

**Transcript of
National Catholic Partnership on Disability (NCPD)
Catechesis with Those with Disability, Part I
March 12, 2008**

Vcall
601 Moorefield Park Dr.
Richmond, VA 23236

Phone: 888-301-5399
Fax: 804-327-7554

info@vcall.com
www.vcall.com
www.investorcalendar.com

Participants

Lee Nagel, Executive Director of National Conference for Catechetical Leadership
David Amico, Director of Office of Ministry Formation, Diocese of Albany
Nancy Thompson, NCPD Director of Programs and Diocesan Relations

Presentation

Operator

Greetings and welcome to the National Catholic Partnership on Disability, Catechesis with Those with Disability, Part 1. [Operator Instruction]. As a reminder, this conference is being recorded.

It is now my pleasure to introduce your host, Mr. Lee Nagel, Executive Director, National Conference for Catechetical Leadership. Thank you. Mr. Nagel, you may begin.

Lee Nagel

Good afternoon. Good day. Good morning. Wherever you are across the United States, we welcome you to Part 1 of "Catechesis with Children and Youth Having Disability." The National Catholic Partnership on Disability, in collaboration with the National Conference for Catechetical Leadership and with the generous support from a grant given by the Sisters of Charities of Blessed Virgin Mary, Dubuque, Iowa. We are proud to support you in your catechetical ministry with children and youth having disability in this two-part series.

With me today is David Amico, Director of the Office of Ministry Formation for the Diocese of Albany, and Dr. Nancy Thompson, Director of Programs and Diocesan Relations for the National Catholic Partnership on Disability.

Throughout this program we invite you to participate in several surveys, the first of which will appear on your screen right now. While we know there are 235 sites registered for this webinar, we want to know how many people are at each site. Please click on your answer right now. Also, in the top left-hand corner of the screen there is a Q and A. Whenever you have a question, simply click on the Q and A, type your question and be sure to hit send.

Our first speaker, David Amico, will provide the vision and foundation for today's topic. David?

David Amico

Thank you, Lee. One of my favorite scripture passages comes from the book of the prophet Habakkuk, Chapter 2, Verses 2 and 3. It reads as follows: "The Lord answered me and said write down the vision clearly upon the tablets so one can read it readily, for the vision still has its time, presses onto fulfillment and will not disappoint." It is my sincere belief that we who are called to ministry need to be people of vision. It is vision that fuels our ministry, that gives us passion and provides us with direction and guidance. Without such a vision, I believe that we can easily become ministers who work very hard and accomplish many good things, but who can also easily become frustrated, discouraged, disappointed and even burned out. We are especially vulnerable when it seems that our efforts are not appreciated, fall short of our own or others' expectations or sometimes outrightly fail. It is at these times that we must return to our vision. And even when things are going well, we still need to spend time with our vision and talk with God about it. We need to hear God say to us that our vision still has its time, presses on to fulfillment and will not disappoint. In encouraging and working with parishes who desire to welcome persons with disabilities more fully, I realized very quickly that they needed to be steeped in a vision for this ministry if it were going to grow and be sustained into the future. Fortunately, we do not need to create the components for a vision for this ministry. It is there for us in scripture and in the essential documents of our church. We need to reflect on it, pray with it and make it our own so that it can become a lived and living reality in our own context.

I would like to share with you some of the key aspects of this vision as I have come to understand them. I propose to look at this vision broadly and then more specifically as it relates to catechesis. As always, we begin with scripture. In the last forty years or so, we have learned from scripture scholars that the life and mission and ministry of Jesus can be summed up in one phrase, the reign of God. Thomas Groome, one of the foremost religious educators in our day, notes that "Jesus made the reign of God the core passion and purpose of his life." Groome goes on to say that this reign of God "symbolized God's shalom-intentions for humankind and all creation—love and fullness of life, wholeness and holiness, community and interdependence, values, personal and social, spiritual and political, to be 'done on earth as it is in heaven.'" (*Educating for Life*, p. 368)

This is not merely some nice idea. It is God's vision for us, for all of us. It is the vision that is proclaimed in one way or another on every page of scripture, and we believe that this vision became incarnate in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Indeed, our belief in his resurrection gives us the ultimate assurance that this vision "will not disappoint...it will surely come."

Yet, we know that although we have this assurance of the ultimate fulfillment of God's reign, we do not have the luxury of sitting back and just waiting for it to appear at some distant cosmic moment in the future. Rather, by virtue of our baptism, we disciples are charged with doing as Jesus did. We, the church, must incarnate the reign of God.

