



**ROMAN CATHOLIC
DIOCESE of ORANGE**

GUIDELINES FOR INCLUSION AND FAITH FORMATION OF PERSONS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

“By reason of their baptism, all Catholics are equal in dignity in the sight of God, and have the same divine calling.”¹

¹ *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities*. “General Principles.” Washington: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), 1995.



April 25, 2016

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

On behalf of the Diocese of Orange Offices of Faith Formation and Pastoral Care, we offer you the *Guidelines for Inclusion and Faith Formation of Persons with Special Needs*. These guidelines are in response to the US Catholic Bishops *Statement on Persons with Disabilities*. The purpose of these guidelines is to support the development of faith formation and inclusion at the parish level of children and adults with special needs. They are a resource guide for clergy, parish staff, and parents involved in faith formation and pastoral care in this Diocese. In the spirit of the National Directory for Catechesis, we in the Diocese of Orange affirm: “*Catholics with disabilities have the right to participate in the sacraments as full functioning members of the local ecclesial community*”² These guidelines seek to support our parishes as they continue their work of inclusion and as “we all continue to grow, helping to build a community of interdependent people, and discovering the Kingdom of God in our midst” (*Welcoming Parishioners with Disabilities* National Catholic Partnership on Disability).

In the development of these guidelines, we thank the Diocesan Special Needs Advisory Circle for their leadership and continuous work towards greater inclusion in our faith communities. Persons with disabilities bring many gifts to the church. As faithful Disciples of Christ, it is our responsibility and privilege to respond to the call to collaborate and grow together in faith. It is when we extend the invitation, when we welcome all, that we become one at the table of our Lord.

In the Peace of Christ,

Rev. Gerald Horan, OSM
Vicar for Faith Formation
Diocese of Orange

² *National Directory for Catechesis*. Washington: USCCB, 2005. 130; 3b-3.



Guidelines for Inclusion and Faith Formation For Persons with Special Needs

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) paved the way for greater inclusion in our church with the document, *A Pastoral Statement on Persons with Disabilities*.³ The Diocese of Orange takes a comprehensive and robust approach to these special challenges: "We work for the inclusion of all the baptized into the embrace of the faith community including those who because of development challenges, struggles with mobility or other special needs, cannot be present or participate in faith formation without assistance."

In the United States, about 1 in 5 people have a disability. It is estimated that over 52,000 students in Orange County are enrolled in Special Education. The Regional Center of Orange County provides ongoing service and support to over 18,500 people with intellectual disabilities.

The Diocese of Orange acknowledges our responsibility to meet the spiritual needs and concerns of this expanding population within our faith community. Several specific goals are outlined in the Diocesan Catechetical Plan. Some options might include:

- Develop faith formation and socialization opportunities at the parish level for children and adults with special needs
- Support the development of sacramental preparation programs, located and identified in each deanery, for children and adults with special needs
- Assist in the training and formation of qualified ministers to serve as catechists for this population
- Provide ministerial formation for those persons with special needs to empower them to share their gifts with others

³ *A Pastoral Statement on Persons with Disabilities*. Washington: USCCB, 1978.

⁴ *That they May All Be One*: Diocese of Orange Catechetical Plan, Diocese of Orange: Office of Faith Formation, 2012



ROLES AND EXPECTATIONS FOR PASTORS, CATECHETICAL LEADERS AND OTHERS

The *National Directory for Catechesis* outlines roles and expectations for Pastors, Catechetical Leaders, and others: “Every parish should seek out its parishioners with cognitive, emotional and physical disabilities, support them with love and concern, and ensure that they have ready access to a catechetical program suited to their needs and abilities”⁵

The Role of the Pastor:

It is the responsibility of the pastor to guarantee the provision of catechetical formation and experience in the Christian life for persons with special needs.⁶ Church law indicates: “It is a proper and grave duty especially of pastors of souls to take care of the catechesis of the Christian people so that the living faith of the faithful becomes manifest and active through doctrinal instruction and the experience of Christian life.”⁷ It further states: “Attentive to the norms established by the diocesan bishop, a pastor is to take care in a special way: that catechetical instruction is given also to those who are physically or mentally impeded, insofar as their condition permits.”⁸

Pastoral leaders set the tone for the entire community. If he is lacking in awareness or insensitive to persons with special needs, this attitude is likely to be reflected in the wider community. It is, therefore, essential that pastors:

- Attain an understanding about different types of special needs which exist among members of the community
- Offer the spiritual and moral support that is needed by persons with special needs
- Approach persons with special needs and their families and initiate conversation on an ongoing basis.
- Determine what means and procedure the Pastoral Council of the parish will utilize to address special needs concerns. Some options might include: setting up a Committee on Special Needs at the parish, or a sub-committee within the Religious Education or Faith Formation Council. (Persons with various disabilities should be included in the membership of these committees).
- Invite a special needs advocate to provide training on current paradigms in special needs

⁵ *National Directory for Catechesis*. Washington: USCCB, 2005. 61:B1

⁶ *Ibid.*, 54:B.1.

