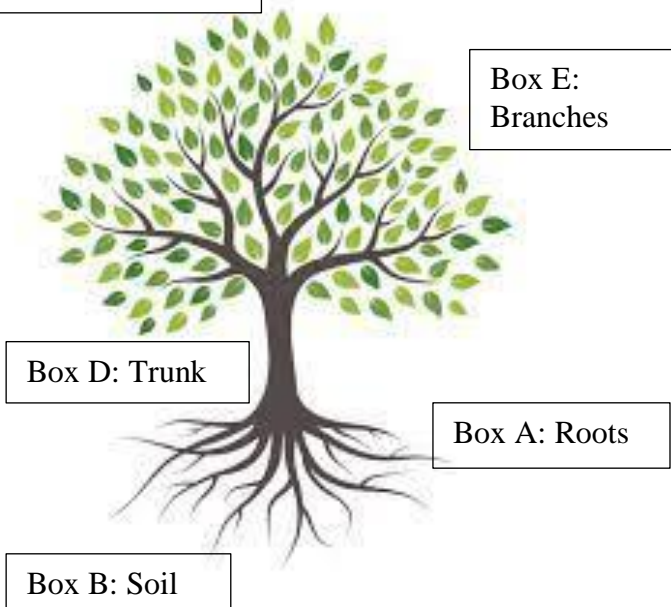
It is important for *Seat At The Table* to recognize the context that it finds itself in, whether that is the educational, psychological, scriptural, spiritual, or personal context, through their premises. In doing this, *Seat At The Table* can better understand how to function, how to best serve their members, and how to show God’s love through their ministry in the most effective way. Understanding the context of their ministry also better helps them recognize what their members and families are experiencing in their everyday lives. Though there are many important premises for *Seat At The Table*, the five most prevalent were discussed in this paper. These included the inherent value that comes with bearing the Imago Dei, God’s love for His children, the ability for all believers to use their gifts for the Kingdom, the necessity of relational disability ministry, and the importance of the Church welcoming in families and individuals with disabilities.

Section 3: Box 3 Profiles

Introduction

A healthy and mature tree is marked by what it produces, either leaves or fruit. In the Frankena model, Box C can be compared to the fruit or the leaves of a tree. This box can be described as the excellencies that a “ministry seeks to instill” (Taylor University Ministry Department). These excellencies are the “attributes, traits, and beliefs [that a ministry] desires to inculcate in the learner”

Box C:
Leaves & Fruit



(Glassford, 537). When stating the excellencies of a ministry, it is as if the leaders are creating a desired profile for members that go through the ministry. The profile of a mature individual that has been involved in *Seat At The Table* will include the following: being Active in service, Boasting in the Gospel, Living in love, and Engaging in community (A.B.L.E.). The hope of *Seat At the Table* is that individuals like Hazel will grow in these four areas as they spend an increasing amount of time with the people involved in the ministry and are taught more and more about Jesus.

Active in the Body of Christ

Seat At The Table desires for their students to be active members of the body through their unique gifts. As stated earlier in the Box B section of this paper, all believers – including individuals with disabilities – have spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12). Just as all believers are given gifts, all believers are also called to use their gifts for the body and for the Kingdom.

Romans 12:6 makes this point in saying “Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them” (ESV). 1 Peter 4:10 also communicates this idea; it says, “as each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace” (ESV). Believers are not called to sit on their gifts or to keep them for themselves, but to use them as “an opportunity for self-giving in sacrificial service” and love (Thomson & Elwell, 835). These gifts are to be stewarded and used in a way that edifies and builds up the body of believers and the Church (Thomson & Elwell, 832).

In light of this desired excellency, Hazel Barlowe will better understand her giftings and will be encouraged to use them as she spends more time in and with the volunteers involved in *Seat At The Table*. As stated in Box B, Hazel is very gifted in compassion and encouragement. Though she might not have the words to describe these gifts at the moment, *Seat At The Table* can still take note of these gifts and encourage Hazel to keep using them. Giftings will vary for each student that enters into the ministry, but the goal is for the volunteers to pay attention to the gifts of each student and to spur them on in their growth and stewardship of these gifts. As they use the gifts they have been given, they will be engaging in and being active in the body of Christ.

Boast in the Gospel

Students who participate in *Seat At The Table* will have heard the Gospel message numerous times and will be able to grasp it in some way. Along with this, the ministry desires for the students to be able to communicate and share the Good News of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection with others, as well as His love for His children. As stated in Box A, all believers are called to proclaim the Good News to others in some way, or make God known. In fact, “God expects his people to share in His quest to save the lost” (Webber, 292). In doing this they are

expanding the Kingdom and following the command given in the Great Commission – Matthew 28:18-20.

