

Special Needs. Special Opportunities.

The lame, the blind, the children,
the maniacal, the helpless.

They were those whom society
pushed aside.

They were those to whom Christ
showed great love and compassion,
those in whom He invested and for
whom He made time. Though they
afforded Him no political, material,
or social gain, and though few would
have noticed if He had ignored them,
Christ made these people a priority,
personally bringing to them His
glorious message of deliverance.

The greatest spiritual leaders of
the cities, with all of their “ministry
busyness” and keeping of God’s
commandments, did not have time
or love for those who could not
return favors and gifts.

The unconditional nature of Jesus’
love was similarly commanded to
all of His followers throughout all
centuries—to love God first and
to love all others, not based on
appearance, gender, age, or societal
compatibility. Love entails making
time for and showing an interest in
someone, even when he or she does
not or cannot give anything in return.

One believer who has answered this call of compassion is Margaret Scott ('16). "In high school, I gravitated toward helping individuals with disabilities. There were two individuals at my church with whom I spent time who helped me see that I enjoyed working with those who would fall under special education. One was physically and cognitively disabled; I spent time with him, especially on Wednesdays, by sitting and talking with him and helping him around. I don't know how many times I have heard from him about a flying ship that was going to crash into the church, or about his concerns of where his grandpa was going to park when he came and visited.

The second individual was diagnosed with autism when he was two. I stayed with him as a one-on-one worker in nursery. When he grew too old for the nursery, I worked with him during a special class that his mom created on Sunday nights during church."

"I don't know of an exact time when I decided to go into special education. I just gradually assumed that that was what I was going to do. I decided to go to MBU because they had a strong elementary program and had the option of special education."

Margaret was hired by Friendship Christian School in Raleigh, NC, directly after graduating from Maranatha and began working as a Specialized Learning Center resource teacher in the fall of 2016. She teaches resource classes, which allow her to work with a smaller ratio of students who need specialized help in some of their classes. Additionally, she works as an inclusive teacher with

some of her students, going with them to their class to help. "The observations and hands-on projects that we had to do at Maranatha helped prepare me for special ed," she explains.

"My burden is for special education in the Christian school and church," Margaret explained. "I saw church families who had to send their children to the public schools because the Christian schools didn't have the resources and staff to work with those in special education. By having special education in the Christian school, there is an opportunity for the families in the church to send their children to the school. This also provides a huge outreach opportunity to the community."

Following Christ's example of love, churches of modernity must also serve the special needs community. "My church uses a buddy system. Each child with special needs has adult and teen buddies who go with them to Sunday School or Children's Church and participate with them. Anyone can be a buddy. A separate class can be utilized for those who are severely disabled. In a small group, the teacher can focus on the more basic information that the students can comprehend."

By reaching out and including the disabled and by sharing her time and sharing her Savior, Margaret Scott is making a difference "To the Praise of His Glory." She looks past their limitations and labels and sees their God-given potential. "Each person has a different strength. One of my students is great at counting money, another one has been working with one of the facilities men around church. They sometimes just need to be given a chance." □

A WARM WELCOME

- Train ushers to find optimal seating for families or individuals with developmental disabilities. Whereas some may favor seating options near a back exit, others may want to minimize their own distractions by sitting close to the front.
- Consider providing a comfortable place where those with special needs can watch church services on closed-circuit television.
- Organize a program that lends support to people who are caregivers of disabled family members.
- Assess the needs present and anticipate needs to come. Are there those in your community you could reach by having on hand a few Braille Bibles or hearing assistive devices? Find out if there is anyone in your church who can communicate through sign language.
- Invest in a wheelchair van to help transport disabled persons to church services.
- Interact with the disabled. Many people with special needs feel invisible and are used to being ignored. Take the risk of not being able to understand their speech. Extending a heartfelt smile and an "I'm glad you're here today!" may be the difference between their returning to church or not.