

Ministry Responsibilities

Responsibilities of Religious Leadership

Religious leaders bear a particular responsibility in this area for they set the tone for the entire community. If a leader is ignorant or insensitive to the needs of the disability community, then it is likely that this will be reflected in the wider community. Some of the ways to foster inclusion of people with disabilities include the following:

Religious leaders set the tone for the entire community. If a leader is insensitive to the needs of the disability community, then it is likely that this will be reflected in the wider community. Here are some ways to foster inclusion of people with disabilities:

- Become knowledgeable about the different types of disabilities among the members of your own community. Offer the spiritual, moral or physical supports that are needed to provide these individuals access.
- Be aware that when a member of your community becomes disabled, or has recently given birth to a child with a disability, they will need extra support. Do not wait for them to ask. Approach them and initiate conversation on an ongoing basis.
- Set up a committee on disability issues to address a wider variety of disability-related issues. Make sure that at least half of the members on the committee are persons with disabilities.
- Invite a disability advocate to provide training on the new paradigms in disability philosophy to the committee. Agenda items should include (a) the moral implications of exclusion; (b) the religious meaning of disability; (c) the barriers to participation that people with disabilities and their families might encounter in your community; (d) the physical access problems in buildings; (e) and how to attract and welcome those who are missing.
- Have an advocate for people with disabilities, preferably a person with a disability, as an ex officio member of the pastoral council.
- Hire qualified people with disabilities.
- Include people with disabilities in a wide variety of volunteer leadership roles that are not just related to disability issues.
- Religious educators should integrate children with disabilities into their programs. Separate programs are not usually desirable.
- Religious educators should become familiar with and use a variety of strategies for teaching that include multi-sensory materials.
- Provide training to leaders of Bible study groups on ways to interpret the disability Scriptures in an affirming way. Work with the music ministers to select songs that do not isolate or offend people with disabilities.
- Follow the guidelines suggested for inclusive language and ways to preach the disability Scriptures.