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NATIONAL CATHOLIC PARTNERSHIP ON DISABILITY

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"ACCESS IN LITURGY"

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>> OPERATOR: Greetings and welcome to the National Catholic Partnership on Disability webinar entitled "Access in Liturgy". At this time all participants are in a listen only mode. If anyone should require operator assistance during the call please press star 0 on your telephone keypad. As a reminder, this conference is being recorded.

It is now my pleasure to introduce your host Ms. Lisa Tarker for FDLC. Thank you, Ms. Tarker, you may now begin.

>>LISA TARKER: Good afternoon, good day, good morning. Wherever you are across the United States, we welcome you to the NCPD webinar, "Access in Liturgy, Making Liturgical Ministries More Accessible to People with Disabilities". My name is Lisa Tarker. I serve as Executive Director for the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions and I am pleased to act as moderator for this webinar.

Today's webinar is being brought to you by the National Catholic Partnership on Disability (NCPD) in collaboration with the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions (FDLC) in partnership with the National Conference for Catechetical Leadership, the National Apostolate for Inclusion Ministry, the National Catholic Office for the Deaf, and the Georgetown Center for Liturgy and EnvisionChurch.org.

This is a final part of a two-part series on "Access in the Liturgy". The first in the series: "*Access to Liturgical Spaces, Welcoming ALL to This Place*", was held in March and was co-sponsored by the National Catholic Partnership on Disability and the Georgetown Center for Liturgy and is archived on the NCPD web site, [www.ncpd.org](http://www.ncpd.org).

There are some things you should know about this webinar. You will have an opportunity to ask questions throughout the webinar presentation. In the top left-hand corner of the computer screen you will notice that there is a Q & A button. Whenever you have a question, simply click on the Q & A button; click on "new" in the left-hand column of the form that pops up. Then type your question in the form and be sure to hit "send."

Also, throughout this program we will invite you to participate in a few surveys. In each instance, the survey will appear on your computer screen. To respond, click on all of the answers that apply and click the submit response button at the bottom of your screen when you are finished. The results will appear on your screen when all participants have had the opportunity to respond.

Now that the housekeeping is completed, before we begin with the presentations, let us take a moment to remind ourselves that we are in God's presence and pray together the prayer that is on your screen.

"Compassionate and loving God, through the example of Jesus who came to serve, not to be served, you have taught us that to minister is to look beyond our own needs. With the aid of the Holy Spirit may your Church's ministers be effective in their work and persevering in their prayer, performing their ministries with gentleness and concern for others. We ask this through that same Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen."

With us today is Dr. Patrick Gorman, Director of the Office of Worship for the Diocese of Madison and Karen Murray, Director for the Office of Persons with Disabilities for the Archdiocese of Boston.

I would like to begin this session with a reminder of a core principle of liturgy outlined by the Second Vatican Council in its first document the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy.

In paragraph 14 of the Constitution, the Council fathers inform us that, and I quote: "Mother Church earnestly desires

that all the faithful should be led to that fully conscious and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy. Such participation is their right and duty by reason of their baptism." End of quote.

The statement continues. And again I quote: "In the restoration and promotion of the sacred liturgy, this full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else, for it is a primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit. And therefore pastors of souls must zealously strive to achieve it by means of the necessary instructions in all their pastoral work." End of quote.

Paragraph 19 of the Constitution continues the theme. And again I quote: "With zeal and patience pastors of souls must promote the liturgical instruction of the faithful and also their active participation in the liturgy both internally and externally, taking into account their age and condition, their way of life and standard of religious culture." End of quote.

Since the Second Vatican Council, the Church has diligently worked towards fulfilling that mandate of assisting the faithful in fully active and conscious participation in the liturgy. But it is clear that more can be done.

With this as a starting point, I turn to our first speaker, Pat Gorman, to take us further into the vision and foundation for today's topic.

Patrick?

>>PATRICK GORMAN: Thank you, Lisa. I also would like to thank both the National Catholic Partnership on Disability and the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions for collaborating on this webinar.

Statistics from the NCPD show that on average about 20% of Catholics have some kinds of disability. One colleague with a disability once said that she sees more people on the bus and in public places with wheelchairs, canes, service animals and other visible signs of disability than she sees in her parish church. While not all disabilities are immediately apparent to others these statistics make me wonder, "Where are these 20%?" Perhaps our parishes need to examine not only the accessibility of our

buildings but the acceptance of our attitudes, as well.

I often wonder of those who have the gift and call to liturgical ministry, "How many are kept from saying yes to God because the print in the lectionary is too small, they can't get into the sanctuary, or they are unable to ascend the steps to the choir loft?"

I would like to take a brief poll and get your thoughts on this. What barriers are keeping people from liturgical ministry in your parish? You may mark all that apply. And I will do the same. I'll give you a moment to complete this survey. And when you are done, click "submit responses." I'll give you just a few more seconds and then we'll wrap this up.