Students involved in *Seat At The Table* will hear the Gospel story on a regular basis and will become very familiar with it. The ministry does note that it can be difficult for some students with cognitive disabilities to fully understand the Gospel, but the message will still be communicated to them, with great efforts, to be done in a way that they best understand or connect with it (Hulshof, 165). In doing this the goal is that the students will be better equipped to share the Gospel with those around them in some way. Volunteers and leaders in the ministry will also help students figure out what works best for them in sharing the Good News. Methods for sharing the Gospel will vary from student to student, but no matter how it looks, their message is still important. Hazel struggles with a limited vocabulary, which can make it hard for her to speak well in some cases. Even though this is a challenge for Hazel, she can still share the Gospel through her actions and even through words on various occasions. She can do this by loving others, caring for them, and serving them. As Hazel gets older and more comfortable with speaking, she will have the opportunity to share the Gospel verbally. For now, though, volunteers and leaders in the ministry will continue to encourage her in showing others the Good News through her actions.

Live in Love

Seat At The Table also desires for all of their students to have a personal relationship with the Lord. As stated in the Box A section of this paper, part of the ultimate purpose for humanity is to know God. Again, the ministry notes that this will look different from student to student, but the goal, regardless of any disabilities, is for the student to know the Lord and the love that He has for them. As stated earlier in the Box B section of this paper, Jesus loves all of His children –

including His children that live with disabilities. His love and a relationship with Him are not hindered by a challenge or disability. In fact, He meets each individual where they are and loves them wholeheartedly. Once again, as stated in Box B, Jesus moves towards the outcast, the vulnerable, and the messy in order to pursue a relationship with them (Dearborn, 416). This was made possible when Jesus came and walked the earth, died, and was resurrected (John 3:16-18, ESV). Now there is no barrier between believers and a personal relationship with Him, He has made a way for all believers. As Jesus is pursuing this relationship with the students, *Seat At The Table* desires to help the students better understand this and respond to Him if they are able to do so.

Hazel is a very intelligent girl who can pick up on things quickly. She comes from a home where her parents talk about the Gospel often, so she has a good grasp on it already. Seeing as how she has a relationship with the Lord already, *Seat At The Table* desires to help her grow in that relationship. This can be done through challenging her in new areas, giving her new ways to connect with the Lord, and trying to answer any questions that she might have. Often children learn from example, so volunteers can help students like Hazel better understand a relationship with the Lord by living out their personal relationship with Him and talking about it.

Engage in Community

Humans were not made to be solitary individuals; they were made for community. In the beginning God saw Adam by himself and said that “it [was] not good that the man should be alone” (Genesis 2:18, ESV). This same principle applies today. In Hebrews, the author tells believers not to “neglect to meet together... but [to] encourage one another” (10:25, ESV). Paul tells believers in Galatians to “bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (6:2, ESV). Repeatedly in the Bible, believers are told to live in community and relationship with one

another. *Seat At The Table* desires to help their students find and live in this community as well, with people who are similar and different than they are.

Students who participate in the ministry, like Hazel, will have the opportunity to form relationships with other students in the ministry, with volunteers, and with individuals outside of the ministry. As stated in Box B, it is important for the church to be a place of belonging, and not one of marginalization or ostracization. In striving to be a place of belonging, these relationships will give students them a wide scope of connections and support. The point of this is for the relationships to be edifying, encouraging, and challenging in a good way. This will be done through the classroom, through different programming events throughout the year, and through volunteers. In growing these relationships, Hazel will be better connected to the church and the body of Christ. This will give her support and multiple opportunities to interact with people who are different from her. She will not do life alone but will be surrounded by a community who loves and cares for her.

Conclusion

As students participate in *Seat At The Table*, they will be encouraged to practice A.B.L.E. – be Active in the body of Christ, Boast in the Gospel, Live in love, and Engage in community. These four excellencies make up the profile of a mature individual who has participated in this ministry. No individual will be perfect at these four things, but they will be encouraged to grow in them and follow the commands that believers have been given in Scripture, as they spend more time with the ministry and learn more about Jesus and the love that He has for them.

