

**Transcript of
Bishops' Pastoral Statement on People with
Disabilities at '30':
Bold Past, Bright Future
NCPD Webinar
August 13, 2008
1:00 p.m. EDT**

Participants

Moderator: Tom Grenchik, Executive Director of the Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB).

Peg Kolm, Director of the Office for Ministry to Persons with Disabilities, Archdiocese of Washington D.C.

Janice Benton, Executive Director of the National Catholic Partnership on Disability.

Vcall Technical Assistant:

Greetings, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to the National Catholic Partnership on Disability, the Bishops' Pastoral Statement on People with Disabilities at '30': Bold Past, Bright Future. At this time all participants are in a listen only mode. A brief question and answer session will follow the formal presentation via web.

If anyone should require operator assistance during the conference, please press star zero on your telephone keypad. As a reminder, this conference is being recorded.

It is now my pleasure to introduce your host Mr. Tom Grenchik. Thank you, Mr. Grenchik, you may begin.

Tom Grenchik:

Thank you. Good day, and welcome all our friends from across the United States, and thanks so much for joining us for this engaging discussion entitled The Bishops' Pastoral Statement on People with Disabilities at 30. Bright Past, Bold Future. The pastoral is a reflection on the teachings of Christ, a call to action and a blueprint for change. This webinar is being brought to you by the National Catholic Partnership on Disability in collaboration with the ministries listed on this slide.

This work of ministering with persons with disabilities now crosses all departments, from pro-life to parish life, from specialized ministries to schools. Today we will explore the strides that have been made since this landmark

statement, and we will look at the principles and practices that have brought about the effective transitions and growth in our church in society related to the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

But first let's get started with a prayer, from the National Catholic Partnership on Disability. I invite you to pray it aloud with me as you see it on your screen.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, amen. Loving God, you make each living person in your image. Your gift of love and commitment to the human race. A seed to build a community of interdependence and respect for all life.

As we celebrate the U.S. Bishops' proclamation of welcome and inclusion, open our hearts to their words. Commit us to their proclamation that there can be no separate church for people with disabilities. We are one flock. Amen.

Thanks so much for praying with us. Please note that large T in parenthesis by the title of the slide. That T will show up on other slides during the presentation, and means that this is one of the items that you will find in full in the toolkit for disability ministry, found at www.NCPD.org. The presenters will talk more about this later.

We have all kinds of interesting and exciting people participating in this webinar today. Every one of you is a gift, and we really value your participation. So we want to hear from you through your responses to several polls that we will post today, and through the questions that you can send to the presenters.

During this program we will invite you to participate in three different polls, the first of which will appear on your screen right now.

Our polling capability is limited to 10 answers for this multiple choice question, so please click as many categories that describe you from our list. You can click on as many as you like, but please do so quickly. I will do it along with you right now, too.

I'm just about done, how about you?

Okay, we've got your results in. Look at all the gifted people we have in our ministry community today. And look at the diverse roles represented here. There are well over 200 sites logged in, with multiple participants at some locations.

As I said earlier, we want to hear from you, and here's how that is possible. In the top left-hand corner of the screen there is a Q&A button. Whenever you

have a question, simply click on the Q&A button. Type your question, and be sure to hit send. It will come directly to me. We'll do our best to respond to as many questions as possible, following the two presentations of the webinar.

Our two main presenters with me today are Jan Benton and Peg Kolm. I had the great pleasure of working very closely with both Jan and Peg during the Holy Father's April visit to Washington, D.C. and New York City. The three of us found out that we were a great team in finding great ways to emphasize the roles of persons with disabilities during the papal visit. We've also found that we were happy collaborators when it comes to efforts like our recent work together on the life, justice and family convocation in Camden last month, or the draft utility care statement being developed by the National Catholic Partnership on Disability. Jan and Peg are two very dedicated and wonderful ladies.

So now to our first presentation. Jan Benton has been the executive director of the National Catholic Partnership on Disability since May 2004, and has worked with the partnership since its beginnings in 1982. Jan is a professed secular Franciscan for over 25 years and is happily married to, as Jan says, a very supportive and patient man. They have a great son and daughter, both of whom are in college now.

Jan will provide the foundation and history for the bishops' 1978 visionary document. We welcome Jan.

Jan Benton:

Thank you very much, Tom. I'm very happy to have the opportunity to share with you today the story of our ministry as inspired by the 1978 pastoral statement, reflecting on where we've been and where we are going. I'd like to begin by sharing a little of my own story. The pastoral statement was passed by the U.S. Catholic Bishops on November 16th, 1978, three weeks before I graduated from college.

As the pastoral was being launched, I was setting out into the world. As my world was opening with new directions, so, too, are people with disabilities about to discover new opportunities. Little did I know then how intricately tied the pastoral and I would be in the coming 30 years.