One of the ways that Jesus made the reign of God manifest was in his meal ministry. It seems that Jesus was always sharing a meal with others or telling parables about

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meals. And this is especially true in Luke's gospel. The preeminent scripture scholar Father Eugene LaVerdiere tells us that the meals in Jesus' ministry, especially the ones that occur as Jesus makes his way to Jerusalem, are "each one a pause that challenges, forms and transforms regarding the most basic values for Christian living in community and on mission." (*Dining in the Kingdom of God*, p. 14) In other words, these meal stories tell us how we are to live as a faith community. They tell us how we are to make the reign of God incarnate in our midst today.

Another scripture scholar, R. Alan Culpepper, notes that "the distinctiveness of Jesus' vision of the kingdom was nowhere clearer than in his protest against discriminatory meal practices...for Jesus, meals were a time of celebration and an inclusive fellowship that foreshadowed the inclusiveness of God's kingdom." ("The Gospel of Luke," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, p. 228)

In the parable of the Great Banquet in Luke, chapter 14, verses 15-24, it is made very clear that those who belong at the table of God's reign are persons with disabilities. This is a remarkable parable that I would urge you to explore further, especially as it is explained by Brett Webb Mitchell in his book *Unexpected Guests at God's Banquet*. Briefly, this parable is about a complete reversal of ways, those who in the world's eyes should not even be invited are those who truly belong at the banquet table. It reminds us that God's reign is fundamentally different than anything we have ever known before. This parable tells us that we all belong at the banquet table in God's kingdom, simply because we have been invited by a God who is passionately in love with us.

This is the vision of Jesus. This is the vision that serves as a foundation for our ministry for persons with disabilities. We all belong and have a place at all the tables in our church, and most especially at the Table of the Word and the Table of the Eucharist, where Jesus becomes present to us until the Reign of God is fulfilled.

In recent years, we have been blessed that our Church has taken this vision of the reign of God and used it to reflect on our ministry with our brothers and sisters with disabilities. From that deep and honest reflection, we have received some wonderful documents from the Church universal, as well as from the Church here in the United States. We are going to look at these documents in chronological order and try to capture in a few words what each one offers to our vision.

First is the landmark 1978 Pastoral Statement on Persons with Disabilities from the United States Catholic Bishops. It was reissued in 1988 on its 10th anniversary with updated language. And in 1998 to mark its 20th anniversary, the bishops issued a brief statement entitled *Welcome and Justice for Persons with Disabilities* which highlighted some of the key points of the Pastoral. If you have not read the 1978 pastoral statement, I would urge you to do so, since obviously today I'm not able to examine the entire document in our time frame.

I would, however, like to look at four points that I consider essential from this document. First, the Bishops state the purpose of this ministry very clearly: "Persons with disabilities... seek to serve the community and to enjoy their full baptismal rights as members of the Church" (no. 33). By baptism, we all belong, we are all valued as

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sons and daughters of God, brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus. Baptism gives us rights, among them the right to catechesis, as we will hear several times today.

Secondly, the Bishops also make some assertions that in my opinion have profound ecclesiological implications. They tell us that “the Church finds its true identity when it fully integrates itself with [persons with disabilities]” (no. 12). And regarding liturgy, they say “to exclude members of the parish from these celebrations of the life of the Church, even by passive omission, is to deny the reality of that community” (no. 23). It seems to me that the bishops are saying that the church is not fully itself, not fully a community of faith, unless it fully includes persons with disabilities. That is profound and profoundly challenging!

Third, the bishops remind us that “the parish is the door to participation for persons with disabilities, and it is the responsibility of the pastor and lay leaders to make sure that this door is always open” (no. 18). Note the word “always.” Not when it is convenient or easy for us, but always open.

And, finally, in speaking of catechesis the bishops write: “Evangelization and catechesis for persons with disabilities must be geared in content and message to their particular situation” no. 25).

I believe that these points, among many others in this document, add excellent insights to our vision for persons with disabilities. I would urge us all to ponder and to study them more deeply.

And now we are going to take a moment for a poll. Have you read the 1978 Pastoral Statement of the United States Catholic Bishops on Persons with Disabilities? And also the 1995 Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities, which we will talk about in a moment? I invite you now to select all the answers that apply and then click the vote button.

Okay. And you can see on your screens now that we have a great number of us who have read these documents, as well as some of us who have not. And so it tells us that we still need to keep putting these documents forward and using them as foundations for our ministry.

The last point that I highlighted from the bishop’s Pastoral Statement allows us to focus our vision more specifically to catechesis with persons with disabilities. Again, if we are baptized, if we thus belong to the faith community, then we have a right to receive catechesis.