Section 4: Box D Processes

Introduction

Box D in the Frankena model can be compared to the trunk in the image of the full, beautiful, and mature tree. This trunk is based in and growing out of the roots and the soil. It also acts as a framework for the branches, as well as the leaves and fruit that will grow from it. Without a strong trunk, the fruit of the tree will be scrawny and scarce. Box D can be described as the “facts of psychology,

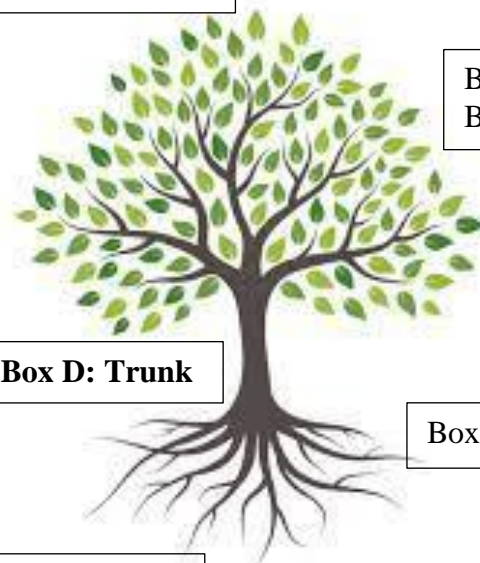
Box C:
Leaves & Fruit

Box D: Trunk

Box B: Soil

Box E:
Branches

Box A: Roots



sociology, and the science of education that show what means should be used to produce the excellencies in Box C” (Stevens, 302). This box is also described as the “processes” used to obtain the desired outcomes within an individual, stated in Box C (Taylor University Ministry Department). Learning theories, developmental psychology, and the role of the Holy Spirit are often included in this box to better explain how the individuals in the ministry will learn (Taylor University Ministry Department). Learning can be described as the way that individuals “appropriate, comprehend, and retain new information” (Blevins, 419). *Seat At The Table* will primarily be relying on two forms of learning theories, Gardner’s multiple intelligence and Vygotsky’s scaffolding, as well as the Holy Spirit’s active work in the ministry. The hope is that the combination of these three things will allow individuals like Hazel to learn about the Lord in order to practice being A.B.L.E.

Learning Theory #1 – Howard Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences

In today’s society, intelligence or a person’s smarts are often associated with their education, vocation, and accolades. When talking about intelligence, people often think of high IQ levels, the ability to problem solve, and the ability to recall information in a matter of second’s (Kaufman, 294-295). However, there is another way to think about intelligence. Howard Gardner has argued that there are multiple forms of intelligence and that being smart is not limited to book knowledge. “The 8 human intelligences proposed by Gardner are linguistic, logical, musical, spatial, kinesthetic, intrapersonal, interpersonal, and naturalist” (Boyles, 38). Gardner picked these 8 intelligences after “discovering that the brain has many distinct abilities” (Boyles, 38). He created this learning theory in light of the idea that intelligence goes beyond an IQ score. The idea that he was getting at with this learning theory was that all individuals are intelligent, their intelligence might just exemplify itself in different ways. About ten years after Gardner developed this learning theory, he decided that there was space for more intelligences to be included. He added two new categories, which are spiritual intelligence and existential intelligence” (Gardner, 47).

“Howard Gardner’s theory of eight personal intelligences allows us to think about how many different strengths and talents can be tapped to make learning more meaningful” (Boyles, 50). He opened up the door for individuals to learn in new ways and forms, and his theory revealed individual’s strengths that might otherwise have gone unnoticed. Each of his areas of intelligence highlighted a different strength, and though there are 10 distinct areas, individuals are not limited to learning in only one area. This theory gives educators a better understanding of how individuals can learn, and it challenges them to help students succeed in multiple areas.