During college I had the good fortune to volunteer in and then direct a religious education program for children and young adults with intellectual disabilities; back then we called it mental retardation. I was taught by several pioneering leaders, two of whom are still active in ministry and mentoring me to this day. That is Maureen O'Reilly and Father Bob Malloy, OSM CAPS, both from the archdiocese in Detroit.

We weren't alone in our ministry. Decades before the pastoral was written there was a vibrant grassroots ministry supporting the pastoral needs of

Catholics with disabilities and their families. Cardinal Stritch, University of Milwaukee, led by the Sisters of Saint Francis of Asisi, educated many of our future leaders.

Several national Catholic organizations of people with disabilities arose prior to the pastoral in order to support the spiritual needs of one another. These include CUSA, which is a letter writing apostolate for persons with disabilities and chronic illness. NCPD is collaborating closely with CUSA now. And the Victorious Missionaries, a member organization with chapters throughout the United States.

Two organizations formed to support pastoral workers and families were the National Apostolate for the Mentally Retarded, in 1967, which is now known as the National Apostolate for Inclusion Ministry, and in 1971 the National Catholic Office for the Deaf.

Board members from these organizations and others in ministry raised their concerns to the U.S. Bishops. In 1975, the U.S. Catholic Conference responded by inviting leaders to serve on a national advisory committee on ministries to people with disabilities. I was honored to be nominated to the committee in 1980, and served during its final two years.

It was through this committee that the pastoral was drafted. Once the bishops approved the pastoral, the committee set to work to bring it to life throughout the United States.

As we all set out on this work to implement the bishops' directives, we had a dream of opening a national office to address the concerns of Catholics with disabilities. We are indebted to this day to the American Board of Catholic Missions and its then-director, Dr. David Beyers, for providing us with the start-up funds to open what was then called the National Catholic Office for Persons with Disabilities, NCPD, in August of 1982.

We are still called NCPD, but as of 2002 it stands for the National Catholic Partnership on Disability.

The founding executive director, Sister Rita Baum, hired me as her assistant, and we set out to work supporting all of those already involved in the ministry. We also advocated that offices be opened where none existed.

On the slide you see Sister Rita, as well as Dave Beyers. In addition pictured is Father Dave Walsh, the first executive director of the National Catholic Office for the Deaf, and Dorothy Coughlin, one of our founding board members and a current director of our board.

So what exactly was and is the significance of the pastoral, and what is its relevance to us today? The pastoral has been described in many ways. As

prophetic, groundbreaking, far-reaching, cutting edge, inspirational. To many, the pastoral has been and still is seen as the declaration of independence.

I'd like to pause now to test your knowledge of legislative history. Please vote for which piece of federal legislation you believe was influenced by the pastoral. I'll give you a few moments to cast your vote.

Okay. We have a smart bunch with us. 38 percent of you knew that it was the Americans with Disabilities Act.

When the act itself was introduced, many of you may or may not know this, but the pastoral statement was quoted on the floor of the Senate by one of the sponsoring senators who was reading from the U.S. Bishops' letter of support for the legislation. The letter quoted from paragraph 10 and 11 of the pastoral noting, and I am quoting here, "It is not enough merely to affirm the rights of people with disabilities. We must actively work to realize these rights in the fabric of modern society."

Clearly the Catholic Church through this pastoral was leading the way for people with disabilities. And of course, since the passage of the ADA, people's expectations of access have been increased in all aspects of their lives, including their life of faith. For NCPD and for me personally, and for countless pastoral leaders, the pastoral statement has been our GPS system, guiding our way in ministry for nearly three decades.

I'd like to focus my remaining time on describing what I see as the power of the pastoral to call people to act, by the way in which it, A, affirms; C, challenges; and T, transforms. Through the inspiration of the pastoral, let us act.

So we begin with affirms.

With their statements, the bishops affirmed what so many individuals, family members and pastoral leaders already knew. That is, and I'm quoting from the pastoral, which was quoting Pope John the 23rds' encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, and I quote, "In an ordered and productive community it is a fundamental principle that every human being is a person. One has rights and duties flowing directly and spontaneously from one's very nature. These rights are therefore universal, and viable, and inalienable." End quote.

Pastoral statement affirms the inherent dignity of all people and their rights. It also affirms the responsibility of the church community to respond to people with disabilities as did our Lord. That is, with love and compassion.

And likewise affirms the giftedness of people with disabilities, and recognizes the ways in which they enrich our faith community.

The pastoral was an affirmation for the pioneers who had been involved in this ministry for so many years, and for parents who are devoting their lives to their beloved children.

And finally, the closing paragraph of the pastoral affirms that we are one flock. Not separate, but one.

Now on to C, challenge. Pastoral also raises challenges confronting the beliefs, structures and policies that marginalize and dehumanize our brothers and sisters. It challenges us to act more deliberately and more faithfully. It causes us to break down walls and open hearts. And it calls us, very importantly, to re-examine our own attitudes.