This is made very clear in the second document that I offer for our reflection. Pope John Paul II’s 1979 apostolic exhortation *On Catechesis in Our Time (Catechesi Tradendae)*. Chapter V of this exhortation is entitled “Everybody Needs to Be Catechized.” And within this chapter John Paul writes, (and here please forgive the language of the translation), “Children and young people who are physically or mentally handicapped come first to mind. They have a right, like others of their age, to know the mystery of faith” (no. 41). John Paul II was indeed a catechetical Pope and one who also took seriously the full inclusion of persons with disabilities into the

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life and mission of the church. I believe his words stand as a powerful witness and challenge to us.

We turn back now to the United States Bishops to mention their 1995 *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities*. I am not going to discuss this document in detail, since it is so specific in its content. However, I would note that its purpose was to give greater consistency to the pastoral practices throughout the United States. Many diocese have their own guidelines, which were developed or enhanced from these guidelines. It represents yet another significant step forward in realizing the vision that the bishops themselves laid out in their 1978 *Pastoral Statement*.

Now we return to the universal church and its *General Directory for Catechesis*, which was published by the Vatican in 1997. For those not familiar with the genre of a catechetical directory, its purpose is to provide guiding principles and direction, as the very name implies, for the ministry of catechesis. The first *General Directory* was issued in 1971, following the second Vatican Council. It contained no reference to persons with disability.

In 1997, this second directory devotes an entire section to catechesis with persons with disabilities. Although only two paragraphs in length, it says a great deal for our vision. It notes, for example: "A growth in social and ecclesial consciousness, together with undeniable progress and specialized pedagogy makes it possible... to provide adequate catechesis for [persons with disabilities] who as baptized, have this right and if non-baptized, because they are called to salvation" (no. 189).

Continuing on, it says, "The love of the father... and the continuous presence of Jesus and his Spirit give assurance that every person, however limited, is capable of growth in holiness" (no. 189).

In one short paragraph the *General Directory* addresses many of the concerns and questions that have risen over the years regarding catechesis with persons with disabilities, especially those living with intellectual disabilities. It says quite clearly that we all have the right to hear and to respond to the Gospel; if we are baptized, then we have the right to be catechized; we have the resources and methodologies to carry out this catechesis and most especially that we all can grow in holiness.

The *General Directory* also goes on to urge that "personalized and adequate programs" be developed, while warning against such programs being isolated from the church community. Rather, it urges that "the community be made aware of such catechesis and be involved in it" (no. 189).

And the final document to which we turn is the *National Directory for Catechesis*. It was published by the Bishops of the United States in 2005, and it applies the contents of the *General Directory* to life here in the United States. It begins by saying that "persons with disabilities...are integral members of the Christian community." In my dictionary, integral is defined as "essential for completion, necessary to the whole." This hearkens back to what the bishops said about the identity of the church in their *Pastoral Statement*. The body of Christ is not complete unless we are all at the table.

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A bit further, it says: "All persons with disabilities have the capacity to proclaim the Gospel and be living witnesses to its truth within the community of faith and offer valuable gifts. Their involvement enriches every aspect of Church life. They are not just the recipients of catechesis--they are also its agents."

This statement reminds us that we are all disciples of Jesus. As such, we all must respond to the Great commission he gives us at the end of Matthew's Gospel "to go and make disciples." I do not believe that we have given enough thought theologically or pastoral to the fact that persons with disabilities are *agents* of these ministries and the great insights that they can bring to it. It is heartening to see that there is a growing body of theological study being done from a disability perspective.

And turning back to the NDC, we later read: "All baptized persons with disabilities have a right to adequate catechesis and deserve the means to develop a relationship with God." Again, this echoes what we heard in the *General Directory*, but I like the fact that it talks about developing a relationship with God. So often we forget that this is the goal of all catechesis and that we are all capable of developing relationships in one way or another.

And finally the end of Section 49 in the NDC, the Bishops write "The Church owes persons with disabilities her best efforts in order to ensure that they are able to hear the Gospel of Christ, receive the sacraments, and grow in their faith in the fullest and richest manner possible." I believe that this is so important for us to remember. The directory is saying that there can be no excuses for not providing meaningful access to catechesis and to the sacraments for persons with disabilities. Will this be challenging? Sometimes, yes. Will it require great energy and new creativity and love? Certainly. Yet, imagine what our Church will look like if we give this ministry the best of our efforts. I can hear Jesus saying: "The reign of God is upon you!"

