

***Transcript of  
National Catholic Partnership on Disability  
Access to Liturgical Spaces  
March 10, 2009***

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**Moderator and Presenter**

Anne Koester  
Robert Habiger

**Presentation**

>> Operator: Greetings. And welcome to the National Catholic Partnership on Disability Access to Liturgical Spaces: Welcoming All to this Place. (Operator instructions).

It's now my pleasure to introduce your host, Anne Koester, from Georgetown Center for Liturgy. Thank you. You may begin.

>> Anne Koester: Hello, and welcome to everyone who is participating in today's webinar. We have well over 170 participating sites, including both diocesan and parish personnel, professional architects and liturgical design consultants, and many others.

Thank you so much for joining us as we consider the topic: Access to Liturgical Spaces: Welcoming All to This Place.

My name is Anne Koester. I'm the Associate Director of the Georgetown Center for Liturgy in Washington D.C., and the Editorial Director of the EnVision Church website.

I'm delighted that the Georgetown Center for Liturgy has teamed up with our friends at the National Catholic Partnership on Disability to bring you this webinar.

It's also a pleasure to be here with today's presenter, Robert Habiger, who is an architect and liturgical design consultant with Dekker, Perich & Sabatini in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

This webinar on Access to Liturgical Space is the first of two webinar's regarding access and liturgy. The second one: Access in Liturgy, Making Liturgical Ministries More Accessible to Persons with Disabilities, will be July 15th.

Our plan for the next hour is, first, to offer a few fundamentals about liturgical celebrations generally. Second, to focus on particular matters regarding access to our liturgical spaces. And, finally, to address some of the questions you, the webinar participants, submit to us. On this note, here's how you may submit a question.

On the top of your screen, there is a Questions button. Whenever you have a question, simply click on the Questions, type your question and hit Submit.

We'll do our best to address as many questions as possible.

Before we begin, please pray with us. The words of our prayer are on your computer screen.

Let us pray.

Gracious and loving God, you summon us to come together as a church to give thanks and praise for all you have done for us, in Jesus Christ, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, enabling us to attend the spaces we create for worship, that they may be epiphanies of your presence among us and places of welcome for all who gather.

We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

I mentioned that we'd begin by considering a few of the fundamentals about liturgy that relate to today's topic. I have five such points of departure that I want to touch upon before Robert begins his talk.

One, liturgical participation is our baptismal right and duty.

Two, the assembly is our first liturgical ministry.

Three, liturgy as a shaper of attitudes.

Four, liturgy as celebration of right relationships.

And, five, liturgy as a system of symbols.

For purposes of this webinar, my aim is not to speak extensively and certainly not exhaustively about these. I cannot possibly do justice to these dimensions of liturgy in the time we have. Rather, my hope is that you will reflect upon these ideas more deeply, discuss them among your colleagues and consider how they relate to what Robert Habiger will say today about access to liturgical space.

The first of these liturgical points of departure is participation. The words on your screen from the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy are likely familiar to many of you.

The Council made clear that as baptized it is both our right and duty to participate in the church's liturgical celebrations. In other words, by reason of baptism we have this privilege. And with this privilege comes responsibilities. One of these responsibilities is to take part in the church's liturgical rites and the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy indicates ways to do this, both verbal and nonverbal.

Note also that this paragraph from the Constitution says the people should be encouraged to take part. I suggest that the kind of encouragement contemplated

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includes a physical space that is welcoming and accessible to all. For if it is not, active participation by all would be undermined. People would be discouraged, if you will, rather than encouraged.

My second liturgical point of departure is that when we were baptized, we signed up for our first, our primary liturgical ministry. That is, to be the assembly. The gathered assembly is the body of Christ, the church made visible. We are sacrament, a visible sign of the mystery of Christ in this world. We are epiphanies, visible revelations of the invisible realities of the mysteries we celebrate. By gathering we give public expression to what we believe as Christian people.

As the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy states, the liturgy is supremely effective in enabling to express in our lives and pore pray to others the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true church. For we as church are visible but endowed with invisible realities.

I have a couple of questions on these points for you to note, and I invite you to reflect upon them later, alone or with others. First, when others look in on us at prayer in our places of worship, what do they learn about what we believe?

Second, what do they learn about what it means to be the body of Christ, the church?