Due to time constraints I can share but a few points from the pastoral to illustrate my points. And I begin here quoting from our bishops. "The same Jesus who heard the cry for recognition from the people with disabilities of Judea and Samaria 2,000 years ago calls us, his followers, to embrace our responsibility to our own disabled brothers and sisters in the United States."

The bishops go on to say, "We call upon people of good will to re-examine their attitudes towards their brothers and sisters with disabilities, and promote their well-being, acting with a sense of justice and compassion that the Lord so clearly desires."

And finally, the bishops state, quote, "Further, realizing the unique gifts individuals with disabilities have to offer the church, we wish to address the need for their integration into the Christian community and their fuller anticipation in its life."

As you can see, the bishops raise many challenges, and I haven't quoted beyond the first paragraph.

Finally, we come to T, transforms. I would like to now describe the power of the pastoral to transform our church, society, and our ministry in ever new and fresh ways. So how has our ministry been transformed?

I need to preface by saying that for many of the points I outline below I could raise the contrary example. That is, while much has been done, there are still problems and needs to be addressed. Exclusion continues to happen, and sometimes individuals and families leave the church in pain.

Historically, disability has been considered as far from the norm and something to be feared and shunned. NCPD, however, defines disability as the normal and anticipated outcome of the risks, stresses and strains of the living process.

This definition, which was an insight of my predecessor, Mary Jane Owen, bears repeating. Disabilities are the normal, anticipated outcomes of the risks, stresses and strains of the living process. They are neither unique nor rare. According to the U.S. census, 20 percent of any group, that is, one person in five, has a disability which limits some major life function. One family in three has a personal experience of disability.

So we encourage you to recognize disabilities as a normal part of living, which should be expected and planned for.

By the same token, we used to talk about mainstreaming as something exceptional. Now we recognize it as a given that everyone belongs. It's not our role to allow a person in. By virtue of his or her baptism, an individual belongs in a safe community. We just need to make sure that nothing is impeding that access. Whether it be attitudes, always the biggest barrier, or lack of architectural or educational accommodations.

Years ago parents would question whether their children with disabilities could attend mass or religious education classes. Ones they began to attend mass, they wondered if their child could possibly prepare to receive the sacraments. Now people with disabilities are called to serve and participate in their parish communities in a variety of ways.

I'd like to share a quick story about a groundbreaking pioneer, Colleen Ruppert, who is pictured on your screen. She's pictured serving as the Eucharistic minister. Colleen was an active, contributing member of her parish long before others were involved, and she still is, I'm happy to say. Colleen's witness inspired many individuals and parents to consider and act on the possibilities of service. NCPD's director of programs, Dr. Nancy Thompson, recently shared with me that seeing Colleen serving as Eucharistic minister reordered the world for her and her son Larry, who are both here today. It had never occurred to them that Larry could serve in a similar way.

20 years later, you are looking at a picture of Larry offering the precious blood to Colleen. And I have to tell you this is not a staged picture. When we found it we were so thrilled, because it's a picture of Larry serving as the eucharistic minister at our Witness to Benedict mass in April that Tom mentioned.

A follow-up to this is the concept of universal design. In the 1970s and 80s we spoke of creating barrier-free environments, suitable specifically for individuals with disabilities. The focus now is on creating environments that to the greatest extent possible can be utilized by anyone at any time.

The Access Manual for Catholic Facilities currently being developed by NCPD will utilize these principles. In addition, NCPD applies this concept to

ministry, encouraging diocesan directors or parish advocates to network with their colleagues in order to infuse disability concerns into all ministries of a parish or diocese.

Our goal is not to set up a special separate individualized separate ministry serving only people with disabilities. The disability ministry toolkit posted on NCPD's website includes an article on this topic, entitled Creating a Universally Designed Ministry.

In paragraph 30 of the pastoral, the bishops state, and I quote here, "Dioceses might make their most valuable contribution in the area of education. Catholic elementary and secondary schoolteachers could be provided in-service training on how best to integrate students with disabilities into programs of regular education," end quote.

While Catholic elementary and secondary schools are increasingly serving the needs of students with learning and other disability, there remains much to be done. NCPD is partnering with many organizations, including the Bishops Education Office, to provide resources and supports.

We also applaud many parents groups such as FIRE, SPICE, and the Catholic Coalition for Special Education in our own archdiocese, for funding programs of inclusion in Catholic schools.

Early next year NCPD's website will feature best practices for including students with disabilities in Catholic schools, and provide a question and answer exchange. We will also be hosting a webinar on this topic in 2009, we hope you'll stay tuned.

Very importantly are the pro-life issues that Tom mentioned. We face ever-increasing threats to the very existence of people with disabilities through such practices as abortion, physician assisted suicide and end of life treatment policies. Many of these weren't even considered back in the time of the pastoral 30 years ago, but they were addressed in the 20th anniversary statement, Welcome and Justice.