And so we end where we began with our vision. Perhaps all I have said so far can be summarized in two questions: Why do we catechize? Why do sacraments exist? Father Paul Waddell in his article "Pondering the Anomaly of God's Love" in the book *Developmental Disabilities and Sacramental Access* gives a profound answer to these questions and one that can serve as a statement of our vision. He says that we catechize and celebrate the sacraments...

"...for the same reason that the Incarnation occurred: God desires access to our hearts and to our world...God will not rest until each one of us has access to the love that saves."

And so to conclude this first part of our webinar today, I'd invite you to take another poll. Prior to this webinar, were you aware that specific sections on persons with disabilities were included in the following Church documents listed on the poll? Select all the answers that apply and then hit the vote button.

I thank you for your kind attention to me.

Lee Nagel

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Thank you, David, for your passion and obvious love of the church and catechesis. We're waiting for your poll to come in, folks. And you can vote while we take care of that. I want you to know at the 249 sites that we have logged in, well over 260 people are watching or listening between Alaska and Hawaii, the East Coast, the West Coast, and that we have many pioneers of this ministry in the United States who are also a part of this process. However, you guys are getting better at responding to the polls, because on the first poll, 96 of the sites didn't get answers in on time. On the second poll, only 24 of you missed it. And on this poll I haven't had time to check the results, but here are the results of this poll.

We have one question that has come in so far, so don't forget to ask your questions as we move along. We're now going to move along to our second speaker. Nancy helps us look at some practical ways of implementing the vision that David just laid out for us. Nancy.

Nancy Thompson

Thank you, Lee. You know, we've heard David speaking so beautifully about the vision of disability ministry. Now we're going to be talking about applying that vision. And this is what it's all about, this picture that you see on the screen, right here: this young man, fully involved in his parish community, parish life and in the sacramental life of the church. We know that we're called to invite, to welcome and to include, all. Those ideas ring through the documents of the Church and scripture. Remember the NDC, as David quoted earlier: All baptized persons with disabilities have the right to adequate catechesis." In echo of that, we invite, we welcome, we include.

I recently asked an adult who has a disability about their experience of the Church. I said, "Well, do you feel welcome in your parish?" Because we have done so much, so much has happened, you know? And I thought, but are we really making people feel welcome? She said, "Well, yes, I feel welcome, but guests are welcome. I want to be valued, to be a real part of the community. I want to belong." And of course she belongs. We know, as David said, by virtue of her baptism she belongs. There's no need of inviting her to belong. She already belongs. But have you ever been inside a door, inside a room with a group of people, but not really felt like you belonged? That's what we need to make sure happens, that people are included in such a way that they belong and they know they belong.

Invite specifically. When you are talking about families and people with disabilities, you need to make sure that you are inviting very specifically and personally. Approach someone at doughnuts and coffee. Telephone them. Wherever you see them with their child, talk to the child. Talk to the parents. Talk to the adults. That tells them they belong. You're reaching out and including them.

Invite people with disabilities specifically in announcements about registrations for different parish activities. When you announce registration for a youth retreat, for example, if you have someone who uses a wheelchair in your parish who is a youth, make a note that the retreat will be wheelchair accessible. That is a subtle, but very real backing of the words of your personal invitation. Also, through the signage or accessibility that is throughout your parish setting, invite. And invite specifically. Because these signs are seen by family members of persons with disabilities and by

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people with disabilities and a signal that the parish anticipates, no, more than anticipates, expects people with disabilities to be participating, to be coming through those doors, into the parking lot and into the classes.

I invite you to welcome. Welcome by establishing relationship with the children and the youth's parents. Now, that is something that goes beyond what you may make a specific effort to do with all of your program's children. I know many of you have programs with typical kids and typical catechetical settings with as few as 30 and as many as 1,000+ children and youth. You can not possibly become close friends or build close relationships, personal relationships, with all those parents as the numbers raise.

However, it is vitally important that you establish relationships with the children with disabilities and their parents. Be aware that there might be past rejections that they've experienced. There might be past hurt or embarrassing encounters that they've had that causes them to kind of hold back a little or to not be so sure of trusting themselves or their family member into your care. So be overt in your welcome and in establishing relationships. Get to know the child or the youth as a person. Talk to the child directly. Engage with them. That says a lot about welcome to the parents. Build a partnership between the family, the parish and even the child's school program.

Now, again, that is something that is unique to this population you serve. When you think of welcome, you do not typically think of building a relationship with the child's school program. But it's true that many of the kids who are in special education classes or who receive specialized services of one kind or another, whether they are in public schools or in Catholic schools, may function outside of the norm of their chronological age group. To serve them appropriately in catechetical and youth ministry programs, you must get to know them and about their educational needs.