Gardner's linguistic intelligence focuses on thinking through words, both verbal and written (Campbell, et al., xx). His logical-mathematical intelligence "makes it possible to calculate, quantify, consider propositions, and hypotheses, and carry out complex mathematical operations" (Campbell, et al., xx). His spatial intelligence has been described as "the capacity to think in three-dimensional ways ... it enables one to perceive external and internal imagery, to recreate, transform, or modify images, to navigate oneself and objects through space, and to produce or decode graphic information" (Campbell, et al., xx). Gardner's bodily kinesthetic intelligence focuses on the use of the body; this is often linked to athleticism (Campbell, et al., xxi). The fifth kind of intelligence is musical intelligence. Individuals that are strong in this area typically exhibit "a sensitivity to pitch, melody, rhythm, and tone" (Campbell, et al., xxi). The next area of intelligence is interpersonal intelligence. This is "the capacity to understand and interact effectively with others" (Campbell, et al., xxi). Next, intrapersonal intelligence is the "ability to construct an accurate perception of oneself and to use such knowledge of planning and directing one's life" (Campbell, et al., xxi). Gardner's eighth intelligence is naturalist intelligence, this "consists of observing patterns in nature, identifying and classifying objects, and understanding natural and human-made systems" (Campbell, et al., xxi). The ninth intelligence is spiritual intelligence. This was a harder one for Gardner to define, and he said it "contrasts sharply with the domains of science and math, which are relatively delimited and uncontroversial" (Gardner, 55). In the end, he defined this intelligence as having three parts: "the supernatural world, achievement of a state of being, [and] having an effect on others" (Gardner, 54-57). His existential intelligence was more easily defined and was understood as "a concern with 'ultimate' issues" (Gardner, 60).

Although this theory is not necessarily faith based, there are ideas within the theory that relate to Christian beliefs. As discussed earlier in this paper, each individual is created uniquely in the image of God and is given a unique set of gifts (Genesis 1:27, 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12:6, 1 Peter 4:10). This belief pairs well with Howard Gardner's belief that individuals learn and grow in different ways; just as people are created and gifted in unique ways, they also understand things in unique ways. *Seat At The Table* desires to use this learning theory in order to help individuals with disabilities better understand the message of the Gospel and seek out a relationship with the Lord. This will look different for each student, but the beautiful thing about this learning theory is that it opened up a way to "approach and assess learning in [a] manner [that] allows a wider range of students to successfully participate in learning" (Bruladi Timmins, 2). This means that students can use their different areas of intelligence to interact with the Lord and to better understand His love for them.

Hazel Barlow is both musically and bodily-kinesthetically intelligent. She is often making up songs about whatever situation she finds herself in or is humming her own tune. Whenever it is time for praise and worship on Sunday mornings, she gets ecstatic. She will immediately jump up from whatever she is doing and hurry over to the area of worship, so she does not miss it. When it is over, she often asks for one more song. Volunteers have noticed Hazel's love for music and, through the lens of Gardner's multiple intelligences, have realized that she is musically intelligent and learns well when music is incorporated. Hazel also loves being active. She loves to skip down the hallway, run to get things around the room, and play with her friends. She also loves to work with things in her hands. She is a tactile or kinesthetic learner, meaning that she learns better with more than just auditory or visual modes (Campbell et al., 65). Instead, she likes to be hands-on with things, it helps her better understand and think through what is

being communicated. The volunteers have also noted this as they have spent time with Hazel. With these two learning strengths in mind, they have altered some of the activities for Hazel in order to incorporate more music or hands on activities. She has thrived with these changes and is better understanding what others are trying to communicate. *Seat At The Table's* goal in using this learning theory is to incorporate areas of intelligence in the classroom that help individuals learn. Again, while this will look different from student to student and will take time to understand what works best for each individual, it is incredibly beneficial when used correctly.

Learning Theory #2 – Vygotsky's Scaffolding

Lev Vygotsky was a "soviet educational psychologist" who created the scaffolding learning theory and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Yount, 117). Vygotsky's ZPD is defined as "the distance between what children can do by themselves and the next learning that they can be helped to achieve with competent assistance" (Raymond, 176). In order to achieve the next level in their development, Vygotsky created the idea of scaffolding. The thought with this is that individuals are always learning and have a history of things that they have learned (Vygotsky, 84). In order to educate them further, teachers can use their base knowledge and build off of that. Doing this opens up the door for scaffolding, which is the act of "providing intentional assistance to learners who cannot learn on their own" (Yount, 124). To further explain this idea, Yount uses the metaphor of building a house. Often, when workers are constructing the walls of the house, they will use scaffolding to hold them up or support them (Yount, 124). In the same way, "teachers can provide psychological scaffolding to support new thinking until it can be processed and internalized" (Yount, 124). The scaffolding is used as a support system to help the learners "get to that next stage or level" of knowledge (Raymond,

176). Once the information is stable, the scaffolding can be removed which leads to the learner being “able to complete the task or master the concepts independently” (Van Der Stuyf, 2).