As many of you know, 80 to 90 percent of fetuses Down's syndrome are aborted. Significant genetic research is currently being done on autism. Many fear that a prenatal test may be developed resulting in the same fate for people with autism that's befallen those with Down's syndrome. As Tom mentioned, we're grateful to be working with his office to counter these dangerous initiatives.

On the screen you're looking at a picture of a group of people at the Witness to Benedict event during the Holy Father's visit. The message we shared on our banner was, "Thank you, Holy Father for valuing and defending our lives."

We also wish to thank Tom Grenchik and his staff for their tireless efforts in defending our lives. We are grateful to be partnering with them.

And the closing point on transformation. Dioceses and disability directors, catechists and other pastoral leaders are expected today to provide support and services to people with an ever increasing range of disabilities. As we all know, autism spectrum disorders have greatly increased, increasing the need for their pastoral support.

We're also reaching out to people now with mental illnesses, celiac disease, and traumatic brain injury. We are working with partners to help us in these efforts.

Our October 6 webinar, for example, will be focusing on the topic of the sacramental life of people with mental illnesses. Our speakers will be members of NCPD's own Council on Mental Illness.

I'd like to close by just talking about a few trends. While parishes and dioceses are being asked more and more to expand their services, budget cuts are a reality. NCPD is responding to this in a number of ways.

In our toolkit is an article entitled Universal Design on a Diocesan Level which talks about models for ministry in order to support the needs of people with disabilities. We're also in the midst of developing a training on foundations in disability ministry to be offered to people who may not have formal training in disability issues, but whose ministry will impact the lives of individuals with disabilities and their families. Of course, we believe that includes everyone.

A few more trends that really impact our ministry. The face of the U.S. Catholic Church is changing. It's estimated, as you may know, that by 2050 Hispanic Catholics will make up over 50 percent of the U.S. church. We need to keep pace with these shifts and assure that the issues and culture of these communities are incorporated into our ministry. Check out the U.S. Bishops website, they have a secretariate on cultural diversity, which can be of help to you.

Another vital statistic is by 2050 the population of people over 65 will have doubled from our current rate. You know as well as I what the huge implications that will have for our ministry.

Another trend is that we are becoming an increasingly individualized society. More and more, each of us is accustomed to focusing on our personal rights, often to the exclusion of the common good of the needs of others. But our Holy Scripture and the example of our loving Lord teaches us that we are a community.

The pastoral reminds us that we are one flock, we prayed that. Our tradition and teaching calls us to embrace community in a spirit of love. We need to nurture people in this rich faith.

And finally, remember that many of our current bishops were not bishops at the time the pastoral was adopted. So find ways to share the message with your bishop and his staff and your parish staff. The toolkit might aid you in this effort.

One other point actually about attitudes. They are still the biggest and most painful barrier we face. But when inclusion does succeed in a parish, it's because people work together in a spirit of welcome, concern, and mutual respect.

We need to assure that the needs of all parishioners, both disabled and nondisabled, are considered and met. As I turn this over to Tom, I encourage you to act on the vision in the pastoral statement. Sincerely affirm as often as you can. Challenge yourself to ongoing growth and introspection. And be ever mindful that a transformative ministry is always evaluating, evolving, modifying, and moving forward. Thank you.

Tom Grenchik:

Thank you, Jan. That was a beautiful summary of what the U.S. Bishops told us in 1978. Today we also hear some very encouraging words from two more bishops reflecting on this anniversary. Cardinal Daniel Denardo, a long time board member of NCPD and now its episcopal moderator, has also recently become a member of the U.S. Bishops committee on pro-life activities. He and Cardinal Justin Rigali, the chairman of the committee, have together written a letter dated today, August 13th, from which I would like to share just an excerpt with you at this time. You can see it now on your screen.

"Today a new generation of leaders must be recruited and trained so we can continue to advance in the 21st century our church's outreach, catechesis, advocacy and support in the important work of disabilities ministry. We join the National Catholic Partnership on Disability in calling on all people of good will to find new pathways, develop new partnerships, and bring new vitality to this ministry. Ever mindful that we are one flock under the care of a single Shepherd.

Our Holy Father called us to draw near to Christ our Hope during his recent visit to the United States. Throughout this 30th anniversary year, let us live Christ our Hope, as we honor the gifts that people with disabilities bring to their faith communities, and rededicate ourselves to ensuring their meaningful participation in all aspects of the church and society."

Well, we certainly thank these cardinals for these encouraging words. Notice the capital T on your slide. That indicates that you will find this letter from our cardinals in its entirety in the toolkit. Please read it and reflect on the entire letter when you get a chance.

Looks like we have a number of questions coming in so far, so don't forget to ask your questions as we move along. We'll get to the questions after our second speaker.

So now let's move on to that second speaker, Peg Kolm, who will help us look at some practical ways of implementing the vision of the pastoral statement on people with disabilities, and she'll help us look to the future. Peg is the coordinator of Ministry for Persons with Disabilities in the Department of Social Concerns for the Archdiocese of Washington, in Washington, D.C. Peg is cochair of her parish's disability ministry, she is a former news editor and media consultant, and she's the wife and mother of two great kids. We welcome Peg.

