

ST. MARK Catholic School: Embracing Students of All Abilities

Making Catholic education accessible to students of all abilities has been the goal of *ST. MARK* Catholic School since our inception in 2003. *ST. MARK* Catholic School was the first elementary school in the Diocese of Arlington to welcome students with intellectual disabilities, establishing the Evangelist Program and dedicating a classroom for one-on-one and small group instruction. *ST. MARK* has 18 years of experience providing instruction and services to students with a variety of learning needs. While we are proud of our past, we will not rest on our laurels and continue to strive toward improving and implementing best practices.

Research has shown the profound benefits of an inclusive Catholic school experience to *all* students. An inclusive Catholic school allows all siblings to attend the same school together, for students to be educated in classrooms with their same-age peers, and for children of all abilities to be active participants in classes. It is a place where ALL students are welcome, ALL students are valued, and ALL students benefit.

To better support this important mission, our Evangelist Program and Resource Program have combined their talents and resources as the Student Support Services team. In doing so, we are more fully equipped to serve the students entrusted to our care, to address a wider range of learning abilities, and to be able to say “Welcome to *ST. MARK*” to all families wishing a Catholic education for their children. The Student Support Services team is dedicated to meeting the needs of our students in our inclusive Catholic school.

This year at *ST. MARK* we have continued to work on becoming more inclusive by offering more in-class support, offering individual and small-group support as needed, and empowering all of our teachers to meet the needs of all of their students through a variety of professional development opportunities.

Additionally, an inclusive environment must make room for meaningful employment for those with intellectual or developmental disabilities. At *ST. MARK* Catholic School we have on our staff a former *ST. MARK* student who benefitted from the services we offered. We are also in the planning stages of collaborating on an internship program with the George Mason University LIFE Program.

We are all called to teach as Jesus taught. Jesus gives us the perfect model of inclusion. At *ST. MARK* Catholic School we strive to teach as Jesus did, to share the light of Christ with our students, and to be the Face of God to all. We are called to fulfill the mission to embrace people on the margins given to us by Pope Francis and the mission of inclusion given to us by Bishop Burbidge.

We ask you to kindly consider helping us with this mission of providing a Catholic education to students of all abilities by making a donation to *ST. MARK* Catholic School Student Support Services. Your donation would go a long way in helping us provide necessary services to students ranging from Level 1 (minimal support) to Level 4 (maximum support). All donations assist with costs associated with the following:

- Employment of Special Educators
- Employment of paraprofessionals (Instructional Assistants)

- Educational materials and supplies to supplement lessons
- Professional development for all teachers to learn how to diversify lessons for an inclusive classroom
- Employment of a staff member or staff members with an intellectual or developmental disability

ST. MARK Catholic School serves the needs and celebrates the God-given potential of all of our students. Thank you for supporting us and for being such an important part of this blessed mission.

May God bless you and your commitment to helping us provide a Catholic education to all students.