Scaffolding can look different depending on the scenario and what is most helpful for the learner. Often it can be beneficial to model things for them, to think through the problem out loud, or to even ask the learner questions about the problem (Yount, 124-125). Again, in doing these things, the goal is to help the learner grow more in their ZPD and to get to a point where they do not need as much support anymore. *Seat At The Table* desires to incorporate this learning theory into the ministry in a way that challenges and encourages the learner. For Hazel, it is a struggle to stay in line when walking through the halls at church. In order to learn how to do this well, in order to stay safe, Hazel’s buddy – ministry volunteer – has started to stand in line with her. She will then also ask Hazel questions like “Hazel, what do we do when we walk through the hallways, do we run ahead of the group or stay with them?” Hazel’s buddy is modeling the action for her and helping her think through the scenario. Eventually the hope is that Hazel will learn how to do this on her own, but in the meantime her buddy will be patient with her and continue to support her in her learning. As *Seat At The Table* uses this method, they will extend kindness and compassion to all of their learners. It takes time and encouragement to learn new concepts, but again, it is extremely beneficial.

Holy Spirit

Intelligences and learning theories are important to consider when it comes to understanding concepts, but if the Holy Spirit is not included in the relational and educational process, then all of it will be futile. Cameron puts it this way, “Without the convicting work of the Spirit, our preaching is in vain. Without the gifts, guidance and power of the Spirit, our mission is mere human effort. And without the fruit of the Spirit, our unattractive lives cannot

reflect the beauty of the Gospel” (113). When considering how to teach others well, it is important for individuals to look at how “The Master Teacher,” Jesus Christ, taught while on the Earth (Ewing, 10). It is no small thing that Jesus “spent some of His final hours on earth teaching about the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit” (Ewing, 10). Jesus told His disciples that when He ascended to Heaven the Spirit would come down and be their Advocate (John 14:26). He also said that the Advocate would “teach [them] all things and would remind [them] of everything [He] told them” (John 14:26). Just as the Master Teacher entrusted His disciples’ continual learning and education to the Holy Spirit, so should teachers and ministers today. If teachers in the Church fail to rely on the Holy Spirit and His transforming power, then the Church will see the detrimental effects.

It can be easy for ministries and educators to think of how they want to teach their learners and what practices they want to use. After individuals have made these decisions, it can be tempting to try to squeeze the Holy Spirit in wherever they can find room. Blevins points out that a better way to approach this “is to see the Spirit participating and working through the various approaches to learning” (422). When this happens, “learning then becomes a means of grace, a way by which the Holy Spirit may truly communicate grace through existing human structures and practices” (Blevins, 422). The Spirit is not separate from the learning theories that a ministry uses but instead is working through them.

Seat At The Table recognizes that they have the honor, gift, and privilege to share the Gospel with any individual who walks through the doors of the ministry, but they also recognize that the Holy Spirit the one who comes and waters or tends to the seed in order to make it grow (Ewing, 1). The Holy Spirit “uses the information [being taught] to bring about the transformation of individual lives” (Ewing, 10). Those who are given the gift of being a teacher

or minister in some capacity, are given the gift of having a front row seat to what the Spirit is doing in the lives of their learners. He just has to invited in and allowed to transform the hearts of those in the ministry. *Seat At The Table* desires to make space for the Holy Spirit to work in the lives of the learners in their ministry. They recognize that Hazel will continue to grow and mature in her walk with the Lord, only if the Holy Spirit is included. If He is left out of the equation, then Hazel will miss out on a key aspect of her faith and her relationship with the Lord. In order to include the Spirit in every aspect of ministry, *Seat At The Table* is committed to praying and inviting Him into every space within the ministry.

