

Ushers & Ministers of Hospitality Welcoming Parishioners with disAbilities



Hospitality is not an additional courtesy; it is a central component of the Christian message, attitude, and behavior; and therefore is integral to the liturgical celebration of the Christian faithful. Ushers and Ministers of Hospitality have the unique privilege and the responsibility to create this cordial and welcoming environment for the parish community.

Each of us has a need to belong and be included. People with disAbilities want to be included and involved just as other parishioners. They have gifts and strengths to offer to the worshipping community. Ushers and Ministers of Hospitality have the rich opportunity to be the first to welcome, and perhaps to recognize and acknowledge the giftedness of a parishioner who has a disAbility. They may be the ones to help a parish dispel attitudinal and physical barriers that hinder some people from participating fully in liturgical worship.

The following suggestions can help Ministers of Hospitality (and all of us) make a parish warmer and more accommodating to persons with disAbilities.

- † Have someone stationed at a ramp door entrance to open door if needed and assist person with disAbility to their seat. (before and after liturgy)
- † Acknowledge people with disAbilities. (notice the Ability of the person)
- † Speak directly to the person. Don't treat a companion as the intermediary.
- † A warm smile, friendly conversation, and handshake create a welcoming environment.
- † It is never wrong to offer assistance; but LISTEN to the response and ABIDE BY IT.
- † Do not take hold of a person using crutches, a walker, or a white cane unless he or she indicates a need for assistance. Such an action may frighten a person or cause loss of balance.
- † When lifting a wheelchair, follow the person's instructions completely and without question.
- † Do not touch or move wheelchairs or crutches or other devices out of reach of the person who uses them. These are extensions of one's person and should be treated as such.
- † Seat parishioners with disAbilities with family and friends. (Having some shorter pews throughout the worship space, allows those in wheelchairs more flexible seating.)
- † Ask where he or she would like to receive communion and make the Extraordinary Eucharistic Ministers aware of this. (Precious Body and Blood)
- † When in conversation, speak moderately loud, but do not shout; shouting make words less intelligible.
- † Have pen and paper available; sometimes a written message is the best communication.
- † Become acquainted with the location and operation of assistive listening devices.
- † When greeting a person who has a visual impairment, identify yourself.

- † Give directions and explanations clearly and simply.
- † Don't be afraid of using "See" or "Look" in your conversation with a person who is blind. You can't avoid them anymore than a blind person can because there just aren't any reasonable substitutes.
- † If a person wishes to be led, offer an arm, walk slightly ahead and proceed normally, avoiding sudden or jerky movements.
- † Offer assistance during Communion by extending an elbow; never grab or push.
- † Offer the parish bulletin, whether you think a person can read or comprehend it.
- † Offer Braille or large print worship aids, bulletins and hymnals if they're available. Bulletins on tape could be a youth group activity.
- † Identify parishioners who would assist persons with disAbilities by sharing a hymnal, explaining the service, extending invitations to socials, making appropriate introductions.
- † As tempting as it may be to pet a dog guide, remember that this dog is responsible for leading a master who cannot see. The dog should never be distracted from that duty.
- † When you're leaving a blind person, let him know you are leaving. Don't leave him stranded.
- † Remember when referring to a person with a disAbility, it is Persons first. (Person who is blind etc.)
- † Invite a persons with a disAbility to share in the Ministry of Hospitality!

*This information has been compiled by Diocese of Buffalo, Venice,
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Website: <http://www.dioceseoflansing.org/disAbilities/index.html>

National Council of Churches – Equal Access Guide for Meetings, Conferences, Large Assemblies & Worship

<http://www.nccusa.org/elmc/disabilitiesmanual.html>

Pamphlet - "Do's & Don'ts Welcoming People with disAbilities" by: Marilyn E. Bishop
by: National Pastoral Life Center

Contact: 212-431-7825 or www.nplc.org

10 COMMANDMENTS

for Relationships with Persons with disAbilities

- 1) I am God, your Creator. I did not intend anyone to be in bondage. Liberation is a sign of the life I give to you all.
- 2) I am God, to Whom ALL shall have access. You may place no barriers before Me.
- 3) Remember the Sabbath, to keep it holy. The entire parish, excluding no one, regardless of disAbility, shall be wholly before Me.
- 4) I name you My children. Therefore, let no one else define My sons and daughters. Call no one "crippled" or "retarded" - They are PERSONS, persons with disAbilities INDIVIDUALS!
- 5) Fear not one another. I know the confusion of your embarrassment, your anxieties toward your brother's disAbility. You, too, are one with Me.
- 6) Know that I, your God, place good in all of you. You shall not look down upon or patronize a person with a disAbility. Recognize that the vast areas of personhood shared in common are far greater than the few differences created by a disAbility.
- 7) Speak directly to one another. You shall not treat a companion as an intermediary.
- 8) Your cup runs over with the fullness of life I give you, including opportunities for education, supported living, employment, transportation, meaningful recreation, cultural expression, and civic responsibility. Exclude no one from these opportunities.
- 9) I place within you varied gifts, abilities, strengths. Do not forget that these abilities, insights and knowledge are in ALL people.
- 10) Be grateful for, and learn from, the qualities demonstrated by persons with disabilities, including perseverance, humor, coping abilities, self-discipline, patience and creative victory.

Ministry with Persons with disabilities has numerous books and videos available from our Lending Library. Partial listing below:

- *Ten Commandments with Persons with Disabilities*
- *Opening Doors to Persons with disabilities*
- *Perspectives on Disabilities by: Mary Jane Owen*
- *Creating a Caring Congregation on Mental Health Issues*

To borrow these or other materials related to welcoming Persons with disabilities into your parish, contact

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