And now our results should come up on the screen. And we're still waiting for those results. Perhaps those will be available later.

Now, when I was first invited to collaborate with Catholics with disabilities in my own diocese, I have to admit that I was intimidated. I'm supposed to be the so-called liturgical expert and I felt I knew very little about the needs and desires of Catholics with disabilities. A woman at the meeting who herself had cerebral palsy sensed my intimidation but didn't let me off the hook, instead she quoted scripture to me. She said, "What did Jesus say to the man who was blind in the Gospel of Luke? He asked, "What do you want me to do for you?" Then she looked at me and said very empathically, "Do what Jesus did; ask." So I did and I still do very often. And I hope to share some of those answers with you today.

I have three main areas that I would like to discuss, beginning first with the actual liturgical ministries, then continuing with suggestions regarding training, and finally, communication and welcoming.

In addressing liturgical ministry, I'll use many of the ideas, concepts, and suggestions found in the FDLC document: *"Guiding Principles & Strategies for Inclusion in the Liturgy of Catholics with Disabilities."* This document will be available for download at no cost from the NCPD web site after this webinar until September 30th, 2009. We're very grateful to the FDLC who is permitting this for all of the participants in today's webinar.

One caveat as we begin: While everyone is called to

participate in the liturgy, not everyone is called to participate as ministers of the liturgy. It is the participation of all in the assembly that is the aim to be considered above all others and this participation may be complete with or without undertaking a leadership role.

So before we begin speaking about access to liturgical ministry, I would like to reiterate some important basics that will ensure a welcoming place for Catholics with disabilities and indeed all Catholics in the assembly. These are based upon the principles of universal design, and these are described on Pages 8 through 11 in the FDLC document that I just mentioned. There are four basic areas I'll touch upon very briefly. First: lighting and visual. Good lighting is essential for everyone. Lights can focus our attention as well as help us participate with full hearts, minds and voices. The print must be large enough to be read with ease and it's helpful if material is available in various formats, including large print and Braille.

**Second, we have sound and hearing issues.** Just as good lighting is essential for everyone's participation, a good sound system is vital so that all can hear the spoken word. Assistive listening devices for those who are hard of hearing which amplify the volume for individuals are affordable and can be added onto existing sound systems. A place can be identified for a sign language interpreter that is near the ambo so a person who is deaf may see the action and watch the interpreter. Visual emergency alarms will alert those who cannot hear to the danger of a fire or some other danger.

The celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation can present unique challenges to people who are deaf or hard of hearing. Closed circuit systems where the priest and penitent are connected to a stand-alone amplification system with headphones are available for reconciliation chapels and having a priest who can sign at a communal Reconciliation service can be a great blessing.

**Chemical sensitivity.** People are becoming more aware of sensitivity to odors, chemicals and smoke. Perhaps the parish could designate one mass each weekend as incense free. It may sound silly to us liturgists, but for the person with severe respiratory issues, it is useful to have confidence if they go to mass, they won't have to leave when the procession begins.

In special masses, such as funerals, a small amount of incense may be used and then removed from the sanctuary when not needed reducing the amount of incense in the air. If needed, reserve pews for those with acute sensitivities near an open door or window, near an air filter or at some distance from the liturgical action. Listen to those with acute sensitivity and they will help you develop solutions and suggestions for paint, cleaning products, carpet, et cetera. And if necessary, remind all parishioners that the overuse of fragrances may make others physically ill.

**The last category here is celiac disease and alcohol dependence.** We're beginning to learn more and more about gluten intolerance and alcohol dependence in our Church. This is a problem that's even more severe in some European countries. Dioceses should develop policies and instruct parish leaders on how Communion can be made available to all people. People with gluten intolerance can always receive the precious blood only or may be able to use low gluten hosts. It's good to have them consult with a doctor for the preferred approach in their case. Those with alcohol intolerance may receive Eucharist under the form of bread only or they may use mustem. And the U.S. Bishop's Committee on Divine Worship has done some good work on this and they have useful information online in their November 2003 newsletter.

**Finally, we can't keep this entire secret.** There might be clear signs, regular information in parish bulletins and web sites and informed sacristans and greeters because accessible features help no one unless they are available and are used.

With these universal principles in mind, I would like to speak more specifically about access to liturgical ministry.

**And I'll begin with ministers of the Word or lectors.** I often speak about liturgical ministry as a kind of stewardship as we help people acknowledge their God given gifts and offer them back to God with thanks and praise. For ministers of the Word, reading with conviction and boldness, possessing a voice that can be understood, and having the maturity to interpret Scripture are the main gifts required.

If someone possesses those gifts what are some of the barriers that may still be keeping them from using their gifts for the good of the Church? Steps? A poor sound system? Lack

of alternative print format such as Braille? Not one of these barriers is insurmountable. The first part of the solution is always consulting those with disabilities. Often they have the best, most practical and even the least expensive solutions. As my friend said: "Do what Jesus did. Ask."