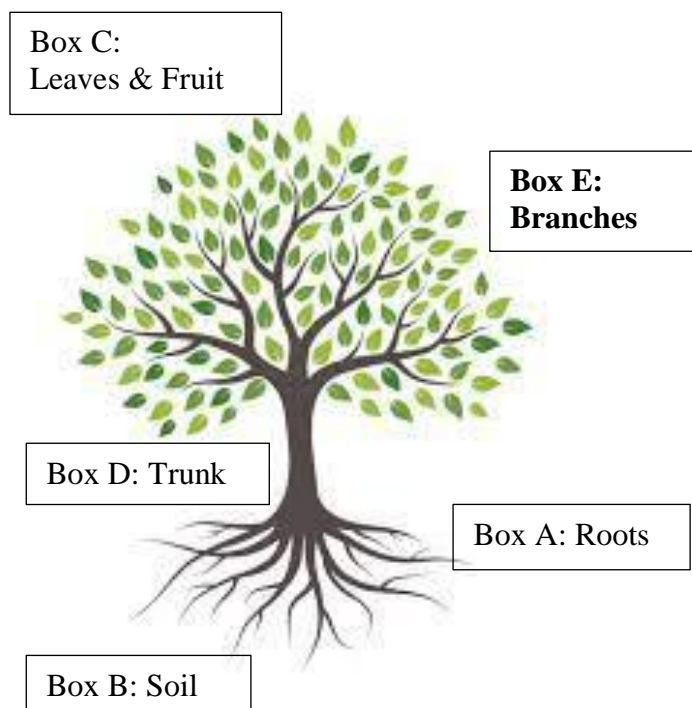
Conclusion

As learners enter and exit *Seat At The Table*, they will bring numerous forms of intelligence, skills, and abilities. Each individual will come with a different level of base knowledge and experiences. With that in mind, *Seat At The Table* desires to meet the learner where they are at and challenge them to keep growing in their relationship with the Lord. Helping these learners will look different at times and from student to student, but the time and energy that it takes will be worth it. In the end, the goal is for them to better understand the love of their Savior and to fall deeper in love with Him. *Seat At The Table* hopes to help them do this through inviting the Holy Spirit into the process, as well as using Gardner's multiple intelligence theory and Vygotsky's scaffolding theory. These three things will greatly impact the programming, events, and models of ministry that *Seat At The Table* implements for their learners.

Section 5: Box E Practices

Introduction

Box E in the Frankena model can be compared to the strong branches of a tree. These branches spring forth from the roots – Box A, the soil – Box B, and the trunk – Box D. From the branches will come the fruit that the tree produces which can be found in Box C. Box E “represents practical precepts about what should be done – how the excellencies should be produced”



(Stevens, 302). The practices found in this box are derived from the purpose, premises, and processes that were discussed earlier in the paper. They include Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, Respite Nights, Integrated Camp, and Family Fest. These practices will develop the profiles that were also discussed earlier on: Active in the Body, Boast in the Gospel, Live in Love, and Engage in Community. In implementing the following practices, *Seat At The Table* is intent on mobilizing individuals and families with disabilities to become an integral part of the local church in Plainfield, Indiana. In this section each practice will be described and then applied to the life of Hazel Barlowe.

Practices

Sunday School

The first practice that is a part of *Seat At The Table* is Sunday school. Sunday school classes create spaces for children to learn about the Lord, as well as the stories in the Bible. For

individuals with disabilities, the Sunday school environment can be a challenging thing. In response to this, *Seat At The Table* has two different options available in order to help each individual succeed: Sunday School Buddies and the Perfect Fit classroom. Sunday School Buddies are volunteers who go to the classroom with a student. The buddy will stay with the student the whole time “and may adapt an activity on the spot, remind the child of upcoming transitions, or provide familiarity and comfort” for the student (Lee, 63). The hope with this model of Sunday school is to keep the students integrated into a typical Sunday school classroom and get them engaged with other individuals around their age, while having a one-on-one buddy supporting them.

The second form of Sunday school is the Perfect Fit classroom. This space is a classroom dedicated solely to friends with disabilities. In this classroom, students will still engage in a lesson, worship time, and a craft, but it will be tailored to meet their specific needs and to help them succeed. “Often the atmosphere and pace of this class is more individualized than the typical” classroom, making it easier to tweak lessons so that they can focus on the multiple intelligences and different learning styles as discussed in Box D (Lee, 64). There will be multiple volunteers in this room to build relationships with the students and to assist them in any way that is needed. Although the Perfect Fit room can look different from a typical Sunday school classroom, this option still strives to help students better understand the Lord and build a relationship with Him.

Both of these forms of Sunday school are offered in order to create spaces for students to succeed. Success is the process of finding the right fit for each child, and it is a process marked with flexibility and patience (Hulshof, 164). Lee says that when trying to find the right placement for a student “the first concern should always be positioning that individual in the

setting with the culture and the teaching methods that best facilitate meaningful spiritual growth for them” (65). With this in mind, the Sunday school buddy is the best option for Hazel at this time. It is clear that she learns better when in this environment, and it allows her to make connections with other students her age.

While the main goal of both of these forms of Sunday school is to help students better know the Lord, they also seek to help students grow in being active in the body and boasting in the Gospel, as stated in Box C. *Seat At The Table* recognizes that they play a role in the spiritual development of these students, but it is the Holy Spirit’s responsibility to take the information that has been communicated to the students and to bring forth growth and change in their lives.