But if they are in public schools, do not assume automatically that the professionals in that student's life will not be willing to consult and give you ideas and help. Many school professionals are eager for their students or clients with disabilities to have as normal and age appropriate life as possible. They want them to be involved and included in the life of the community with their peers. And if the student is Catholic and they have a church that they're participating in, the school professionals know how important it is to the life of the family and the child that they be able to access that informal support network. Many times they're willing, if given permission and invited by the parents, to even become consultative, to give you tips about learning techniques that are especially helpful with that child. This type of consultation and support is a unique part of the welcome and partnership building that is needed for the child or the youth with disability.

Include. In this situation, when you have kids with disabilities in your program or youth with disabilities in your program, you will need to individualize and there is no single strategy. We will talk more about individualization because it is very important. One size does not fit all. Be partners with the family for inclusion in all aspects of parish life and diocesan life. Make sure that there are spiritual, social, instructional, formational and service aspects to your individualized plan, where the gifts of the person with disabilities are recognized and called forth.

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Make sure to provide specialized curriculum where needed and disability-specific formation for volunteers as or if it is needed. This can be in formal instruction or it might be more formal, such as workshops on disability-specific issues through your Department of Human Services or an area education agency. Catechists can attend many of those and some are free of charge.

The next two slides are modified from a *Praise* presentation from the Archdiocese of Newark, Pastoral Ministries for Persons with Disabilities. The slide you will see here is a modified version of the original slide because it was simpler for purposes of our discussion at this time. However, as you were notified by email, there are many handouts that are available on NCPD's website at www.ncpd.org. You can download the next two slides from the Archdiocese of Newark and one following that from the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, to study and go over, or even share for with catechists for at a presentation that you are doing, if you would like to. As of March 26, 2008, this full presentation will be available in an archived version through a link on our web page, for your use for free with catechists. So keep in mind, this is the simplified version. There will be more details than this when you get the printed version.

This pyramid illustrates the variety of settings, a continuum of models for religious education, various models of catechetical setting, for children and youth with disabilities, from the least restrictive environment (inclusion in an age appropriate classroom without special supports) to the most restrictive environment (receives individual instruction with one on one support)

In some situations a child or youth might be prepared at home by their parents or a catechist for sacramental reception, or they might be provided all their catechesis at home. Now, we are not referring to standard home schooling here. We are talking about an unavoidable need for the child or youth to be worked with at home. Perhaps the child's level of fragile health does not allow them to get out and be around other kids. In this case, the catechist might go to the home, or maybe the parents work with the child at home under the direction and support of the local catechetical leader.

There are many varieties of models. Some communities used to have, and some still do have a catechetical center for special education programming. In this case, area parishes collaborate and meet together at one site, a shared site with shared resources, to provide separate programming for their children and youth with disability.

There can be separate programming for children and youth with disability that is provided for a single parish at a different building. As noted on the pyramid, you could have children and youth with disabilities in a separate room, but meeting at the same time as the rest of the catechetical program.

At times it is in the best interest of a student to have programming that is split between a mainstreamed group and separate programming. There can be valid reasons for a child or youth to have such split programming, with part of their time being spent in an inclusive group of disabled and nondisabled peers, and part of the time to have separate or one on one catechesis. .

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For example, during sacramental preparation I have found that because concepts can be very challenging to communicate and the need to take extra time emphasizing the vocabulary is necessary, children with deafness can benefit with some individualized instruction when preparing for the Sacrament of Reconciliation, First Eucharist, or Confirmation. It is very helpful to have some disability specific instruction and support in a separate room, so that they can have what they need to be catechized to the fullness of their capability. That is what we mean by individualized programming and instruction. You analyze what the needs of that child are so that their learning experience, their formation experience, their catechetical experience, can be maximized on the basis of what their abilities and skills are.

A child or youth might be mainstreamed with individualized support if they convene with the catechist once a month on a one-to-one basis, to assure that the goals of catechesis are being met with them and to make sure that things are being covered thoroughly to the satisfaction of that child/youth and their needs. A mainstream group with consultation is used when there really aren't specialized services needed, like special aides in the catechetical setting, but the catechist meets periodically with a professional consultant or others who can assist them in planning and strategizing techniques that are related to disability specific needs, such as signing for lyrics to a song.

And finally, the best model for the child/youth with a disability could be a mainstream group with no special services or instruction. So these are a variety of the settings that you might find in any typical program.

Some of the model options and supports include shadowing or having a buddy for extra assistance, incorporating strategies for behavior and language support. A combination of shared prayer and activities such as mass with the larger program and some separate catechetical instruction directly related to the specific needs of the child or children with disability, and then re-joining the large group when the whole program comes together again. The separate programming is treated more like a grade section, where sometimes you come together for mass or you come together with the larger program for song or special prayer.