Peg Kolm:

I want to thank you for your spirit of collaboration, and I thank the National Catholic Partnership on Disability for inviting me to share ideas about the upcoming 30th anniversary.

The goals of today are these. I'd like you to know about the pastoral, know about its impact, history and mission, as Jan has told us. Next I'd like you to honor the spirit of the pastoral in your life and work, and if you can, reach out to the young in your work.

Anniversaries are what reporters would call a hook; something to hang a story on. It's easy to justify a broadcast story or print piece on any given day if you can tap into the very real human need to look back in time. An anniversary does that.

When I came to the archdiocese of Washington about a year ago, I took note of the upcoming 30th anniversary of the bishops' pastoral, and knew this was an opportunity to use the anniversary hook to bring more people closer to the ideals in the document. A document which, as Jan says, leads us to act -- affirm, challenge, and transform our world -- in order to build up the mystical body of Christ.

Before I begin, though, I'd like to tell you how I came to this work. My portal is my own child, Kate. 17 years ago, my husband and I weren't expecting our second child to be anything but normal and healthy. But we got what we didn't expect, a child born with a rare syndrome.

So for the better part of 17 years, our lives have been spent learning how to care for Kate, finding the right specialists, preparing for surgeries, that sort of thing, and not really having a deep connection to Christ and his church. That was BP; before pastoral.

I remember the first time I heard about the pastoral statement. About five years ago I was attending a kind of townhall meeting at our parish for parents of children who have disabilities, and one of the speakers described some of the tenets of the pastoral.

Like many others in the room, I had no idea our bishops had ever written on the subject. I learned that night that my church, long before Kate was born, welcomed her and persons like her into the body of Christ. And I remember the exact moment I realized that the bishops, who in their later publication, *Sacramental Guidelines for Persons with Disabilities*, created a process for my child to be welcomed at the Eucharistic table. It was a life-changing moment. The pastoral was a portal back into my church.

Before that time, I thought the Catholic Church had only three things to offer my child, what I called then the three Bs: Baptism, burial, and back of the church attendance at mass.

After reading the pastoral statement, I realized that my church wanted and needed Kate. Now I know that the Catholic Church offers a sense of belonging.

So I invite you to read the pastoral, read it in its entirety on the National Catholic Partnership on Disability's website. It is a short, beautifully crafted description of how we should imitate Jesus as we include persons with disabilities in our church and society.

After you read the pastoral, then what? This afternoon I want to share three practical applications of the pastoral. How you can build the pastoral into your prayer and work life; I'll talk about the unique features of this 30th anniversary, and I'll discuss how the pastoral is our shared portal into the gospels, and into a deeper connection with Jesus Christ.

As I said, this 30th anniversary is an opportunity to grow our ministry. And the exact date of the anniversary, November 16th, is providentially a Sunday.

Your first starting point might be joining us on our journey. The National Catholic Partnership on Disability and the Archdiocese of Washington envision a full year of engagement from Sunday November 16th, 2008, to Sunday, November 15th, 2009. The engagement we're committing ourselves to is a year to read, reflect, pray, and then teach the message of the pastoral.

You might be thinking or hoping we'll plan a special anniversary liturgy. That would be fine, but what we're really wanting is for all of you to re-imagine your ministry.

Just now Cardinal Rigali and Cardinal Denardo have asked us as people of good will to find new pathways, new partnerships, and new vitality in a year to live Christ our Hope.

That name is a reminder of Pope Benedict's journey to the U.S., a journey he called Christ our Hope. During his visit in New York with children who have disabilities, our pope said, "Sometimes it is challenging to find a reason for what appears only as a difficulty to be overcome, or even pain to be endured." He went on to say, "Yet our faith helps us to break open the horizon, beyond our own selves, in order to see life as God does. God's unconditional love, which bathed every human individual, points to a meaning and purpose for all human life."

All throughout his visit the pope witnessed the value of human life. Of course we would expect him to do this, but few know he has experienced firsthand the horror of a system that categorizes person based on their utility.

When Joseph Ratzinger was 14, his own cousin, who was about the same age, was taken from his family and eventually murdered by the Nazis. That cousin was a young man with Down's syndrome. The Third Reich had determined such people needed therapy, but what they really believed was that persons with disabilities were what they called "useless eaters." At the time, the Bishop of Munster spoke out against this ghastly doctrine.

Our Holy Father has lived most of his life without that cousin. He carries on the work of the Bishop of Munster by reminding us that life is indeed a gift.

It is this same man, Pope Benedict, who grew in his faith so much that he could distill this piece of wisdom: The one who has hope lives differently.

Let me say that again. The one who has hope lives differently.

Let us try to live as people who believe, who have hope, as we read the pastoral, reflect on it, and work together.