If a reader can't get a wheelchair behind the ambo that person could be next to the ambo with a cordless microphone or the lectionary can be brought to the person in another location. Railings can easily be installed to assist people who can walk but have difficulty with steps. A server can be trained to offer a supportive arm to those who need assistance.

Large print lectionaries and sacramentaries are available free of charge in 24, 34, and 44 type print from NCPD. The lectionary is also available on CD-ROM, making it easy to incorporate with existing lectionaries, printing only the pages needed. Xavier Society for the Blind offers a wealth of free materials in Braille, large print or audio recording that are mailed directly to those who need them. They have an excellent web site at [www.xaviersociety.com](http://www.xaviersociety.com).

Reading with conviction and boldness has nothing to do with mobility or sight. Removing the barriers that keep people whom God has blessed with the gift of reading with conviction and boldness will help all in the community meet Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh.

Now I move onto Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion. These people are called to be examples of Christian living, to grow in holiness, and to be especially observant of the Lord's command to love neighbor. Few disabilities alone would disqualify someone from this ministry. If a person possesses the gifts mentioned above, then unless they do not have a mature sense of Eucharist or the ability to use their hands in a way that can ensure reverence and safe keeping of the species they may be called to utilize their gifts with very few modifications. Establish a system that doesn't require Eucharistic Ministers to walk up steps or if that isn't possible devise a plan for someone to bring the elements to the ministers unable to go up the steps. Provide vessels that can be gripped easily and passed back and forth with confidence. People with celiac disease may also be assigned to distribute the Precious Blood while those with alcohol intolerance may be assigned to

distribute consecrated hosts. What a witness to the community and the intrinsic value and worth of each and every community member: a person who the world may call handicapped is chosen by God to be a full member of the body of Christ and is called to feed others the Bread of Life and the Cup of Salvation.

**Music ministers.** Some skills required for musicians are obvious if they are an organist, pianist, instrumentalist, or trained singer. In addition, there are often many music lovers in a parish who may lack formal training but are willing and able to contribute in this ministry. However in music ministry, same barriers are harder to overcome than others. In most cases, the participants must be able to hear, match pitch and understand basic musical concepts. Many involved in choral music ministry are elderly. Steps to the choir loft can become a barrier as can rehearsals held after dark, poor lighting, or a soft-spoken choir director. Most of these issues are easily resolved. Rides to rehearsal can be arranged. The music area can be accessible. Music can be enlarged. Small book lights may be made available to singers and the choir director may speak up and do so with clarity. Singers who must sit can be placed so that they can see and hear from a seated position. And rehearsals may be recorded to help those who have difficulty seeing, hearing or remembering. Now, many choir directors are not full-time employees so our choir members or parish staff can be enlisted to help with some of these tasks such as enlarging music, because facilitating access is everyone's job.

**Altar servers.** Those who serve at the altar must be humble and desire to serve the community by helping the liturgy unfold smoothly and with reverence. While the physical structure of the building may present its own barriers (steps, cramped sanctuaries, poor lighting) there are often less visible barriers. I have a friend whose adult son has autism. He takes great joy from his role as an altar server and while he serves with skill and reverence, he doesn't deal well with change or improvisation. An accepting and encouraging pastor has been one of the keys to this man's success. The pastor works with him privately as needed to build up his confidence and he makes sure to schedule him when there will be no surprises or big variations in the liturgy. When the pastor was moved to another parish, he even took the time to explain this young man's



situation to his successor. The server's mother also has served as his advocate helping with the training and practicing as needed. This example shows that a little effort goes a long way. The collaboration between caregiver and pastoral leader seems essential. They work together to find solutions which maintain an appropriate involvement in the ministry. And it's not only a blessing for him and his family but for the entire parish.

**Ushers and greeters or ministers of hospitality.** These people are the first to welcome all to the liturgy in the name of Christ. Obviously, few disabilities would disqualify someone from this ministry other than the dreaded. "But we've never done it that way before." Since these ministers often work in teams, caregivers or family members may participate as needed. All parishioners regardless of physical or cognitive ability who love to be around others and share the joy God has placed in their hearts should be invited into this ministry so that all may be welcomed in the name of Christ.

**I would like to move onto the second part now, which is training.** It's one thing to commit to removing the barriers, whether they are physical or attitudinal, to having full and meaningful participation in liturgical ministry for those with disabilities. However, the process is incomplete unless the training and formation of ministers embrace the same level of accessibility.

How do we know what will be needed to create barrier free training sessions? As my friend said, "Do what Jesus did. Ask."

On the most basic level, the room where training takes place must be accessible with an accessible rest room nearby. If possible, assisted listening devices for those who are hard-of-hearing should be available, and clear, readable printed material including large print material if needed should reinforce the spoken word. Adequate lighting is essential. Speakers should always be amplified and speak clearly and audiovisual aids should be projected clearly and in large print.

