



**MEDIA CONTACT:**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Rejoicing Spirits Ministry celebrates five-year anniversary of including people with intellectual and developmental disabilities**

EXTON, PA, October 1, 2008 – The community is invited to a worship celebration of the Rejoicing Spirits ministry's five-year anniversary, Sunday, October 12 at 4 PM at St. Paul's Lutheran Church, 104 S. Village Avenue, Exton, PA, 19341. Rejoicing Spirits is an inclusive faith community that welcomes, values and celebrates the gifts of people with intellectual or developmental disabilities. The Rejoicing Spirits model of worship and fellowship has been adopted by 13 churches across 5 states and 3 denominations. The adapted worship service includes upbeat music, a meaningful and interactive message and special songs by the Rejoicing Spirits choir. After the worship, refreshments will be served.

"We are pleased that St. Paul's Rejoicing Spirits has become a national model for worship inclusion. Our efforts to encourage faith communities to be more inclusive have really taken root," says Susan Crawford, Program Director. "We have witnessed how the presence of Rejoicing Spirits raises awareness and fosters education, ultimately leading to the genuine acceptance of our brothers and sisters with intellectual or developmental disabilities. As congregants' eyes are opened and hearts are changed, attitudinal barriers are removed allowing congregations truly to become one in community. This has a profound impact as the congregants, young and old, go out into the greater community with a new attitude of acceptance regarding people with disabilities."

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To help other churches start their own Rejoicing Spirits ministry, St. Paul's developed a "How to Start a Rejoicing Spirits Ministry" guidebook which can be used by congregations of any faith.

Rejoicing Spirits was honored to receive the 2006 Presidents Award from The Arc of Chester County and the 2006 National Christian Service Award from Bethesda Lutheran Homes and Services. Another highlight includes the ministry recently being included in a nationally-released, educational video entitled "Creating Room In God's House". This video highlights Rejoicing Spirits as being an example of how Christian faith communities can intentionally reach out to include people with disabilities. This video accompanies, *Praying With Lior*, an award-winning 2008 documentary film that seeks to change the way people with disabilities are perceived and received by faith communities.

The Rejoicing Spirits model has been shared at both local and national conferences. Some of these include: *Beyond the Ramp*, San Antonio, TX; *One God, One Call*, St. Louis, MO; *Alliance For Full Participation*, Washington DC; *Accessibility Summit: A Conference for the Disability Community*, Tysons Corner, VA; and *Sharing the Harvest: People of Faith Respond* sponsored by Senator Andrew E. Dinniman.

Rejoicing Spirits is a founding member of the Faith Inclusion Network for Disabilities (FIND) of Chester County. FIND was formed to assist people with disabilities in locating a place to worship, and to better equip faith communities in opening their doors and hearts to these worshippers.

Everyone, regardless of his or her religious background, is welcome to attend the worship and fellowship time. St. Paul's monthly worship services are held the second Sunday of each month at 4:00PM. Other host sites are available at [www.rejoicingspirits.org](http://www.rejoicingspirits.org). For more information, contact Susan Crawford, [scrawford@rejoicingspirits.org](mailto:scrawford@rejoicingspirits.org) or 610-363-6264. St. Paul's Lutheran Church, 104 S. Village Avenue, Lionville/Exton, is located near Routes 100 and 113. The facility is wheelchair accessible and FM receivers are provided for the hearing impaired.

<captions for 4 photos below>

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**News Release Captions for**

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Please call if you would like digital files of the photos.



When the upbeat music plays during the Rejoicing Spirits worship, Susan and Joshua March join in with hand instruments.



Katie McCurdy (left) takes part in leading the worship by reading scripture. Her mom, Cynthia (right), lends a hand.



Rejoicing Spirits is a community that encourages friendship. Lauren Crawford and John McGuire have become friends. They keep in touch through email and see each other at the Rejoicing Spirits worship and events.



Rejoicing Spirits welcomes all people no matter what their abilities are. The ministry encourages spiritual inclusion. Faith communities take on a new attitude of acceptance when hosting a Rejoicing Spirits ministry. (from left to right: Susan March, Joshua March, Cynthia McCurdy)