Of course, the work part is always a major concern. How do we get more accomplished with limited budgets and expanding goals. We are here to help. We've put together an online resource for all of you, the disability ministry toolkit, with fresh ideas for implementing the vision of the pastoral statement, that can be found exclusively on the NCPD website.

The toolkit contains everything you will need to get your year going, including some great resources from the papal visit. And we want this toolkit to be interactive. So if you have an idea to share, send it to NCPD@NCPD.org.

And throughout the rest of this webinar, all terms with the capital T describe items that are in the toolkit. To integrate the pastoral into your work life, consider this quote by the late theologian Walter Burghardt. "Social justice begins with deep listening. That listening must of course begin with our own prayer life." Make this a year of renewed reflection. Finding a spiritual director might be a good start, or perhaps finding a bit more time every day to be open to the Holy Spirit. Certainly receiving the sacraments more often, especially the Eucharist, can give us all much needed graces.

That deep listening also happens at every meeting you attend. And I'm sure, like me, you are in lots of them. When I started at the archdiocese I was told by my predecessor, Delores Wilson, that this work was a ministry of meetings.

It's clear that holding an effective meeting is a great goal for this partnership year. So we've developed a planning tool called the Ministry of Meetings found in the toolkit on the NCPD.org website.

Another thought about meetings, we have them all the time, but what would it take for us to be as excited about the planning meaning as about the event or program we are planning. In truth, the meeting process is the first step in that deep listening and in community building. If we might consider meetings as the outward and visible sign of our encounter with Christ in the person or persons before us, we might then be more open to the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

So start each meeting in prayer, there are some great prayers in your toolkit. And as you reflect, think about language, too. These past 30 years have seen a change in our thinking about persons with disabilities, and that is reflected in language.

There are some great resources in our toolkit that will give you some ideas about how to use "People First" language.

Now let's look at what the 30th anniversary really means. You might be thinking 30 years isn't very remarkable. It's not 25 or 50. But it turns out that 30 years really is very special. A passage of 30 years represents, literally, a new beginning.

When I was considering this topic, the idea of passing the torch kept coming to me. So I looked up the term "generation" in the dictionary, and there it was in the definition. 30 years is the standard length of time between human generations. Between the birth of parents and the birth of their offspring.

It seems to me that this 30th anniversary is about reaching out to the next generation. Young people who may not know about that definition of disability as being a natural part of life. I also like the idea of the pastoral being generative, capable of creating new life.

If the 30th anniversary is called to the next generation, it's a generation unique in human history. Because of persons like my daughter Kate, persons who survived a difficult birth and infancy, due to technical advances.

So the call of the 30s is to make good ground for our ministerial offspring, the next generation of persons like Kate coming into adulthood, and those persons who will support them.

How do we engage young persons in this ministry? We begin with what I'll call the "Come a little closer" campaign. The idea is not to bring two groups together in a one-time event, but to introduce a process of knowing each other. Here are the components.

Connect to the bishop's pastoral statement and make the spiritual component and the Catholic Church's outstanding witness a central part of what you do. Use everything around you. Use your e-mail tag line, your phone message, your website.

Mention the pastoral in everything you do.

Include a formation process. The event is seen as the first step to build and grow community.

Make a targeted request for help to find a few more volunteers just for this year.

Have your leadership be organic. Begin with some plans and projects, but get back into that deep listening Father Burghardt talked about.

Make it fun, too. While we still must advocate for our community, we can turn away from sharp approaches and work as people who have hope. So make it fun, whatever fun means to you. Food, music a great activity.

How do we get young people to come a little closer? Contact your Catholic schools office, religious education department, and youth ministry office, to get an invitation to speak about the pastoral to middle or high school religion classes or youth groups.

Let me say here that during Pope Benedict's visit he reminded us that no child should be denied his or her right to an education in faith which in turn nurtures

the soul of a nation. Many Catholic schools are welcoming students with disabilities. This is a positive trend.

Whenever you meet with young persons, introduce Catholic social teaching, especially the foundational tenet, life and dignity of the human person. More on Catholic social teaching can be found on the USCCB website.

Next, do that follow-up piece by asking for a meeting on campus to imagine a shared project. Consider having a young person on your advisory board or instituting an associate board with teenagers and young adults. And this is important, make sure your outreach plan has a marketing piece that really can and does get implemented.

Find out if colleges or parishes near colleges have an outreach component, and do the same thing. For example, the Portland, Oregon diocese works with what they call RECS communities where college students and those with a disability share friendship, faith and a meal. More information is on the youth outreach page of your toolkit.

What can young adults themselves do to translate the statement into their generation? Here are some ideas. Hold a film screening. There are a number of great films and documentaries about persons with disabilities, a list of these films and links on how to obtain them are in the media guide of your toolkit.

Following the screening, select a panel of young persons to lead a dialogue about the film as it relates to one part of the bishops' pastoral statement.