In addition to hearing and/or reading about what a minister does, it's good to see and do the actions. Every lector for example should practice walking in the procession, carrying the Gospel book, if that's your custom. How much more

important this becomes if someone walks with a cane or uses a wheelchair, if one cannot bow or genuflect, or if a minister uses a service animal. Once again liturgical leaders need to be willing to adapt and be flexible, always involving the person needing accommodation in the solution.

**Consider having mentor ministers.** We do this in one of the choirs I direct. Every member regardless of ability is assigned one of our friendliest veteran members. This person sits with the new member at rehearsal, helps find music in the folder, makes introductions to other members, and generally helps the person become acclimated.

In a similar program our office has recently partnered with a civic organization to help two women with disabilities become more active participants in their respective parishes. One of the first things we do together is help identify someone or several people from the parish, who will seek out this person each week, sit with her at mass, introduce her to others and make sure she knows about parish social events, volunteer opportunities and the many things of parish life.

I can see something like this happening with liturgical ministers again regardless of ability, so that a trusted veteran could answer questions, give tips and encourage someone just beginning this ministry. Training doesn't have to occur in a meeting room and it doesn't have to be done by the pastor or liturgist alone. Sometimes the accommodation is relatively simple such as enlarging the print on handouts. Other times we must be more creative and willing to work with the person with the disability for possibilities we haven't considered before. Ultimately this benefits not only the person with the disability but the entire people of God.

**And finally for my last section, communication and welcoming.** Our diocesan offices here in Madison underwent an extensive renovation about ten years ago, greatly enhancing accessibility. Elevators and lifts make all meeting rooms and offices accessible thanks to a fund established by the Knights of Columbus. The chapel and all meeting rooms have assisted listening devices. All permanent signs include Braille. The restrooms are accessible. Doorways are wide and the large main doors are automatic.

Now, about four years ago I hosted a meeting at our

diocesan center of a group that had gathered informally to discuss issues for Catholics with disabilities. They were so pleased with the accessibility and they asked, "Why didn't you let us know about this before?" The lesson I learned was not to assume that people with disabilities instinctively know whether a building will have the basic needs to welcome them. Taking their advice, we now try to include basic accessibility information whenever we mail a flyer or post an announcement about an event.

This working group also impressed upon me the need for commitment so that people with disabilities could trust that events would be accessible. If I go can I be sure it will be in a room I can access? Will I be able to hear? Will I be able to see the AV material or read the handouts? Is there a rest room I can use nearby? If these answers are sometimes "yes", sometimes "no", then it does little to build the trust that's needed.

So now on registration materials for our office workshops and training sessions, we note the level of accessibility and ask if a person will need additional assistance. For example, large print materials. We also list contact information for those who have questions regarding accessibility. It's been a tremendous help and a very simple solution. Communication and welcoming thus go hand in hand.

As you can see, there are many opportunities in liturgical ministries for all Catholic people. A person first needs to possess the gifts and skills necessary to undertake the ministry. And the artificial barriers whether created by the building or by our own opinions and attitudes need to be removed in collaboration with those with disabilities so that they and more importantly perhaps the entire people of God can benefit from God's generosity and providence. It's an ongoing task but one which bears delightful and abundant fruit.

Now I would like to pass this back to Lisa who will introduce the next section of today's webinar. Lisa.

>>LISA TARKER: Thank you, Patrick. You have offered us some key principles and some extremely helpful examples on which to reflect. We do have the results of your survey, and they will be posted on the screen in a few seconds. Right now the survey

is showing so you can be refreshed as to what the survey was about, and the results should be coming up in a second. I'm sorry. They are not coming up. However if Patrick's presentation has sparked any questions, remember that you can use the Q & A button at the top of your screen whenever you have a question, simply click on that button. When the form appears, click on "new" and then type your question in the form provided. Be sure to hit "send".

After Karen's presentation, we will be addressing those questions. Now we will turn to Karen Murray.

Karen?

>>KAREN MURRAY: Thank you, Lisa. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to the National Catholic Partnership on Disability and the Federation of Diocesan and Liturgical Commissions for collaborating on this webinar and giving us this important opportunity to discuss this issue.

In 1978, the US Bishops issued their *Pastoral Statement on Persons with Disabilities*. In it they wrote that, "The parish is the door to participation for individuals with disabilities." And, "It is the responsibility of the pastor and lay leaders to make sure that door is always open."

This afternoon I would like to build on Pat's wonderful and insightful presentation by sharing with you how some of the critical insights we just heard were brought to life for me at my own home parish. I do this with the sincere hope that some of my story might serve to inform and inspire others about the power and impact of invitation that can enrich not only the lives of persons with disabilities but the entire community. For, by their baptism, persons with disabilities have not only the right to participate in the liturgical life of the Church; they have a responsibility to share their gifts with the community. And as the *Pastoral Statement on Persons with Disabilities* reminds us, "The forms of the liturgy are the essence of the spiritual tie that binds the Christian community together."