⁷ Code of Canon Law, c. 773, in *The Code of Canon Law: Latin-English Edition*. Washington: Canon Law Society of America, 1983. 253

⁸ *Ibid.* c. 777, § 1, 4; 254.



- Invite a person to be an advocate for people with special needs, preferably a person with a special need, to be an ex officio if not formal member of the pastoral council
- Hire qualified people with special needs
- Include people with special needs in a wide variety of volunteer leadership roles that are not only related to special needs issues

The Role of the Catechetical Leader:

Catechetical leaders, like pastors, have a responsibility to:

- Welcome those with special needs to be included into faith formation programs.
- Create new opportunities for those who cannot participate in existing programs, to have the opportunity to participate in specialized faith formation that meet their individual needs
- Become familiar with the methods and strategies for teaching those with special needs
- Use inclusive language
- Use catechetical approaches that reflect intercultural competence

Inclusion With Regard to Liturgy and the Sacraments- Basic Principles

- ❖ By reason of their baptism, all Catholics are equal in dignity in the sight of God and have the same divine calling.⁹
- ❖ It is essential that all forms of the Liturgy be accessible to persons with special needs.
- ❖ Catholics with special needs have a right to participate in the sacraments. Ministers are not to refuse the sacraments to those who, if properly disposed, ask for them at appropriate times, and who are not otherwise prohibited by church law from receiving them.
- ❖ Parish sacramental celebrations should be accessible to persons with special needs and open to their full, active and conscious participation according to their capacity.

⁹ *Guidelines*. "General Principles." Washington: USCCB, 1995.



- ❖ Parishes should encourage persons with special needs to participate, as much as possible, in all levels of pastoral ministry.
- ❖ A fully accessible parish reaches beyond mere physical accommodations to encompass a positive openness by all parishioners towards persons with special needs.

Guidelines With Regard to the Reception of the Sacraments

Baptism

Baptism, the sacrament of universal salvation, is to be made available to all who freely ask for it, are properly disposed and are not prohibited by church law from receiving it. Baptism may be deferred only when there is no hope that the person will be brought up in the Catholic religion.

Confirmation

It is the case that some persons, because of special needs, may never attain the use of reason. They are to be encouraged either directly, or, if necessary, through their parents or guardian, to receive the sacrament of Confirmation at the appropriate time.

Eucharist

The celebration of the Eucharist is the center of the entire Christian life. The criterion for reception of Holy Communion is the same for all persons—the ability to distinguish the Body of Christ from ordinary food, even if this recognition is evidenced through manner, gesture, or reverential silence. Preparation for the reception of communion occurs in the second grade in the Diocese of Orange, following a two-year process of preparation. The length of preparation for persons with special needs should be similar in length to that of our typical preparation process. Circumstances that may delay or advance the reception of communion are at the discretion of pastor in collaboration with the parents, director/coordinator, and/or catechists. If it is determined that a parishioner with special needs is not ready to receive the sacrament, great care must be taken in explaining the reason. Cases of doubt should be resolved in favor of the right of the baptized person to receive the sacrament.

Some special needs students may have gluten-intolerance or Celiac Disease. The Secretariat for the Liturgy of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has stated that the use of gluten free host may be validly used at Mass with permission of the parish. Gluten free hosts are manufactured by hand in a separate facility from the ordinary wheat hosts; they are



shipped separately from the wheat hosts so that there is no danger of cross contamination. In order to avoid any cross-contamination, it is recommended that two patens be used at the consecration (one with wheat hosts and the other with the gluten free hosts). Those members of the community who are to receive communion from the gluten free paten should either be first or last in line for communion, dependent upon arrangements confirmed with the pastor.¹⁰

Reconciliation

An individual may receive sacramental absolution if that person is capable of having a sense of contrition for having committed sin whether or not the sin can be described precisely with words.

Persons who are Deaf should have the opportunity to confess to a priest who communicates in sign language if sign is the primary means of communication. They may use the services of an approved sign language interpreter who is bound to the seal of confession. They may write their confession as long as the materials are returned to the priest for immediate shredding. Furthermore, persons with special needs who are non-verbal should have the opportunity to confess to a priest. They may use the services and support of a specialized instructor who is bound to the seal of confession. They may write their confession as long as the materials are returned to the priest for immediate shredding. Electronic devices must not be used in confession.

Anointing of the Sick

Since a special need does not necessarily indicate an illness, Catholics with special needs should receive the sacrament of anointing on the same basis and under the same circumstances as any other member of the Christian faithful.

The anointing of the sick may be conferred if the recipient has sufficient use of reason to be strengthened by the sacrament or if the sick person has lost the use of reason would have asked for the sacrament while in control of his or her faculties. In the presence of doubt, the sacrament is to be conferred.

Persons with special needs may at times be served best through inclusion in communal celebrations of the sacrament of anointing.