Have a sign language demonstration. To bring two communities together, sometimes it helps to have a little competition, so you might consider organizing a sign language spelling bee. You could also show a great new DVD resource now available called Liturgical Signs and Prayers. It was coproduced by the Archdiocese of Washington and the Archdiocese of Baltimore, and demonstrates the specialized signs for mass, a baptism, and a wedding. Information about this DVD is in the toolkit.

And use the internet. There's a great youtube video students will love. A deaf performing arts group signs along to the rock ballad, Waiting for the World to Change. We have shown this video during Catholic schools week with great success.

So make the request now to have an event or connection to Catholic Schools Week, which happens every year in late January. And connect with similar gatherings put on by your religious education department.

You could also have a teen social event, a 3M event of what we call mass, meal, and mission. Because we're a church we begin with mass, follow with a meal and some kind of real world activity.

At every chance you get, use the 30th anniversary as a hook to engage. And remember, it's not really enough just to present to one group, such as students. Make sure everyone -- parents, faculty and staff -- get a piece of the pastoral.

Now it's time for you to weigh in on how you might be able to use some of these ideas in your ministry. We'd like you to look at the question on your screen, which says what group could you partner with this year to reach the Catholic youth leaders of the future. You can answer with more than one group, and I'm going to answer right now myself.

Just a few more minutes. Seconds, rather. And we'll see what the response was. Wow, look at all those responses. I'm pleased to see a large turnout in the religious education programs.

Next I'll give you some ideas on how to partner with others in this year of live Christ our Hope, at the parish or diocesan level.

Here's how you might be able to come a little closer in parishes. Institute a life issues group to discuss the intersection of abortion and genetic screening. Or you could seek out a local faith and life group to share a meal, mass or mission. Or you could do the same with your large communities, if there are any in your area.

You can have an event at your bookstore or library, featuring a book or DVD listed in the media guide. And you could plan a liturgy. But in this partnership year, do it with more partners.

The Diocese of Richmond has provided a great model called Inclusion Sunday. Last June, many of the over 150 parishes in the Richmond, Virginia diocese welcomed and included Catholics who have disabilities at masses that day. Their head start in planning is your windfall. It's all there in the toolkit.

A reminder here that I'm not really suggesting you take on a whole new line of work or a new set of projects. What is really hoped for is that transformation piece Jan talked about. Enriching what you are already doing with an emphasis on reaching out to the next generation.

What we're really talking about here also is something more. It's about coming a little closer ourselves to Christ. Again, the pastoral can help. For me, the bishops' pastoral statement was a portal into the gospels Matthew, Luke, and into St. Paul's letter to the Romans, where, as the bishops wrote in 1978,

scripture teaches us that any other commandment there may be is all summed up in this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

The bishops went on to say Jesus in his wisdom said as yourself. The bishops also said that we are called to build a community of interdependent people and discover the kingdom of God in our midst. Read the pastoral. Know its tenets. Honor it in your work this year.

We have come a long way in three decades, but of course we might go a little further. I call on you as people of good will to take this work to the next generation in a partnership year, to live Christ our Hope.

Tom Grenchik:

Thank you, Peg, for your great personal story and your great ideas in putting this pastoral to work. Folks, we're going to move right into your question and answers. Jan and I have been looking at some of those, and I'm going to let Jan begin by sharing a couple of questions and answers, then I'll be coming in with other questions that have come up.

Note that the directions for sending in questions are back on your screen.

Jan Benton:

We received a question: Are you aware of any national grants available to small rural churches that want to make their buildings handicap accessible? Thank you for that question, it's one we get a lot.

In the toolkit there's a page called Q&A, and it's actually from our parish guide, and it does answer a little bit of where you can get some funding. Now, I apologize that I am not aware of specific national grants, but I suggest you go to local groups. Family foundations, and the service groups as well, the Knights of Columbus, Alhambras, the Catholic Daughters, and ask them for assistance.

If it's a large project that you have in mind, I would recommend you just include it in the parish budget as you would for any other major type of thing that you're trying to fund. Especially if you're doing a capital campaign, that type of thing.

We will be answering -- we will be posting our question and answers on our website, and if I come up with -- there is one that I have in mind, but I want to check with that source. After I check with them, if that is available, as I'm thinking it might be, it will -- we'll post it on that Q&A, okay?

Next question: Does anyone have advice about teaching an eight-year-old child with nonverbal autism? I'm trying to get her ready for First Communion.

The last two webinars that we hosted were on catechesis and people with disabilities, the archival links are on our website at NCPD.org. On the home page you'd click on webinar and you'll get to those. I would suggest you begin there, there's a link that you can actually listen to those webinars again.

The second webinar, the one we did in May, featured one of our speakers was Ann Masters from the Archdiocese of Newark, who offered a lot of tips for that particular topic.

I'd also say to the questioner if you'd like to call us here at NCPD, 202-529-2933, we'd be happy to talk to you further and maybe could direct you to a more local person who could work with you on that issue.

