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principles that call disciples to godly character and healthy relationships. One reflection on James 1:19–20 especially stood out: “James emphasizes listening, because it is when we listen that we begin to understand.” What I noticed was that within the low-key atmosphere, many of us were able to meditate on the scriptures being shared in the lesson.

On Saturday there were a few classes to choose from. The one that stuck out to me the most was Brooke Caswell’s “The Heart of Jesus: Extending the Olive Branch.” There were two parts to this class. The first was Brooke’s journey with autism, and the second was Jesus’ friendship with Zacchaeus. She began by describing her life before realizing that she may be on the spectrum:

“I didn’t know that I was autistic. Which meant... my needs were never quite met. And those unmet needs? They had caught up with me by the time I got to high school, and I struggled and fell hard...”

After sharing about her journey, Brooke connected her story to Jesus’ interaction with Zacchaeus. She explained how Christ’s willingness to see, welcome, and dine with Zacchaeus became a model for how she approaches forgiveness, hospitality, and understanding in her own life. She also shared how this passage shaped the way she seeks to educate neurotypical people about autism with grace, patience, and compassion.

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> **God Was Searching for Them All Along**

July 21, 2026 • Layla Matar – Beirut, Lebanon

Long before Alain and Eliana ever stepped into our church, God was pursuing their hearts; speaking through dreams, revealing himself through his Word, and lovingly calling them closer. Then came one more gentle invitation: while watching one of our...

> **CHORD Leadership Center Announces Certificate in Spiritual Leadership Formation**

July 20, 2026 • CHORD Leadership Center

Christian leadership is more than influence or management, it is a lifelong spiritual vocation. The CHORD Leadership Center is launching its new Certificate in Spiritual Leadership Formation...

> **Pioneer Valley, Mass Church Seeks Campus Ministers**

July 20, 2026 • Elias Deleault – Chicopee, MA, USA

The Pioneer Valley Church is located in Chicopee, MA and is surrounded by 13 college campuses that total nearly 65,000 students. Our campus ministry of 17 students is represented on five of them. We’re a...

> **Madison, Wisconsin Seeks Campus Ministers**

July 17, 2026 • Dan Winchester – Madison, WI, USA

The Madison Church is building our campus ministry team! We are excited to invite spiritual leaders to join us as we strive to build God’s church in Madison, Wisconsin. God has blessed us with a younger fellowship of about 100 disciples, comprised mostly...

What made this conference remarkable was not only the wisdom shared by the speakers, but the atmosphere created by all who attended. Everyone who attended seemed genuinely comfortable being themselves. Some attendees stimmed freely during sessions, others wore headphones or quietly stepped out when they needed a break, and no one appeared pressured to perform socially or fit in a certain way.

There were also these moments throughout the weekend when something a speaker said would quietly move an attendee to tears from finally being seen, understood, or deeply validated.

This conference reminded us that belonging is not created merely through programs or presentations, but through intentional love, patience, and understanding. Throughout the weekend, we witnessed what happens when people are given space to be honest, human, and fully themselves without judgment. Belong was more than a conference about autism—it was a glimpse of the kind of community Jesus creates: one where people are truly seen, heard, and welcomed.

Save the date for 2027 Belong 2.0 from April 30 – May 1 in Fort Worth, Texas. Registration will open around September 1, 2026. For more information about Belong please email belong@dfwchurch.net

Editor’s note: This has been cut due to space, please search for this story on DisciplesToday.org for the entire article.



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To Inspire, Inform, Unify and Grow
the International Churches of Christ

INTERNATIONAL & LOCAL NEWS BULLETIN

WWW.DISCIPLESTODAY.ORG • ISSUE 1070

The Joy of Being Seen: A Review of the Belong Conference

UPCOMING EVENTS

US ICMC

July 30-August 2, 2026
Milwaukee, WI, USA

North American Singles Conference

September 3-6, 2026
Baltimore, MD, USA

DT Travel 2026 Mediterranean Cruise: Footsteps of Paul
September 12–22, 2026

North American Teachers Conference

September 17-19, 2026
Raleigh, NC, USA

Spacon

October 2-4, 2026
Brisbane, Australia

Minister’s Wellness Webinar

October 15, 2026
Online

Conferencia de Las Americas

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
Oct 15-18, 2026

July 21, 2026 • Franklin Castillo – Dallas-Fort Worth, TX, USA

On April 24th and 25th, Jennifer and I had the privilege of attending “Belong” – a church conference envisioned by Marty and Erin Chavez. The conference was created to help disciples better understand autism through lessons, testimonies, and conversations led by both autistic and

neurotypical speakers who have loved ones on the spectrum. After attending Belong, I wanted to share some of the moments that made the weekend such an inspiring and meaningful experience for us.

When we arrived on Friday to pick up our shirts and lanyards, we were warmly greeted by volunteers. The atmosphere was calm, peaceful, and welcoming. At the registration desk, attendees were invited to choose one of three colored stickers for their lanyards to help communicate their comfort level with social interaction. A green sticker meant “say hello,” yellow meant “ask me about my stickers,” and red meant “wave and wait.”

When we stepped inside the auditorium, we noticed that many of the chairs in the center section were spaced farther apart to allow for additional comfort and personal space. Round tables with seating were also arranged along the sides of the room, creating a more relaxed and accommodating environment.

Many of us got excited when Marty gave a rundown of what to expect for Friday evening: an icebreaker activity, dinner with a variety of options, worship songs, and a keynote lesson. After the keynote, the remainder of the night would include dessert, a movie in the auditorium, a karaoke machine in the studio room, board games and card games, a camera station in the hallway, and a quiet room for those needing a calmer environment.

The keynote lesson “Rethink Simple” by Axl Chavez focused on scriptural



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