Vacation Bible School (VBS)

The second practice that *Seat At The Table* will be implementing is Vacation Bible School (VBS). VBS is a five-day summer program for all levels of learners. This time includes Bible lessons, worship, games, group activities, and snack. The goal with this practice is to continue to educate students on the Bible, to encourage a deeper relationship with the Lord, and to make connections with other students. Each summer the group uses a curriculum to cover a different topic. These topics build off of one another in hopes of the student growing deeper in their knowledge and wisdom. Every time a student comes back, they are adding more to their layers of knowledge, like Vygotsky’s scaffolding mentioned in Box D. However, this does not limit students who have never been to VBS before. No matter what the topic or theme is, students are encouraged to live in love – to know the Lord and the love He has for them – as stated in Box C.

Similarly, to Sunday school, VBS will have Buddies and the Perfect Fit classroom available as options for students. Again, the student and family will choose what works best for

them and what helps the student succeed. If they decide to have a buddy paired with them, they will travel with a group of students their age and move from station to station throughout the day. Their buddy will also carry a buddy bag with them full of “fidgets, a visual schedule, noise-reducing headphones, and other items that may be helpful depending on the child’s specific needs” (Peoples). Hazel thrives with a buddy during VBS, and she seems to be learning a lot. Her buddy has noticed that transitioning from one station to the next can be challenging for her. This led to using a visual schedule, which Hazel loves, because it helps her better understand what is coming next. Buddies can also help their student with alternative activities if something in the large group seems overwhelming or too much. A good area to calm students down or to give them a break is the sensory room. Often these rooms have swings, quiet corners, or areas to move around in (Peoples). If the student chooses to stay in the Perfect Fit classroom instead of going with a buddy, they will still have a similar schedule, it will just be modified in order to fit their needs and enable them to succeed.

Respite Night

Seat At The Table’s third practice is quarterly respite nights. These nights are events held in order to care for and love on the entire family. Parents are invited to drop all of their children off at the church and take some time for themselves. Volunteers then watch over, care for, and interact with the children. Children will have time to play, build relationships, and engage in their community as stated in Box C. This practice is a little less programmed than other practices and is more driven by what the children want to do. Each student will pick out what they would like to do from the list of activities that are available that night. This gives children agency and allows them to think for themselves. It also allows for nondisabled individuals to choose what sounds best to them, and either to stay with their siblings or to do their own thing. Some

examples of activities can include scooters, face painting, crafts, playing on the tree house, reading, snacks, etc. Usually, the night will end with a movie so that students can begin to wind down before their parents pick them up (Ability Ministry).

While the volunteers are caring for the children during respite nights, they are also caring for their parents. Giving parents this time allows them to get a well-deserved break and a time to just breathe. This is a chunk of time for them when they are not needed and instead are given the freedom to do something that they enjoy. Often, they come back to pick their kids up and they are refreshed and ready to engage their children in a new way. Caring for and valuing the parents is just as important as doing these things for the students. Johnston and Levert put it this way “thinking about your ministry to the family is as important as thinking about your ministry to your leaders and your students” (157).

Hazel loves respite nights. Her favorite thing to do during this time is to ride a scooter. She also loves playing with playdough with her brother Jackson. Her parents have communicated that respite nights have been a huge blessing for them. They use this time to go on dates, shop for Christmas presents, and reconnect as a couple. They love that both Hazel and Jackson are cared for during this time and that they themselves are loved on as well.

Integrated Camp

Seat At The Table's fourth practice is integrated camp. This practice will be implemented two years into the ministry and will either be a week or 3 days and two nights long. The duration of the camp will be dependent on the age of the camper. Plainfield Christian already has an existing summer camp program for their elementary and middle school age students, so this practice would be an addition to that program. This integrated camp experience will allow children to engage in their community – build relationships with people who are similar and

different than them – as stated in Box C. It will also be a time full of exciting activities, Bible lessons, and integrated groups with all levels of learners in order to aid students in growing in their ability to boast in the Gospel as stated in Box C.

Similarly, to VBS and Sunday School, camp will incorporate buddies. These buddies will almost seem like a second or third assistant counselor, making students feel more independent and self-sufficient. Each buddy will stay with the student and the group for the whole camp, being ready to meet any needs that may arise. Ideally buddies would be paired with students that they have already worked with and have an established relationship with (Tatum). This brings in familiarity and comfortability for the camper and the buddy.

