

## Guiding Words

by Kimberly Baker

There was once a four-year-old girl who had some delays with speech development. Her doctor and parents agreed that she should work with a speech-language pathologist to correct this difficulty. There were times during the sessions when it was frustrating, not being able to form her mouth or move her tongue the right way to make sounds which came so easily for everyone else. There were also those rare, joyful moments when suddenly she was able to speak more clearly and pronounce the word exactly as she had intended. After several years, the speech difficulties were corrected, the sessions came to an end, and the girl continued on with her life.

That little girl was me. When I look back at those years, I remember the speech therapist as a woman who tirelessly encouraged me to try again and again as I worked to overcome my difficulties. I no longer remember her name, but she is one of those special teachers I will always remember from my early childhood. I wonder how many other young children benefited from her gentle reassurance and guidance.

Today, it is easy for me to take for granted what I can do with my incredible power of speech. We live in a world which takes delight in wit, quick “comebacks,” and clever wordplay in political discourse, entertainment, and of course, in everyday conversation. It is easy to forget the power of words to either tear down or to affirm others, and even easier to take for granted the ability to speak at all.

A culture that respects life seeks to accompany others in various life circumstances, reminding them of their worth and dignity, which cannot be taken away. When we encounter fragility and brokenness, especially in those who are struggling or suffering in some way, we each have the capacity to guide others to the light of God’s love through our attentiveness and tender encouragement—especially through our words.

It is in concrete circumstances that we can each be a ray of light to another, reflecting back his or her dignity through the words we choose. The person may be facing a terminal illness, wondering whether life is worth living; living with a disability and questioning her value; or struggling with depression, lacking the hope to continue on. God has a purpose for every life he creates, and it is amazing to know that each one of us has been loved from all eternity.

We have each been created with a tremendous capacity to love. Let us be attentive to the daily opportunities to speak to others of their sacredness in God’s eyes. How much are we willing to gently guide others—sometimes out of very dark places—closer to the light of God’s love? However brief the encounter, you never know how much your loving, affirming words can positively impact one life.

*Kimberly Baker is programs and projects coordinator for the Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities, US Conference of Catholic Bishops. For more information on the bishops’ pro-life activities, please visit [www.usccb.org/prolife](http://www.usccb.org/prolife).*