November 3rd. November 3rd is one of my favorite days. On that day every year, I take some time to mark it with some special reflections and small celebrations. It's important to me not because of a birthday or anniversary. Not because of a

holy day or feast day of a favorite saint. It's special to me because it's the day I was asked to become a lector at my parish church. That invitation opened up a whole new world for me, and allowed me to participate in ways that I never dreamed possible.

I was born with a rare progressive neurological condition that required me to wear braces on my legs from an early age. I don't remember my disability interfering with my desire to participate for most of my early childhood but as I grew older, by the time I entered Middle School my disability had progressed to the point where I could no longer manage the stairs to my parish church and I needed a wheelchair for mobility. For a time my parents carried me firemen style up the 11 or so stairs that stood between me and Sunday mass. And they would place me in one of the pews where I would remain seated for the entire mass. I couldn't help but feel awkward and embarrassed by the whole affair. The worst part of it for me was the anguish and frustration I felt at not being able to stand during the requisite parts of the mass. In my child's mind, I felt the entire congregation must have been judging me as a terrible, indifferent, unbelieving Catholic for remaining in my seat. I kept all of these thoughts and feelings to myself of course, which only added to the hardship of the whole experience. When it was finally decided that I would remain at home on Sunday mornings to watch the television mass and receive monthly Communion calls, I was saddened and relieved; mostly relieved. I no longer needed to feel the torment of not being able to participate.

The relief didn't last long, though. Through high school and my early college years, I felt my relationship with God deepening and my spirituality maturing to the point where I longed to be able to return to mass with my family and celebrate once again in person. I wanted to feel connected to a parish community. While I was still at school, we were able to find a wheelchair accessible parish. I was excited just to be able to pass through the doors and find a comfortable place to park my wheelchair. The new parish provided that and so much more. From the first moment I wheeled through their grade level entrance I was overwhelmed by the friendliness and hospitality of the entire community. They instinctively knew the answer to that most basic of questions: "How do you treat a person with a

disability? Just like everyone else." Their welcoming and generous spirit made me feel right at home. Almost immediately I decided to join the parish rosary group and soon participated in their First Saturday Devotions, early in the morning on that third day of November. Characteristically, I arrived later than I intended but just as they were about to begin. On the way to my spot, I was asked to read a meditation on the Second Glorious Mystery. And uncharacteristically, I agreed. Always painfully shy, my "yes" was a reflex answer. I hadn't even really heard the question until after I had answered it. I immediately wanted to take it back. But it was too late. The devotions were already under way, and I was soon reading and leading my newfound friends from the rosary group in a meditation on the Ascension of Jesus into Heaven.

When it was over, I felt exhilarated and filled with gratitude. I thought even that I might want to try it again some time. After all, it was just for our little rosary group assembled very early in the Church before anyone else had arrived for mass. Or so I thought. Little did I know that one of our associate pastors had arrived very early and was busy in the sacristy. He heard my voice and as he told me later had to stop what he was doing to listen to the meditation and find out who was reading. He thought that I read with clarity and persuasion, with conviction and boldness. And he believed that I possessed the skills to serve as a lector for the parish.

When I received a telephone call later that afternoon formally inviting me to become a lector for the entire parish community, I can honestly say that it was one of the most exciting moments of my life. Never had I been asked to do something so important. Never had I imagined doing something so holy. My greatest hopes in joining the new parish had simply been to go through the doors, say the prayers and receive the Holy Communion alongside my fellow parishioners. That's what participation meant for me. I had no concept or understanding yet of a duty to share any skills or gifts or talents I might have had with the Church community.

The inaccessibility of every sanctuary I had ever seen caused me to assume that liturgical participation could never be an option for me. In fact, because of that inaccessibility, it never even entered my mind to wish for it. For so long I had

been unable to even enter a church building. And now I was being invited to a whole new level of participation, one that I never even imagined. I began to understand what "Full conscious and active participation" really was, not only for me but for others with disabilities, as well.

After the initial thrill of the invitation, I soon became overwhelmed with worry, though, and anxiety over the logistics; problems that in my mind were so numerous, I feared they would never permit me to even consider participation as anything beyond mass attendance. Every advocate for accessibility knows well the various obstacles persons with disabilities face every day that threaten inclusion and participation: Communication barriers, lack of invitations, lack of resources, lack of cooperation. And while attitudes are most often the greatest barriers to "Full conscious and active participation," at my new parish it was the good old-fashioned, ever present, always abundant physical and architectural barriers that jeopardized my new hope. Sure, the church building was accessible. But what about the stairs into the sanctuary? How would I hold the lectionary? What about the very high ambo, which could not accommodate my wheelchair? I had some ideas for solutions. But I feared any one or all of these barriers might be the undoing of my newfound hopes of proclaiming the Word of God at mass.

None of these problems were of any consequence, though, to the priests and parish staff. They knew that if barriers to participation are removed, the entire community benefits and is enhanced.

