

Father Bernie Lindley

January 24, 2019

Church

This is Father Bernie Lindley from St. Timothy's Episcopal Church, for Voices.

According to the website, AutismSpeaks.org, in 2018 the Center for Disease Control (CDC) determined that approximately 1 in 59 children is diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Boys are four times more likely to be diagnosed with autism than girls. That would mean that, if there are 1800 students in School District 17-C, then there are approximately 30 kids in our community that have been identified as autistic.

Within the spectrum, some kids will be high functioning and some will have considerable challenges. How well those children will make the transition to adulthood will depend largely on the involvement of their parents as they advocate and seek the various resources their child will need to learn how to cope with their condition. The hope that a child will grow out of their autism is not realistic. It seems to be the case that children with autism grow up to become adults with autism.

I met a homeless man recently that shared with me that he is autistic. He says that he can endure only a limited amount of social interaction before he becomes overwhelmed. I have forgotten the exact term that he used, but he said that it is like his brain is hypersensitive to what I might consider as simply the exchange of social pleasantries.

I did a Google search on the symptoms of autism in adults. Google says these folks have difficulty interpreting what others are thinking or feeling. They have trouble interpreting facial expressions, body language, or social cues. It is difficult for them to regulate emotion. And they have trouble keeping up a conversation.

Consequently, it is difficult for them to hold down a job and they sometimes become homeless through no fault of their own. Too often, we try to blame homelessness on addiction and alcoholism. I would argue that the issue is more complicated than that.