Be flexible. Use alternative activities if that makes sense. And ask during the planning process, if it is needed, where does one-on-one catechesis make sense for this child/youth? So think in terms of using a combination of options. But always be preparing for the next environment level and make sure that the student is connecting with the rest of the program and worshipping community.

This second description of program models that was sent by Sr. Kathleet Schipani of Philadelphia, is one that I think you will find helpful if you download and print it for your use and study. Get a sense of how the language is different than that used by Anne Masters of Newark on the pyramid, and how both slides are describing similar concepts, but looking at it from different perspectives. We want to thank Sister Kathleen and Anne for providing these slides as a preview of more good things to come from them when they present our May 6th webinar: "Catechesis with Children/Youth with Disability Part II: Applying the Vision."

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It's very important that you gather meaningful information at registration. You need to ask a specific question. Remember that specificity is important. On your regular form, say something like this: "Does your child have any conditions, disorders, allergies, physical sensory, cognitive, social, or emotional disabilities of which we should be aware so we can serve them properly?" And then, if the answer is "Yes", be in personal contact with the parents or the guardians and with others as needed to gather pertinent information.

Prepare to design a plan, an individualized religious education plan. We will look at the individualized religious education program (IREP) form that is provided for download on our web site, and use it as a model. Many people do use it. This one is from the Diocese of Orange, the Department of Special Religious Education. It can be used as provided – as long as you credit the source. Many resources for disability ministry are shared that way. However, not all resources are for sharing, so make sure to respect copyright when you are considering the use of something that was created by another. Make sure to give credit if sharing is permitted.

You can also find the Diocese of Orange IREP form in NCPD's resource that was provided to each diocese of the U.S., "Opening Doors, Volume II A", Chapter 3, Section A-6-B. That form considers five important, broad areas:

1. general administration,
2. areas to consider in designing and adapting lesson plans and other activities,
3. communication (with categories under that for physical considerations and social interactions),
4. what helps your child learn (preferred learning styles, attention span, distractibility, and additional learning techniques to which your child responds well), and then
5. other information or recommendation for the catechist that will be important for you to know and use.

Bring those together for planning who can help you fill in each of these areas, so the child or youth might best be served.

I would like you to recall one last thing. And that is the emotional well-being of the child. Clues to the emotional well-being of the child are very important to be aware of. Make sure that you understand what they are. How can you tell if a child's emotional well-being is declining? What triggers the decline and how can catechists help restore equilibrium? These are things you must find out and include in the designing of the IREP. Inform the catechist before the student meets with them. Be prepared. Be ready. Be ready with intervention tools for the catechetical and youth ministry settings you will use and for emergencies, so that you can truly serve this child or youth and their family in the full life of the church and parish community.

Lee Nagel

Thank you, Nancy. We're going to move right into your questions and answers. David and I have been looking at some of those. I'm going to let David begin by sharing the question and a couple of answers and then I'll be coming in with other questions that have come up. David?

David Amico

Vcall

601 Moorefield Park Dr.
Richmond, VA 23236

Phone: 888-301-5399
Fax: 804-327-7554

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Okay. Thank you, Lee. One of the questions that came up was: "Don't our volunteers need specialized training in order to include children and youth with disabilities into our programs?" And the answer to that is really yes and no. We do not need special training to be welcoming. We can all do that. And it's about forming relationships. That's truly what catechesis is about. That is what church is about. That's what our relationship with God obviously is about. And so we don't need special training in that. We have to have an open heart. And so that's what's first and foremost, which is required. However, hopefully there is assistance from your diocesan offices, whether it's ministries with persons with disabilities, whether it's your catechetical office. Hopefully they would be able to provide some assistance. There's also assistance available from the Network of Inclusive Catholic Educators from the University of Dayton, from the National Apostolate for Inclusion Ministry, from NCPD and from the National Catholic Educational Association (they have specialized workshops for inclusion of students with disabilities).

There is a current partnership between NCCL and NCPD, who have a grant, and are going to be looking at resources that are going to be able to be posted on the websites. Data from the "Help Us Help You and Others" survey we are asking you to fill out that is on both of their websites, will be compiled and shared with all in this area of ministry.

And one more thing that I would encourage people to do is connect with their local colleges and universities through their special education departments to see what kind of training they can provide. So that's at least a beginning for you.

