AUTISM IN OUR CHURCH

As we celebrate April as Autism Awareness Month, let’s purpose in our hearts to be more welcoming to families of children and young adults impacted by this disease. Autism in the church is an invisible problem that alienates families within the church. Every Sabbath in churches families of children/youth with autism are ostracized, wrongly judged, pushed to the side and made to feel unwelcome because we don’t know how to support these families and provide for them the help they need. Our heartfelt appeal to every church within South Atlantic Conference is to equip the members to support families of children with special needs at church as well as at their home. We can start by:

- Initiating contact and establishing a relationship with the family.
- Home visitation to understand the needs, strengths and weakness of the child.
- Develop buddy/shadow partners for the child at church to assist in worship and study.
- Strategize ways for participation of utilizing his/her spiritual gifts during service.
- Start a support group to help families network with other families in the community.
- Include the family in social outings.

A FEW FACTS

- 1 in 68 children have been identified with a autism spectrum disorder.
- African American children are diagnosed 18 to 24 months later than whites, are referred to specialist less often, less likely to receive medical tests than whites, and often misdiagnosed with another condition.*
- Minority children with autism have a more severe problem with language and communication.*
- African American children with autism are likely to demonstrate aggressive and challenging behaviors.*
- ASD is almost 5 times more common among boys (1 in 42) than among girls (1 in 189).
- ASD tends to occur more often in people who have certain genetic or chromosomal conditions. About 10% of children with autism are also identified as having Down syndrome, fragile X syndrome, tuberous sclerosis, or other genetic and chromosomal disorder.

*Huffingpost.com/children of color and autism