

Highlights of the
Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with
Persons with Disabilities, Revised Edition

Revision Approved by the U.S. Catholic Bishops, June 15, 2017

Highlights prepared by the National Catholic Partnership on Disability

Addition of Introductory Paragraph

“The Church continues to affirm the dignity of every human being, and to grow in knowledge and understanding of the gifts and needs of her members who live with disabilities. Likewise, the Church recognizes that every parish community includes members with disabilities, and earnestly desires their active participation. All members of the Body of Christ are uniquely called by God by virtue of their Baptism. In light of this call, the Church seeks to support all in their growth in holiness, and to encourage all in their vocations. Participating in, and being nourished by, the grace of the sacraments is essential to this growth in holiness. Catholic adults and children with disabilities, and their families, earnestly desire full and meaningful participation in the sacramental life of the Church.”

Preface

New language added to 2nd sentence, par. 1 (see bolded words): “Inconsistencies arise ... provision of sign language interpreters **and captioning** for persons who are deaf”

General Principles

Modified language to #1. “All human beings are equal in dignity in the sight of God. Moreover, by reason of their Baptism, all Catholics also share the same divine calling.”

New language added to #3. “Full accessibility should be the goal for every parish, and these adaptations...”

New language added to #5. “Parish catechetical and sacramental preparation programs may need to be adapted for some parishioners with disabilities, though, as much as possible, persons with disabilities should be integrated into the ordinary programs. They should not be segregated for specialized catechesis unless their disabilities make it impossible for them to participate in the basic catechetical program.”

Modified language to #8: “Difficult situations may be encountered by those making pastoral decisions. Dioceses are encouraged to establish appropriate policies for handling such instances, which respect the rights of all involved, and which ensure the necessary provision of evaluation and recourse.”

Baptism

New language added to #11. “Parents who receive a prenatal diagnosis of a life-threatening condition should receive the support they need to assure that their child will be baptized “without delay.”¹ Indeed, priests, deacons, and other pastoral ministers should provide spiritual and emotional support to families who have received any difficult prenatal diagnosis and offer on-going support before and after the birth of a child, with special concern in the event of the death of a child.”

New language added to #13. “...Adults and children of catechetical age with disabilities should be welcomed into all stages and rites of the initiation process...”

Confirmation

New language added to #18. “To the degree possible, those with disabilities should be included along with others during the preparation and celebration of the sacrament. At times, pastoral need may necessitate an accommodated setting and a simpler manner.”

New language added as #20. “When those with disabilities who are already baptized Christians desire to become Catholic, they should participate in the *Rite of Reception of Baptized Christians into the Full Communion of the Catholic Church*, which normally includes the reception of the Sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist.”²

Eucharist

The Revision retained in #22 the important clarification that “the criterion for reception of Holy Communion is the same for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities as for all persons, namely, that the person be able to ‘distinguish the body of Christ from ordinary food,’ even if this recognition is evidenced through manner, gesture, or reverential silence rather than verbally.”

The Revision added guidance on three major issues relating to the reception of Holy Communion: when a person uses a feeding tube, in situations of gluten intolerance, and for those experiencing Alzheimer’s or other age-related dementias.

#24. “Catholics who require nourishment through feeding tubes are encouraged to receive Holy Communion, as are all the Catholic faithful... Since the full presence of Christ and his sanctifying grace are found in even the smallest piece of the consecrated host or in a mere drop of the consecrated wine, the norm of receiving through the mouth remains the same for those who otherwise use a feeding tube for sustenance, and Holy Communion is not to be administered through a feeding tube. For these communicants it will commonly be possible to place one or a few drops of the Precious Blood on the tongue. Clergy and pastoral ministers are encouraged to use these guidelines and consult with physicians, family members...Specialized instruction for extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion is to be provided as required.”

#25. “Catholics with Celiac Sprue Disease or other conditions that make them gluten intolerant should be given the opportunity to receive a small fragment of a regular host, and made aware of the options

¹⁵ CIC, c. 867, §2.

²⁹ See RCIA, 473-498; see NSC, 35.

to receive a low-gluten host or to receive under the form of wine alone. In the event of intolerance to gluten and wine, mustum may also be an option, with the approval of the local Ordinary....”³

#26. “When baptized Catholics who have been regular communicants develop advanced Alzheimer’s or other age-related dementias, there is to be a presumption in favor of the individual’s ability to distinguish between the Holy Communion and regular food. Holy Communion should continue to be offered as long as possible, and ministers are called to carry out their ministry with a special patience....”

Reconciliation

New language added to #29. “Catholics with significant communication disorders may be permitted to make their confessions using the communication system with which they are most fluent. Individuals preparing for the sacrament are to be taught to be as independent as possible in the use of their communication system to allow for the norm of private reception of the Sacrament. Confessors are encouraged to work with families and individuals to familiarize themselves with various alternative communication options to ensure that all who desire to celebrate this sacrament may do so, provided that the seal of confession is properly safeguarded.”

Anointing of the Sick

No changes were made to this section.

Holy Orders

New language added to #38 (see bolded words). “Diocesan vocation offices...should provide counseling, information resources, and **reasonable accommodations** for men with disabilities who are discerning a vocation...”

New language added as paragraph #40. “Some men with disabilities already serve the Church as bishops, priests, or deacons. Clergy who have or acquire a disability are to have access to resources and accommodations that will aid them in continuing in their ministry.”

Marriage

New language added to #44. “Couples with intellectual or developmental disabilities who believe they are called to the vocation of married life are encouraged to seek counsel by discussing the Sacrament of Matrimony with their families and pastors.”

New language added to #44. “A physical disability, in and of itself, does not necessarily constitute an impediment to marriage.”

New language added to #45. “Likewise, those who are nonverbal or have minimal verbal communication ability should be offered the opportunity to express their matrimonial consent using the communication system with which they are most fluent.”

³⁴ See Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Circular Letter to all Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences concerning the use of low-gluten altar breads and mustum as matter for the celebration of the Eucharist (July 24, 2003), C-1.

New language added to #46. “As people live longer, more will experience loss of mental and physical capabilities, including Alzheimer’s and other age-related dementias. The faith community must minister both to the spouse whose body or mind begins to fail and also to the spouse who becomes the caregiver....”

Conclusion

New language in this closing paragraph. “These Guidelines are presented to all who are involved in liturgical, pastoral, and catechetical ministry. All persons with disabilities have gifts to contribute to the whole Church. When persons with disabilities are embraced and welcomed, and invited to participate fully in all aspects of parish community life, the Body of Christ is more complete....”

The full version of the *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities, Revised Edition* is available at <http://www.usccb.org/about/divine-worship/policies/guidelines-sacraments-persons-with-disabilities.cfm>. A pdf version is available for download at the same site. Copyright ©2017, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington DC. All rights reserved.