Another question that came up was really kind of a sad comment...that there are only 267 sites of us registered today. And truly I think that we always hope for more. We always want more. However, the good thing is this presentation will be archived and available for free use after March 26, 2008. Then, we are going to be doing another webinar, one that is more disability specific on treatment of children and youth who are deaf or with other sensory disabilities and children and youth on the autistic spectrum and those with intellectual and developmental disabilities, this coming May 6, and that will continue to draw people into this conversation.

Lee Nagel

Thank you, David. We're going to try to stay away from the autism questions today since they will be covered more fully at the May 6 webinar.. Nancy, someone asked when they give a form as you suggest in your talk, that people, families don't complete the registration forms to let them know about their child/youth's disability because the parents don't think they know the parish catechetical or youth ministry leaders well enough. Do you have any suggestions to help them out?

Nancy Thompson

I sure do. It IS really hard on parents to, once again, have to spell out all that information. First of all, you've got to remember when thinking about those families, that you can't imagine the volumes of forms and papers they are expected to fill out on their children. I know. I have a son with disability. And I'm telling you, you look at another form and think, "No, not again!" But that is why you develop relationship and

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partnership with the families. They need to know that you are serious, that you really care about this child and you are asking for things that will help you make sure that their child or youth is going to get the best your catechetical and youth ministry programs can provide to them. You care and you are taking it very seriously. That will help get them on board. And don't just hand them the 7 page form to fill out. Meet with them and go through it together, filling it out as you go.

Lee Nagel

Thanks, Nancy. David, we have a question about what is a parish's responsibility providing for children? Mind addressing that?

David Amico

I would be happy to address that. I think every parish has the responsibility to offer catechesis to everyone who belongs to the parish. They need to look at what their resources are, what they can do to assist this child and this family? Perhaps it means pooling resources with neighboring parishes or drawing in new resources from professionals who are parish members not formerly involved in your programs. But the responsibility is that we need to catechize everyone and that everyone needs to be welcome to the sacraments. And sometimes that requires creativity and thinking outside the box. It is definitely the mandate of the Church that we be able to do this. It is the "how we do it" that is going to vary from place to place, depending upon your particular situation.

Lee Nagel

Could you follow that up, David? Somebody wants to know about school teachers and other professionals. Can they communicate with religious educators and catechists, or what's the confidentiality rule there?

David Amico

Yes, they can communicate. In fact, as Nancy referred to in her talk, it's about building a partnership between the parish, the family and the regular school setting. What is generally required is a written release from the parents so that the regular school personnel can communicate freely with the parish catechetical staff.

Nancy Thompson

You could even suggest that the parents build an aspect into the IEP, the Individualized Education Plan of the student, for "community access" and include the parish catechetical program in that community aspect. That opens a whole new set of doors for communication.

Lee Nagel

That's an excellent answer, Nancy. Why don't you pursue this question-- someone talked about a student with celiac disease. Can you talk about what we have available?

Nancy Thompson

Sure. A person with celiac disease has an allergy to or is not able to tolerate gluten. Gluten is present in communion hosts and it can be very difficult and sometimes impossible for them to consume any gluten. Let me give you a listing on the resource

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page of our web site at www.ncpd.org . It is a listing for the web site of the Catholic Celiac Society at www.catholicceliacsociety.org . They have wonderful resources and links there. But it is important for you to understand, there is a very low gluten host that has been approved. It's lower than even the standard for gluten-free in Europe. So some people are able to tolerate that. Some are not. If you can-- if they are able to tolerate just a little, then they could have just a small piece of host because the fullness of the presence of Jesus, is in the smallest piece of that host. Some also receive only under the precious blood, and in that case they use a separate cup, not the one over which the host is broken, because for some just that much of the host would be detrimental to their health.

Lee Nagel

Thank you. As long as we're talking about liturgy, a question that arose is how do you help children or youth with disability be involved as liturgical ministers? How do you train a person with disabilities to be actively participating in liturgy and how perfect is liturgy supposed to be? Does inclusion of some with disabilities who are not able to sit quietly violate that standard? Is there a way to include those sometimes disruptive people with disability, even in liturgical ministries?

David Amico

I have done this a lot of times and I think it's very possible to do. It requires patience. It requires, again, a lot of the things that we've been talking about today: an understanding of this particular child or youth, what their needs are, how they learn, how to communicate with them effectively and from that information you build a little training program to allow them access to the training that you provided for everyone else. The wonderful thing about liturgical ministries is very often most of them are done in a buddy sort of system. And so, again, you can provide that kind of support and training for alter servers, for hospitality ministers, for ushers and certainly of course, for Eucharist ministers as well. It's again taking what we've done today in terms of catechesis and applying it to that setting. I don't think "making liturgy perfect" is the primary goal . The more important thing is to see that everyone is at the table, in case you missed that point in my talk.