Peg Kolm:

Here's a question: Our new archbishop has recommended installation of kneelers in all our parishes in our diocese. For some parishes this will require a significant redesign of worship space. How can you help us with this transformation?

Well, again, I think there are two things you need to do. One is to -- first, not to remake the wheel, but to try to make sure that there are other -- to reach out to other dioceses to find out what they have done, and NCPD can help you.

And I think the other thing is to make sure that persons with disabilities aren't housed in one part of the worship space exclusively. So for instance, the cutouts for the wheelchairs are not just in the front or just in the back, that they're in different places. Because I did mention that sometimes we sit in the back of the church, but really after reading the pastoral we sit where is best for us as a family, and sometimes that's in the back, and sometimes it's on the side, and sometimes it's in the front. So please, the most important thing is to be welcome, and to be welcoming.

Jan Benton:

We received a question on legislation. What legislation is NCPD currently working on nationally? What can individual states do legislatively to help raise awareness for NCPD's concerns?

I'm glad you raised that question, thank you.

One issue that we've been working on for decades now, but has a new name, is -- used to be called Mi Casa, now it's called the Community Choice Act, and it would shift Medicaid funds so that they could fund community-based services. We and the bishops are very much in favor of this legislation, and we would encourage you to work with your local -- we're working with ADAPT, the group ADAPT nationally, but work with any local people that you know,

any of your local advocates to try to get your own senators and congress people to support this legislation.

You can also work and hope that you are working with your state Catholic conferences, as well as the legislative network that you might have in your own diocese or archdiocese. I know that we have a very active one in our archdiocese, and we're also not only addressing national issues, but state issues, as well.

We also in NCPD are working on some other initiatives relating to life issues. One is in the state of Washington there will be a referendum on physician-assisted suicide. We're working very closely with Tom's office on that, and we are in the process of drafting a statement on that issue which will, as soon as it's reviewed and hopefully passed by our board of directors, it will be made available on our website.

And we're concerned that it's an issue that isn't going to -- it's already legal in Oregon, now it's being considered in Washington, and we're concerned that other states will be facing the same.

Another question was also related to catechesis. How can we assess readiness for the reception of the sacraments?

I would just say the same as I did, please review our past webinars and see what's helpful with that.

There's also we have the bishops, and we didn't have time to talk about the other documents, but the bishops passed the guidelines for the celebration of the sacraments for people with disabilities in 1995. In the toolkit there's a list of resources available from USCCB, and that's included among them. And those guidelines are very helpful to you on that issue.

Peg Kolm:

We got a question about -- one question, where is the liturgical signs and prayers DVD, where is that information. And there's actually a deaf -- an outreach to deaf and hard of hearing page in the toolkit where the information about that DVD is. It also can be purchased through the Catholic Information Center at cicdc.org.

We had a question here about -- talking about the -- can I talk briefly about the tension between inclusion and specialized ministries.

I can talk as a parent, probably less than a diocesan director, that I think you have to work with the comfort level of the family first, and move out from there. The church is a community, we belong to the community, but

sometimes people need separate spaces and programs to achieve success in some part of their sacramental prep or their religious faith formation.

Tom Grenchik:

Folks, we're almost out of time, and the questions we didn't get to, we promise to post them on our website after September 17th. What's most important right now is that after September 17th there will be a complete archived copy of this webinar plus a transcript online for your free use. All you need to do is check www.NCPD.org.

I want to thank Jan and Peg for their wonderful presentations and to bring to your attention some upcoming events that will be of interest to those involved with disabilities ministry. We have the National Apostolate for Inclusion Ministry Conference in Sandusky, Ohio, on September 4th through 6th; the Network of Inclusive Catholic Educators Convention September 26th through 28th in Miami; the NCPD webinar on October 6 from 1:00 to 2:00 p.m. eastern daylight time; and the Pastoral Statement Symposium on October 18th in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; and then a conference on Suicide; Dying Too Soon, October 25 in Chicago, Illinois.

These activities and others are listed on the coming events calendar found in the toolkit. Contact information is provided, as well.

Now, a little bit more about the October 6th webinar. Come back on Monday, October 6th at 1:00 p.m. for a presentation by Connie Rakitan of Chicago, and Father Bob Malloy of Detroit.

The webinar will be entitled Come to the Table: Nurturing the Sacramental Life of People with Mental Illnesses. This one hour session will feature viewing the parish through the eyes of a person with mental illness; a view from the pew; the person with mental illness comes to the church; welcomed and valued; and liturgy, sacraments and faith formation.

Now, bless you all in your exciting efforts during this year of celebrating the vision of the bishops' pastoral statement on persons with disabilities. Now the webinar evaluation is provided for your response. When the webinar ends in the next few sends, you will have up to 30 minutes to complete the evaluation before the system shuts down.

We appreciate and need your feedback. Thanks so much.

Vcall Technical Assistant:

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. This concludes today's teleconference, you may disconnect your lines at this time. Please remember to fill out your evaluation forms, and thank you for your participation.