



Center for
Disability
& Ministry

Nurturing Children with Disabilities

Purpose	<p>Over the course of a roughly two-year grant process (September 2024-July 2026), congregations will be asked to participate fully in the planned training as well as one 6-week session of equine-assisted learning/therapeutic riding and one 6-week session of nature school programming. Additional engagement with artists and liturgists will be integrated into the immersion experiences.</p>
Training	<p>Each adult member of the church teams is asked to attend three training sessions provided by the Center for Disability & Ministry faculty. These will be held at the seminary and oriented toward developing viewpoints and practices for attending to and listening to children.</p>
Immersion Experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Every member of the church groups will have the opportunity to connect with horses and nature in unique and meaningful ways. ● During each session, four churches will alternate engagement at Renew Therapeutic Riding Center with nature immersion at the Outdoor Discovery Center, both in Holland, Michigan. If teams are attending horsemanship in spring, then they will attend nature school in the fall and vice versa.
Reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Teams will reflect artistically on the immersion experiences using liturgical themes (awe, thanksgiving, lament, repentance, and connection) led by artist Joel Schoon Tanis. ● Teams will also meet with Dr. Erik Carter at the beginning and end of the program to be interviewed about their hopes and expectations from the project and their understanding of disability ministry with children. ● Program leaders from all participating congregations will participate together in Zoom calls twice a month with NCD leadership to check in during the course of their immersive experiences.
Resource Development	<p>Leaders may be invited to meet with Dr. Carlos Thompson who hosts a podcast (Disabling Church: The Podcast of the Center for Disability and Ministry) touching on various aspects of the project as well as other congregational resourcing efforts.</p>
Symposium	<p>Teams will be invited to participate in the CDM Summer Symposium on Children, Disability, and Worship (Saturday, July 11, 2026) culminating event. Additionally, a banquet with all participating congregations will be held to connect, celebrate, and share about the NCD experience.</p>

Training

Dates	Sunday evenings at Western Theological Seminary September 8, 15, 22, 2024
Expected participants	Each adult member of the team who will be engaging the immersive experiences and bringing knowledge back to congregational practice.
Topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Universal Design in Learning (UDL)● Engaging in a theological view of nature/creation as an expression of God's 'UDL'● Understanding how children, disability, and faith development are interconnected● Re-envisioning worship with an inclusive lens
Other	Dinner and child care will be provided for training participants.

Discovery Sessions-Therapeutic Horsemanship

Dates & Location	<p>Sunday afternoons: Renew Therapeutic Riding Center, 5080 146th Ave., Holland, Michigan 49423.</p> <p>February 2, 9, 16, 23, March 2, 9, 2025 or September 7, 14, 21, 28 October 5, 12, 2025</p>
Expected participants	<p>Each person of the 10 member team: staff, children, parents, volunteers</p>
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Using tested therapeutic methods of play and sensory engagement, the horsemanship immersion experience of NCD will invite riders and team members to observe and listen to horses and consider how animals and humans are interconnected as members of creation. These session will take place at Renew Therapeutic Riding Center . ● Some adult team members will serve as side-walkers while children ride. To help facilitate this process, applicants are encouraged to review the necessary paperwork for participants here: https://renewtrc.org/our-services/therapeutic-riding/
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● We encourage participants to go through a Volunteer Training to support those who are riding – many students require 3 volunteers during one riding lesson. Paperwork for Volunteers which can be found here: https://renewtrc.org/get-involved/volunteer-info/

Discovery Session-Nature School

Dates & Location	<p>Sunday afternoons at the Outdoor Discovery Center, 4214 56th St., Holland, Michigan 49423</p> <p>February 2, 9, 16, 23, March 2, 9, 2025 or September 7, 14, 21, 28 October 5, 12, 2025</p>
Expected participants	<p>Each person of the 10 member team: staff, children, parents, volunteers</p>
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participate in the ongoing conservation in our community's natural resources. ● Practice the art of sauntering and wonder-walking reconnecting to our shared natural world ● Learn about God's creation through experiences with plant life and wild animals indigenous to our area ● Reimagine education, play, and learning spaces in an accessible sprawling outdoor environment ● Gain an appreciation and understanding of worship in (not of) creation

Concluding Activities

Celebration Dinner	<p>At the conclusion of the immersion experiences, a <u>celebratory dinner</u> will be held for all team participants to connect, celebrate and share about the NCD experience. [Date TBA]</p>
2026 Symposium	<p>Participants may be invited to share their experiences at the Center for Disability & Ministry Symposium on Children, Disability & Worship: July 11, 2026.</p>

Questions?

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