Lee Nagel

That's a very good point, David. After all, liturgy translates to mean "the work of the people". Our work's are never perfect but always being perfected.

Another question. Someone said how they've been struggling to try to get a person to sign for a child who is hearing impaired. They say they've advertised, they've asked for help publicly and nobody seems to respond. Do you have any suggestions?

Nancy Thompson

I do. I would recommend you to the National Catholic Office for the Deaf (NCOD). You can contact them at www.ncod.org . Connie Wild, the Executive Director, is able to direct you to some local resources wherever you are in the United States. That local resource person can help you track down available interpreters in your area. Their telephone number is 301-577-4184. And that is their TDY. Their voice and fax is 301-557-1684. Connie is in the next room participating with the webinar right now, utilizing our closed captioning.

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Lee Nagel

Thanks, Nancy. David, could you talk a little bit about the diocesan responsibility to assist parishes? What can parishes look to the Diocese for support for in helping them?

David Amico

Well, it's our hope, of course, that there would be some resource person or persons available at the diocesan level, whether through the catechetical office, the Catholic school office, through the liturgy office, in some diocese through Catholic Charities or other agencies such as parish social missions, and so forth. Check with NCPD if you have problems locating your diocesan resource persons. By contacting here at the national Catholic partnership on disability, Nancy or Jan can certainly put you in touch with whoever is a diocesan contact for your area. So, again, if you go to ncpd.org, you'll be able to contact the office here and be able to access that information for your area.

Lee Nagel

Thanks, David. Someone questioned if you have to be careful with the individual lessons one-on-one because of our current situation concerning sexual abuse. What advise can you offer them about that concern?

David Amico

Well, I think obviously we need to have all the precautions that our diocese require now under the Charter for Protection of Youth and Children. You know, I don't think that there is a greater requirement because of dealing with children and youth with disabilities. You know, both children and youth with or without visible disabilities are all vulnerable individuals and therefore whatever protections are in place need to be the same for everyone. Again, we advise that in our diocese, if you're working one-on-one with a child, it needs to be in an open space, it needs to be public. There needs to be someone else around. So, again, the important thing is to consult with your diocesan and catechetical offices as to how you can best fulfill those requirements.

Lee Nagel

Can either of you offer any specific recommendations about resources to help children who have ADHD?

Nancy Thompson

There are many resources. Actually, we have a resource sheet that is on the website for you to download. David put together that resource sheet for a recent article he wrote for Religion Teachers' Journal. It lists several different kinds of general resources for children/youth with disability. We will continue to add to it as people complete and return our "Help Us Help You and Others" survey form and following our May 6 webinar.

David Amico

There is a very fine little book that is called "The ABCs of A.D.D. for Catechists." It is written by Madonna Wojtaszek-Healy, Ph.D.. And, again, if you go to the NCPD

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website at www.ncpd.org, you'll be able to get information about that. Madonna is also an excellent speaker and she loves to come to different dioceses if she is available. She can be reached at 815-741-5188 by phone and at rootedinloveinc@aol.com by e-mail. So that is one resource for you, anyway.

Lee Nagel

We are almost out of time.

The questions we didn't get to, we promise you that we'll get to them on our website. We want you to check the NCPD website for answers to those. At the end of this we're going to offer you an evaluation that will appear. We ask you to complete that as well.

What's most important right now is after March 26 there will be a complete archived copy of this webinar online for your free use and all you need to do is check www.ncpd.org.

Also, at the NCCL conference in Houston on April 6 there will be an NCPD wrap-around session from noon to 1:30 p.m. and you are all invited to participate and get some of the results of what you'll hopefully be sending in to help us out on the Help Us Help You and Others survey.

May 6 we will continue this webinar with Part 2, Catechesis with "Children and Youth with Disability, Applying the Vision" at 1:00 p.m. EDT. Once again, you will be asked to register. We hope that you will do that. Invite other people who have not been part of this webinar. That one-hour session will feature Sister Kathleen Schipani, Archdiocese Philadelphia, and Anne Masters, Archdiocese Newark. I will serve again as moderator..

We also are going to ask one more time that you complete the resource survey entitled "Help Us Help You and Others." This document has nine questions. It will be found both on the NCPD website and the NCCL website. As we receive your responses, we'll continue to compile and update the results. Please take the time to help us be a resource to one another.

I want to thank David and Nancy for their time and helpful presentations.

Circle May 6 on your calendar for Part 2. Don't forget to complete your online webinar evaluation within the next 20 minutes.

Blessings on all of you in your esteemed role as catechists. And here is the webinar. Evaluation.

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