It is often an unknown or overlooked fact that people with disabilities know best what they need and should be included in all consultations that concern them. Thankfully my new parish knew this well, and did what Jesus did. They asked. They asked for my input. And together we found answers to the problems that threatened the joy that God had placed in my heart for this liturgical ministry. Ramps to the sanctuary were built. A microphone stand was secured. Later on a cordless microphone headset was used. A spot was marked out for me in the sanctuary and a lap desk purchased for me to place the lectionary while I read for the parish community.

All of the previous barriers disappeared. This parish that I was so blessed to find, knew how "the Church earnestly

desires that all the faithful be led to that full conscious and active participation in the liturgical celebration called for by the very nature of the liturgy."

The determination of the pastor and parish staff to resolve any and all challenges associated with my participation taught me a powerful lesson about leadership. Our pastor was a man eager to serve God and was always leading by his good example. He was a true servant who had the ability to nurture and call forth the best in others through the ministry of understanding, encouragement and counsel.

When he retired for health reasons a few short years after my arrival, this lesson in leadership hit hard through our new pastor, a man with many gifts for sure, especially a love for the liturgy. But he was someone who did not possess the same comfort regarding persons with disabilities. During the first Easter vigil as pastor, he learned that I was to be a lector at that evening's mass. He was visibly angry and upset at the news. He had spent months planning and preparing the Church for this moment. And the presence of my microphone stand and, apparently, wheelchair were in his eyes blights that marred the spiritual and liturgical experience he had prepared for the people in his care. His reaction shocked and saddened me. I felt the urge to back out and give up lecturing all together. Fortunately, my previous years and experience at the parish had strengthened and fortified me enough to know that my participation was not the problem. Rather, it was a vision too narrow and small to imagine a place for me in the celebration.

People with disabilities desire to worship God as equals in the community. Not as outsiders who distract simply by being present. While it is true that our parish never looked more beautiful than Easter, it was never quite the same for me after that. I learned just how much pastors and parish leaders set the tone for inclusiveness and welcome.

For a time, however, this was truly a parish committed to acknowledging the gifts of all of its parishioners, helping us to use these God-given gifts in a way that expressed our thanks and praise. It was a parish-open-to-all that extended the hand of welcoming and invitation to parishioners with and without disabilities, recognizing that many people with disabilities have gifts, skills and spirituality to serve as liturgical



ministers. Some of my fellow parishioners who participated in liturgical ministries included a fellow lector who was blind, servers and hospitality ministers with developmental disabilities, and music ministers with physical disabilities.

My experiences with this parish taught me not only the importance of architectural accessibility but the open hearts and minds of the community that accepted all parishioners as children of God and expected all parishioners to consider their gifts and abilities in serving the church.

My participation as a lector led to an invitation to teach religious education, serve on the parish pastoral council, and assist the parish staff and community as an advocate in ministry with persons with disabilities. An invitation to greater participation in the life of the parish had such a powerful impact on me that I began to pursue a vocation for professional ministry in the church. I longed to assist other parishes and persons with disabilities to experience what I was so blessed to know. I entered graduate school and earned my master of divinity degree and now serve as the Director of the Office of Persons with Disabilities for the Archdiocese of Boston where I strive to bring some of the things that I have learned and experienced to others. Without a doubt this lesson in leadership, community and invitation was one of the most powerful and important that I had ever learned. It is one that I am committed to share with everyone I encounter.

Our work is focused on persons with disabilities and their families so that they may know the full, active, conscious and meaningful participation in the life of the church for the benefit and enrichment of all.

I have shared these experiences with the hope that they can inspire and inform others about the power and impact of invitations, and how the entire parish community can be enriched. In order to be loyal to its calling, to be truly holy and pastoral, a parish must make sure that it does not exclude any Catholic who wishes to take part in its activities. For an attitude of welcome and inclusiveness will permeate authentic liturgical celebrations. This attitude can change lives. I know this well. For on that 3rd day of November, mine was changed forever.

>>LISA TARKER: Thank you, Karen. Truly inspiring. Your story exemplifies the importance of invitation and that the nature of liturgy truly demands "Full, conscious and active participation of all the faithful." We'll be moving into answering questions in a minute but I first want to remind you of the resources listed on the NCPD and FDLC web sites and the special offering from the FDLC that Patrick mentioned. Both the NCPD website at [www.ncpd.org](http://www.ncpd.org) and the FDLC web site at [www.fdlc.org](http://www.fdlc.org) contain a wealth of materials to assist you in your ministry.

I'll just remind you that you can still ask questions. We have quite a few here right now, which we'll begin to answer. But if you wish to submit a question, just follow the instructions that are repeated on your screen right now.

The first question I'm going to direct is to Pat, Dr. Patrick Gorman, and it reads: "An elderly woman had long enjoyed being an Extraordinary Minister of Communion at her parish until a parish renovation changed the lighting so it was no longer so harsh in the sanctuary area. The softer lighting made it difficult for this particular Eucharistic Minister with impaired vision to navigate the steps to the sanctuary to receive the species for distribution. Is there something that she or her parish can do to accommodate her and permit her to continue serving in this ministry? Pat?"