My third point is that the church's liturgy shapes who we are as Christians. This happens in ever so subtle ways, but the symbols of the liturgy wash over us time and time again, shaping our attitudes, or as the theologian Mark Cirio was fond of saying, liturgy is a rehearsal of attitudes.

So I have another question for you to note and reflect upon later. What are the attitudes shaped by a worship space itself?

My fourth liturgical point of departure is that the church's liturgy ought to celebrate right relationships, relationships which are just and truthful. The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops conveyed this understanding well in their document on places of worship.

I will read a quote to you from this document, which is also on your screen. A suitable liturgical space encourages a community to experience that inclusiveness signified by the wedding banquet of God. This space allows the members to experience themselves in relationship both to other believers and to a God who is triune and always in communion. The relationships in that space must be right, just, truthful, not deceiving, that is, according to the mind of God.

My last point is that liturgy is a system of symbols, and we human beings need our symbols. Think, for example, of some common symbols: a wedding ring, a nation's flag, memorials concerning people or events, art and poetry, songs and mottos, rising for a National Anthem, and so on.

What do symbols do for us? They help us get beneath the surface of our experiences and find meaning. Symbols put us in touch with our deepest feelings and give us

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ways to express them. In liturgy, through seemingly ordinary people words, actions, objects and physical spaces that we experience with our senses, the mystery of God is made real for us.

So think, for example, of the assembly itself, an essential symbol. Ordinary people who, when gathered together for worship, become extraordinary. Or think of our baptismal fonts, the signings we do when we sign ourselves with the cross, our processions, the book of the gospels, water, oil, wine, bread, and so many more.

Ordinary things of life that becomes extraordinary when we gather to praise God. Our participation in these symbols leads us to encounter the sacred, which can change us.

Of course, the space in which we gather for liturgy is itself a symbol, a vessel of many, many more. And given the power of symbol, we need to be attentive to the symbol of the space in all that is whole.

Now to our presentation by Robert Habiger. Robert directs the religious practice area of Dekker Perich Sabatini, serving as project manager, design architect and liturgical design consultant.

He has over 35 years' experience with all types of architecture, with an emphasis in ecclesiastical projects. He resides in Albuquerque, New Mexico, is married and is the father of five and grandfather of three. Robert has also written for the EnVision Church website and in particular on the topic of access to space.

You may find these articles by going to [www.EnVisionchurch.org](http://www.EnVisionchurch.org), or by visiting NCPD's website, where links to these can be found as part of the toolkit for this webinar.

And now I welcome Robert Habiger.

>> Robert Habiger: Thank you, Anne, for that nice introduction and also for setting a foundation to guide this conversation today. I also want to thank the National Catholic Partnership on Disability, Georgetown Center for Liturgy and EnVisionchurch.org for sponsoring this webinar. I'm deeply honored to be asked to address this important topic.

The primary aim of this webinar is to provide insights and practical suggestions regarding our program's title: Access to Liturgical Spaces, Welcoming all to this Space.

Because of the short amount of time that we have, it is impossible to cover every possible disability or every issue that affects accessibility. So now I apologize for any such unintentional omission that I may make.

I have five primary purposes for the presentation today. They are: One, to give you a short review of our history regarding access to liturgical spaces. Two, to introduce to you the concept of equivalent experience. Three, to examine both physical and psychological barriers that prevent access by all.

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Four, to explore how we experience spaces and how that might change now that we may think differently in our liturgical spaces and how they're organized. And, five, provide some practical step that you can take to move towards having liturgical spaces that offer an equivalent experience.

While this webinar addresses access to liturgical space, we know that access to other parish facilities such as classroom, fellowship spaces and offices are just as important. It goes without saying that every building should accommodate people in their use of parish facilities.

Let's start off today by asking: Where are we today regarding access to our places of worship and devotion? What can we learn by looking in the rearview mirror to see where we came from?

In 1990, barrier free access to buildings became law with the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Most parishes saw the ADA as a positive event. Some lacked funds to change their older churches, though. Some parishes also saw this as simply another burden.

This meant that a wide range of approaches has occurred. Some parishes felt that the act meant more restrictions and costs while others saw it as opportunities for greater inclusion. Too often, though, a sense of burden, a belief that it was too hard to achieve, has led architects, contractors and the church to take an only-if-required approach. Such a minimalist approach is today inappropriate for the purposes that it is to welcome everyone within the framework of active participation and a fuller access to the sacraments.