Matrimony

All persons not prohibited by church or civil law can contract marriage.

¹⁰ Coughlin, Barbara. "Catholic Communion and Celiac Disease: the Options." *Catholic Celiac Society*. 31 March 2012. catholicceliacs.org. As cited in "Celiac Disease, Alcohol Intolerance, and the Church's Pastoral Response." *USCCB Newsletter Committee on Divine Worship* October 2012. vol 47. www.usccb.org.



To ensure the inclusion of persons with special needs in marriage preparation programs necessary provisions should be made under the guidance of the pastor. He should consult with men and women of proven experience and skill in understanding the emotional, physical, spiritual and psychological needs of persons with special needs.¹¹ In this manner, he will help support the needs and gifts of couples preparing for marriage.

For matrimonial consent to be valid, it is necessary that:

- the contracting parties possess a sufficient use of reason
- the contracting parties are of sufficient age by both canonical and civic law
- they are free from any grave lack of discretion affecting their judgment about the rights and duties to which they are committing themselves
- they are capable of assuming the essential obligations of marriage
- they understand that marriage is a permanent union ordered to the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of children.

Pastors and other clergy are to decide cases on an individual basis and in light of pastoral judgment based upon consultation with diocesan personnel involved with special need issues and canonical, medical and other experts.

It should be noted that paraplegia in itself does not always imply impotence, nor the permanence of such a condition and impotence is not in itself an impediment. In order for it to be considered an impediment, it must be perpetual (incurable) and antecedent to the marriage.

If case of doubt with regard to impotence, marriage may not be impeded.

Catholics who are deaf are to be offered the opportunity to express their matrimonial consent in sign language, if sign language is their primary means of communication. Marriage may also be contracted through a sign language interpreter whose trustworthiness has been certified by a pastor.

Because the pastoral care for married persons extends throughout the married couple's lives and is witnessed to and supported by the entire ecclesial community, special care is to be taken to include parishioners with special needs in parish programs aimed at assisting and nourishing married couples and their families.

¹¹ *Guidelines*. "Particular Sacraments." USCCB, 1995. (cf. Canons 1063, n.2 and 1064)



Holy Orders

The existence of physical disability is not considered in and of itself as disqualifying a person from holy orders. However, candidates for ordination must possess the necessary spiritual, physical, intellectual, emotional and psychological qualities and abilities to fulfill the ministerial functions of the order they receive. The proper bishop or competent major superior makes the judgment that candidates are suited for the ministry of the Church.

Cases are to be decided on an individual basis and in the light of pastoral judgment and the opinions of diocesan personnel and other experts involved with special need issues.

Diocesan vocations offices and offices who oversee ministry with persons with special needs should provide counseling and informational resources for men with special needs who are discerning a vocation to serve the Church through one of the ordained ministries.

In preparation for responsible leadership in ordained ministry, the bishop or major superior is to see to it that formation of all seminarians includes preparation for services to those with special needs in their faith community.

Formation personnel should consult with parents, psychologists, religious educators and other experts in the adaptation of programs for ministerial formation.

Appendix One: The Sources From Which The Guidelines Were Drawn

- Code of Canon Law, c. 773, 777, 1002, 1005, 1025, 1041, 1051, 1058, 1063, 1064, 1084, 1095, 1096, 1106, in *The Code of Canon Law: Latin-English Edition*. Washington: Canon Law Society of America, 1983.
- *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities*. San Jose: Diocese of San Jose, 2011.
- *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities*. Washington: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), 1995.
- *National Directory for Catechesis*. Washington: USCCB, 2005.
- *Pastoral Statement of the U.S. Catholic Bishops on Persons with Disabilities*. Washington: USCCB, 1978 (1989).
- *That they May All Be One: Diocese of Orange Catechetical Plan*, Diocese of Orange: Office of Faith Formation, 2012 (for citation of Spanish edition see below).
- *Que todos sean uno: Diocese of Orange Catechetical Plan*, Diocese of Orange: Office of Faith Formation, 2013.
- *Welcome and Justice for Persons with Disabilities: A Statement of the U.S. Catholic Bishops*, Washington: USCCB, 1998.



Appendix Two: Resources

- National Catholic Partnership on Disability: www.ncpd.org
- National Catholic Educational Association: www.ncea.org
- National Catholic Office for the Deaf: www.ncod.org
- Catholic Celiac Society: www.catholicceliacs.org
- Xavier Society for the Blind: www.xaviersocietyfortheblind.org
- University of Dayton, Institute for Pastoral Initiatives, Resources for Inclusive Catechesis: <https://udayton.edu/artssciences/ctr/ipi/index.php>
- Archdiocese of Detroit. "Holy Communion and Celiac Spruce Disease." *Handbook for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion* 2012, pp 27-30.

Appendix Three: Diocesan Contacts

The Office of Faith Formation and the Office for Pastoral Care share responsibility for this ministry in the Diocese. These two offices are served by the work of the Special Needs Advisory Circle. For more information, contact:

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