Throughout their time at camp, the hope is that campers will experience things that they typically do not throughout the rest of the year. Examples of this are zip lining, swimming, kayaking, archery, etc. While the ministry recognizes that not all campers will be able to do every activity, they want to make every activity as accessible as possible. If that means getting a camper out of their wheelchair and carrying them into the pond, they will do it. *Seat At The Table* wants to create a place where students do not feel limited by their disabilities or challenges (“Making A Difference”). At the heart of all of this, the ministry wants to be the hands and feet of Jesus and show the campers His love for them.

As stated earlier, *Seat At The Table* is a vessel used to communicate the Lord’s love and grace. Volunteers can and will share the message of the Gospel with the students and plant seeds in their hearts. However, in this process it is the Holy Spirit’s role to grow these seeds in order to bear fruit, as stated in Box D. *Seat At The Table* is just aiding in the process.

Since this practice is going to be implemented during the second year of the ministry, Hazel has not experienced it yet. With this in mind though, the hope is that Hazel will love camp

and grow from participating in it. The goal is to further her knowledge of Jesus and His love for her, connect her with other people in her community, and aid her in participating in new and exciting activities. Her parents are already looking forward to when this day comes, and they are confident that she is going to enjoy this practice. *Seat At The Table* does recognize that there might be some individuals who cannot attend this camp due to higher levels of need and support. Even though they are not able to attend, *Seat At The Table* wants to encourage families to still participate in some form of camp. That is why the ministry has funding set aside to aid families, with higher levels of need, in going to Joni & Friends Family Camp (“Information for Families”).

Family Fest

Seat At The Table's last practice is family fest. This will occur once a year and will be implemented during the third year of this ministry. The vision with family fest is to create a space for families and individuals with special needs to commune with others in similar situations and build relationships. In Box C this is called engaging in community. This event will be full of fun activities such as face painting, games, prizes, dancing, snacks, etc. (Tatum). There will be something for the whole family to enjoy. This event will also serve as an opportunity for outreach. Parents and students will be highly encouraged to invite their friends or other families who have not been a part of the ministry before to come to the event, in hopes of these new families making connections and finding a place of belonging and support, regardless of any challenges that they might face (Hubach, 153).

Family Fest will also be used as a time for students to be active in the body as stated in Box C. Students can do this by volunteering at different stations, greeting people at the door, helping set up, clean up, or even encourage other students to try new activities. As stated earlier,

Hazel is a great encourager. She can be active in the body by encouraging other students in trying new or scary things. She can also volunteer at one of the game stations and encourage people as they try to win. Even though these might seem like small ways to serve, they can make students feel valued and help them understand that their gifts are useful. *Seat At The Table* will use Gardner's multiple intelligence theory, from Box D, in order to help each individual find a space to serve. Just as each individual learns in a different way, they are also gifted in a different way.

Conclusion

Seat At The Table is first and foremost about helping individuals know Christ. With that being said the programming that this ministry is going to use to aid in that process is Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, Respite Nights, Camp, and Family Fest. Some of these practices will be implemented right away, and others will take time to put into place, but the hope with each of them is that children and their families will grow to be active in the body, boast in the Gospel, live in love, and engage in community. In the midst of all of this *Seat At The Table* wants to make sure that the Holy Spirit is included, because without Him, any of these practices would become pointless and ineffective. These practices are fun, and they engage the students well, but they are not what produces growth inside of each student, that is the job of the Holy Spirit; the ministry is just aiding in the process.

Conclusion

Seat At The Table is a ministry that mobilizes individuals and families with disabilities to become an integral part of the local church in Plainfield, Indiana; while also providing a space for them to encounter Jesus in order to build a deep and lasting relationship with Him. This ministry believes that all individuals were created to know God, glorify Him, and make Him known. The ministry recognizes that the following is true about the population that they serve: all individuals are created in the image of God; He loves all of His children; everyone has gifts to use for the Kingdom; individuals with disabilities need a tailor-made plan for relationships and learning; and the Church should be the place where families and individuals feel that they most belong. *Seat At The Table* hopes that all students who enter into the ministry will walk away being Active in the Body, Boasting in the Gospel, Living in Love, and Engaging in Community. In order to teach these things, the ministry will invite the Holy Spirit into every aspect, while also using Gardner's multiple intelligence theory and Lev Vygotsky's scaffolding theory. The practices that will be implemented in this ministry are Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, Integrated Camp, Respite Nights, and Family Fest. All of this will be done in an effort to communicate the Gospel and to grow relationships with individuals and families with disabilities. In a society where these individuals and families are made to feel like they do not belong or have a place, this ministry will invite them in and give them a seat at the King's table.

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