



DISABILITY COMMISSION

DIOCESE OF SYRACUSE

"Faith has walked up the stairs that love has built and looked out the window that HOPE has opened." (Charles Spurgeon)

How Can Parishes Begin to Minister to Persons with Disabilities?

One strategy for beginning to bring persons with disabilities to Jesus and Jesus to those with disabilities is to answer these questions?

- **Need** – Determine who is missing from the life of the parish?
- **Barriers** – In consultation with those who, at this time, are unable to participate in the life of the parish.
- **Response** – What concrete steps we, as a parish need to do to overcome those barriers?

How a Parish Might Use this Model

Listed below is a sample of possible questions that a parish might use to begin to better serve persons with disabilities.

Preparation

- Gather a group that will undertake beginning this ministry. Be sure to include persons with disabilities as part of this group.
- Identify what the parish has already done to include persons with disabilities.
- Determine how have modifications made a difference in the life of the parish?

Determine the Needs in Your Parish

- Ask parishioners with disabilities what they need in order to feel welcome, included and able to share their gifts in God's service.
- Get to know those in your congregation who have disabilities. Don't forget to include those who have hidden disabilities like diabetes, mild hearing loss, etc.
- Determine the extent to which adults and children without disabilities in the parish understand the needs of persons with disabilities. Are some disability awareness sessions needed?

What are the barriers that prevent persons with disabilities from fully participating in the life of the parish?

- Partner with members of the parish building and grounds committee review the entire physical plant of the parish using the Diocese of Syracuse Parish Assessment Instrument.
- Be aware that not all barriers to making all people feel welcome at the parish are construction issues. These need to be addressed as well.
- Share this report with the pastor and parish council.

What can the parish do to overcome those barriers?

- Determine the priority with which each of these needs will be addressed.
- Appropriate groups in the parish may then implement strategies designed to overcome these barriers.
- Consider having the Disability Commission conduct "Disability Awareness Sessions" in the parish.
- Celebrate the accomplishments that the parish has made to make it more welcoming and inclusive of all parishioners.
- Continue to find new ways to meet new needs as they arise.