

Parish Advocacy Program

Guidelines for creating a Parish Advocacy Plan

The approach of each parish is unique and any parish advocacy program should reflect that uniqueness. If your diocese has a central office of disability ministry, it is important for the advocate to be in contact with them for advice and guidance.

Mission Statement: The mission of the Parish Advocacy Program is to enable parishes to respond to persons with disabilities for full participation in the life of the Church community.

Goals:

- To meet the spiritual needs of persons with disabilities
 - To meet the educational needs of persons with disabilities
 - To meet the service needs of persons with disabilities
 - To meet the social needs of persons with disabilities
-

Objective I: Identify and assess the unmet needs, the existing resources, and the current level of access.

Strategies:

- Write an article in the parish bulletin describing the mission and goals. Outline ways to gather information. Emphasize access more than abilities, as many people who could benefit from accessibility features do not consider themselves as disabled.
 - Gather information to identify concerns and discern needs, existing resources, and current levels of access through home visiting, telephone calls, accessibility survey tool, the parish census form, publicity, and visiting group homes and care centers in the parish boundaries.
 - Host a meeting of parishioners to share results and findings of the accessibility survey.
-

Objective II: Provide awareness of the needs and gifts of persons with disabilities through education and communication to the larger parish community.

Strategies:

- Invite speakers, including persons with disabilities, to talk on disability issues for parish organizations, decision-making bodies, in liturgical services, and at educational venues for all age groups.

- Submit articles to be published in the local and diocesan papers.
 - Organize a companion ministry so that others in the parish can journey with persons with disabilities; including prayer network, transportation, social activities, conversations, and friendship.
 - Distribute copies of the Pastoral Statement of U.S. Catholic Bishops on People with Disabilities, the Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities, and other relevant resources.
 - Offer sign language classes taught by a qualified person.
-

Objective III: Invite and assist persons with disabilities to become active in the liturgical, educational, spiritual, social, and ministerial activities of parish life according to their interests and abilities.

Strategies:

- Include persons with disabilities in the liturgy through homilies, prayers of the faithful, songs, and ministries; such as, lectors, communion ministers, hospitality ministers, song leaders, choir, ushers, and acolytes.
 - Coordinate a transportation program for parishioners in need. It is best to avoid group transportation. Rather, link each person with a family or individual from the parish, so that they can be introduced to the parish through that family or friend and to avoid segregation of disabled or elderly people into a special needs group.
 - Set up a companion ministry for families and individuals experiencing disabilities to assist others newly disabled or parents of disabled newborns.
 - Schedule a signed Eucharistic liturgy every Sunday in the parish or an adjoining parish.
-

Objective IV: Provide resources and support to those in parish schools and religious education programs to assist them in meeting the needs of all students, including students with disabilities.

Strategies:

- Work with existing organizations to provide workshops for teachers and catechists.
- Provide resources through personnel and education for teachers and catechists.
- Challenge the parish schools and religious education centers to be physically accessible.
- Provide resources for parish schools and religious education centers to develop and maintain student accommodation plans.
- Foster commitment from the parish to partner in a financially responsible manner with schools and religious education centers to meet the educational needs of the students.

Objective V: Promote on an ongoing basis full participation of persons with disabilities in the life of the parish community.

Strategies:

- Advocate and work on an ongoing basis for accommodations to facilitate movement, including physical accessibility to the church and other parish buildings, interpreters, enhanced hearing systems, audio description, braille, cassette, and large print materials.
- Establish and maintain an up-to-date resource and reference center