

*“Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony...”*

Colossians 4:14

**We**  
**Support Hope Advocate Respect Empower**



The **We SHARE Support Group for Children with Special Needs** recognizes that caring for a child with special needs can be challenging, exhausting and sometimes lonely.

By God’s grace, the people of St. John’s, Marietta, lovingly embraced a ministry for children with special needs and their families to offer support and serve as the heart and hands of Jesus. After several months of planning, we started the ministry in January 2012 with funding provided from private donations, Operation Understanding grants, and a Diocese of Central Pennsylvania Congregational Development Project grant.

These precious children, their siblings, moms and dads gather once a month for fellowship, fun and friendship. We call it “Fun Night” and mothers and fathers bring the children to watch a movie, eat a “kid’s-choice” supper, play games, do puzzles, create a craft and listen to a story.

These awesome parents encourage, inform and support one another while the children enjoy the friends they have made. Our ministry welcomes all who have children with special needs at no cost.

The goal of **We SHARE** is to provide a safe space for families with children with special needs to come together not only to enjoy the fun and fellowship of being together but also to create friendships that offer support and encouragement, especially in the moments when caring for these children feels overwhelming. This ministry succeeds in achieving this goal and we all have been blessed and enriched by their presence which has raised awareness and an appreciation for the challenges the children and their parents face every day. Members of the congregation have faithfully volunteered their time and shared with others the experience of being a part of this ministry.

Friendships have developed between the children and there is an openness with which mothers and fathers share their challenges that has created a special bond. There is a genuine warmth and caring for one another. Absolute joy fills the room when balloons come in, candles are lit on the birthday cake and we all sing “Happy Birthday” to one of these precious children as we celebrate his or her life.

Every time we gather I think of Jesus’ words, *“Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.”* There is a lovely innocence about the children in this program that touches my heart and makes me aware that each of us is a beloved child of God and each of us has special needs, especially to be loved, appreciated and cared for with dignity.

As I embrace them in love, with sensitivity to their unique needs, there is harmony. We are the same...there is no difference and the **We Share** experience has blessed us both.