>>PATRICK GORMAN: That's a very good question. And we see this happen quite often. Stepping back before the light change, I might just make the suggestion and I saw a few other questions up on our board about this, as well. I think it's good -- you know we use that phrase, "Do what Jesus did, ask." And asking doesn't always mean asking every specific question but its saying let's involve everyone. So in one parish where I worked, we actually always had strategically placed people whose role on the liturgy committee or on the Parish Council or on other committees was communicating with and speaking in behalf of the disabled people in our parish so that we would know immediately what impact some of these things like changing lights might have on people that had never crossed our minds. So I think getting people involved in the whole structure and life of the decision making of the parish is critical.

But now that this has been done, there are probably a

variety of things that can be done from changing the lights back to what they were before -- but I think less drastic would be something like perhaps a server could come down and offer an arm to this person. Assist her up and down the steps. That might just give her the confidence to feel more secure. Or I think -- and I've seen this done in a number of parishes in our diocese-- someone can just bring the vessel down to her and give it to her at the foot of the steps so she doesn't even have to navigate the steps. She may feel ok about it. Again, I would talk to her about that and see what her level of comfort is for all of those things. She might feel it draws too much attention to her, but she might be very grateful she can continue in the ministry, as well.

>>LISA TARKER: Thank you, Pat. The next question I'm going to direct to Karen. It's a difficult one. Karen, how do you handle a pastor or parish leader that will not make accommodations? You had in your own experience a pastor that was somewhat difficult to deal with. Could you share your experience again?

>>KAREN MURRAY: Yes, sure. This is another very good question. And what I have done in the past is this. I think it's very important not to burn bridges and just leave a parish community when you encounter difficulties with accommodations and participation. I think it's important to try and work with the pastor and the parish leaders about educating them about the accomplishments and the potential and the contributions that persons with disabilities can make. We have a lot of important resources here at the National Catholic Partnership on Disability that can inform and educate others about the potential of persons with disabilities in ministry. And those will always be available to pastors. But I think it's important to try and work with them. And I know that in the end the pastor has the last word. And if he's unwilling to budge, I think it's important to just try and remain and work and pray that his heart be opened and continue to find ways to show that persons with disabilities can contribute and be a part of liturgical ministries.

>>LISA TARKER: Thank you very much. Pat, I have another question for you. What do I do if the accommodation of a particular person seems to be in conflict with liturgical norms?

>>PATRICK GORMAN: Another good question. I like to remind people that norms I think, aren't so much rules, although they can be defined that way, but the normal way of doing things. That's where we get that word norm. It's the normal way we do things, it's the usual way. But I think sometimes common sense has to come into play. It's the normal way to do something but if it's not able to be done that way then we need to come up with a solution and I think here is where it's important to involve a number of people in the discussion. We want to involve someone who is knowledgeable in the liturgy, who understands the liturgical principles here and how that liturgical principle could perhaps be modified in a way that doesn't violate it. You want to involve the person with the disability. Perhaps a diocesan office or parish office for people with disabilities. The pastor of course. And if need be to perhaps seek help from the diocese, as well. One example would be of course the norm is to have the readings read from the ambo, but in Karen's case the parish came up with a very suitable solution and maintained the integrity of what was going on. There are instances, especially Sacramentally, where we have to be careful. For example the whole issue of gluten intolerance. Since that involves the "matter" of a sacrament, it's not something we can take onto our self to just say okay we're going to do something completely different. Especially when it comes to the Sacraments, things have to be done in accord with the liturgical and canonical laws especially regarding sacramental formulas and sacramental matters. There we do need to do a wide consultation with church authorities and make sure we are staying within both the spirit and the letter of those laws.

>>LISA TARKER: Thank you very much, Pat. I will answer the next question. The question is: How does a parish go about getting interpreters if they are needed. And who pays for this?

The first suggestion would be to contact the diocesan office for Deaf Ministries. If your diocese doesn't already

have a ministry, contact the National Catholic Office for the Deaf (NCOD), that's [www.ncod.org](http://www.ncod.org). Check their list of Board Members and contact your regional representative. Also request a copy of their guidelines for interpreters. In most cases a parish should include the payment for the interpreters as part of their budget.

The next question I'm going to pass on to Pat. Again this is directed to him since it deals with his bishop. It says what does the Bishop of Madison do to motivate pastors and laity to invite and participate in the liturgy? How many parishes participate versus the total number of parishes, and what is the likelihood after the bishop leaves of this continuing? Pat, can you answer that?

