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Deacons help to expand church's welcome

DERWOOD, MD. -- With commanding authority, Meghan Jones stepped to the microphone in the sanctuary and welcomed the congregation to St. Francis of Assisi Church here, and then announced the beginning of the feast of the Epiphany liturgy.

Jones, an active member of the parish, was one of 24 special needs teens and adults who played a role in a recent liturgy that would not have been possible had it not been for some frustrated parents, two willing deacons and a cardinal intent on expanding the church's welcome to people with disabilities. The story of the genesis of this liturgy as well as the development of Upcounty Community Resources in suburban Maryland, within the Washington archdiocese, is a tale of a changing church and the increasing roles engaged laity and the permanent diaconate play in its work.

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