>>PATRICK GORMAN: Well, I can. We began this initiative probably about ten years ago, in depth. And we have a long history, fortunately, in our diocese of some awareness about this, although primarily it was focused towards people with very severe disabilities. And so I was approached by a woman at the cathedral named Peggy who herself had some disabilities and she had formed a group called Catholics with Disabilities. So as much as I would like to give the Bishop of Madison credit, it was actually Peggy that began it and the bishop was certainly supportive of it. And since that time that bishop has retired and we have had a new bishop and he's been very vocally supportive of this, as well. Now, it's limited in what it does. You know, we work with parishes and try to keep awareness up. It's a constant struggle and uneven in the diocese. But I think little by little it spreads from parish to parish. And for example on our building commission, we've had a little bit of in roads. We don't necessarily require certain things about accessibility. But we require them or the parish has to come back with a reason of how they are going to accommodate somebody if they are not going to add this ramp or whatever it might be. And so it's still a work in progress. But as much as I would love to give credit to the bishop, it was actually Peggy who began this and really spearheaded this and has been the real muse behind it all.

>>LISA TARKER: Thank you, Pat. The next question, again, goes

to Pat. Our parishes are planning a mass to have people with disabilities participating as they are able. It is to be part of the Disability Awareness Week and Respect for Life mass. Are we limited to use of readings for that particular Sunday?

>>PATRICK GORMAN: If it's a Sunday mass in Ordinary Time you're not. The pastor -- if it's an Ordinary Time Sunday can for pastoral advantage of the people make adaptations and the obligation to attend mass is not to hear those specific readings it's to be able to participate in a mass on a Sunday. So there's some leeway there. During the Easter season and Lent and Christmas season, it's a bit more complicated. Advent of course is a bit more complicated. So if it's in Ordinary Time, generally there can be changes. Or perhaps sometimes I have seen it done where just one reading is changed, perhaps that brings more focus into it and the prayers can be changed as well. It needs to be done carefully. It has to be done in consultation with the pastor and the celebrant to make sure they are aware of it. For example if "the bishop is coming" just make sure he is aware of your desire for these changes ahead of time. If your pastor is concerned, he can call his local office of worship just to confirm all of this. But I would also go on to say maybe this will be the beginning of something where it's not just the people with disabilities work on this particular weekend but then are invited into the full milieu of the parish and ministry just as everybody else does.

>>LISA TARKER: Thank you, Pat. I'm afraid that we're almost out of time. I'm sorry if we did not have time to get to your question. I wish we did have more time to do that. If you wish to pursue your question, depending on the nature of your question, may I suggest that you contact either the Director of your diocesan Department for Persons with Disabilities or your diocesan Director of Worship? When contacting the diocesan director, encourage him or her to consult with other diocesan departments. Interdepartmental collaboration and communication will go a long way to that process of changing attitudes and removing barriers such as has been discussed today.

Please keep in mind that within a few weeks there will be a complete archived copy of this webinar online for your free

use and all you need to do is to check [www.ncpd.org](http://www.ncpd.org). That's the NCPD web site.

Again, I'll remind you to use the resources posted on the NCPD and FDLC web sites.

Please let me call attention to -- point out the upcoming webinars that NCPD is sponsoring. Tuesday, October 13th, 3:00 o'clock to 4:00 o'clock p.m. Eastern Time, "*Access in Catholic Education: Elementary Schools.*" Then Tuesday, October 20th, from 1:00 o'clock to 2:30 p.m., again Eastern Time, "*Access to Tools in Addressing Suicide: Pastoral Supports and Prevention Strategies.*" More information on these webinars may be found on the NCPD web site.

I want to thank Patrick and Karen for their time and insightful presentations. I also want to thank the National Catholic Partnership on Disability for sponsoring this webinar with the input of FDLC. And I would also like to thank the partnering organizations, NCCL, NAFIM, NCOD and GCL.

>>KAREN MURRAY: And as a final word in addition to my role for the Archdiocese of Boston, I am also a member of the National Catholic Partnership on Disability Governance Board. We rely on support from donors like you to continue providing resources like today's webinar. Established by the Catholic Bishop's Home Mission Office, NCPD does not receive funding from the US Conference of Catholic Bishops as is widely presumed. NCPD operates with funds from affiliate member dioceses and archdioceses, grants and donations from foundations, and individuals like you. Please go to [www.ncpd.org](http://www.ncpd.org) and click on the 'Donate to NCPD' button on the right.

As we honor the 30th anniversary of the *Pastoral Statement of US Catholic Bishops on People with Disabilities*, please consider joining our national "I Gave 30" campaign located on the [ncpd.org](http://ncpd.org) donation page. Thank you.

>>LISA TARKER: Finally, we request that you evaluate this webinar by completing the evaluation, which will appear on your screen. You will have 20 minutes after the conclusion of the program to complete the evaluation. But after that time, the webinar site will shut down. And here is the evaluation.

I want to thank you for your participation and may you and

your ministry be blessed and may you enjoy the rest of the summer.

>> OPERATOR: Ladies and gentlemen, this does conclude today's conference, you may disconnect your lines at this time and we thank you for your participation. Have a wonderful day.

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