As this photo shows, access to a sanctuary can draw more attention to the design of the ramp itself than to the place where the principal attention is to be placed. As a seamless integration of physical features into a unified wholeness, that is our aim. And sometimes we miss the mark.

For sure, compared to 30 years ago, we have come a long way in creating liturgical spaces that welcome all to the members of the body of Christ. Today our efforts should take the next steps toward expressing what we believe as the church.

As Anne said in the opening statement, liturgy is a rehearsal of attitudes. An attitude I want to implore is the concept of equivalent experience. How a person experiences liturgical spaces is the principal theme for today's presentation.

Please be clear that I'm not saying that with equivalent experience everyone has the same experience. Rather, I want no one to be excluded from their own personal experience simply because the space is not accessible to them.

My definition for equivalent experience is to create a similar experience while maintaining a person's dignity. Equivalent experience does support full conscious and active participation.

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Let me repeat that. Equivalent experience does support full conscious and active participation. As Anne reminded us, the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* states that people should be encouraged to take part by means of acclimations, responses, Psalms and hymns, as well as by actions, gestures and bodily attitudes. Through an application of equivalent experience full conscious and active participation is more achievable by all who enter the liturgical space.

The work of the NCPD as well as local groups concerned with accessibility issues has continued to call the church to reflect on the physical barriers of accessibility. Each person's approach to dealing with these barriers is also different. Some people approach the issues with determination and poise. Some always find obstacles in their path.

Are we doing an A-plus job? As my previous slide alluded to, I would say no. Barriers to an equivalent experience still exist. For example, there are still churches where not all parishioners enter the worship space by the same door or take the same path to sacraments. However, we're making great strides in doing away with these physical barriers to accessibility. Yet less so with removing psychological barriers. Today's presentation, at least I hope, move us from just thinking about physical barriers preventing accessibility to the experience of the person or psychological barriers that also affect a person's sense of being included in the celebration.

Psychological accessibility means we must examine how a person feels when they are asked to take a different path, use a different door, and isolate themselves away from family or the community.

To achieve equivalent experience is to develop solutions that combine removing physical barriers with the experiential insight derived from both a respect for the liturgy as well as for the people who want access to the liturgy. To provide some examples of how physical and psychological avenues to similar equivalent experience can be combined, I'm going to provide a quick review of five general categories. What does the main entrance into the worship space say to us? Does everyone use the same door?

Do we design our seating to reflect a memory of past churches, or is seating configured to support the liturgical ministry functions as well as accommodate people with disabilities? Do floor materials and patterns reestablish old barriers or are these materials used to connect and support ministry functions? What are some visual and textural components of flooring design? Regarding access and movement, can we come to expect that everyone will take the same path? With experiential aspects of vision, oral and touch, how do these sensory issues contribute to achieving an equivalent experience?

The main ceremonial doors into the worship environment should be designed for everyone to use. The principle here is that the door that celebrant uses is also used to by everyone else. Don't let the door be off limits or only used by the ministers. It transmits the wrong message that only the worthy few can enter or the door is reserved for an exclusive few. Door handles should be easy to grasp and operate. In this photo, the door handles can be grasped by the hand, by the wrist, a lower arm.

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The door handles are tall enough to also allow children, a person in a wheelchair or elderly to open the door. Also, note that the doors have push-bars that allow gripping and support when exiting the worship space.

To make the access even easier, you can install automatic assists; although, with the correctly specified door hardware, large doors such as these can be feather light to open.

Seating needs to provide options. Use chairs to provide access where the person wants it. A person in a wheelchair can sit adjacent to their family simply by removing a chair it's especially accommodating when they arrive too late so as to move to the too often designated wheelchair spot. I'd prefer to have the flexibility that chairs provide rather than thinking I'm smart enough to predetermine where people want to be located.

In this photo a chair is removed for the person in the motorized wheelchair. Notice that the level floors are also a welcoming gesture and more easily accommodates the movement of a wheelchair.

Place chairs and pews so some do not have obstructions in front of the seat. This allows people in walkers, canes, as well as in crutches, and people that might have certain back and leg disabilities, to more easily access a seat.

Providing flexibility is an important solution for accommodating different needs. A question to ask: Can the space be reconfigured to accommodate a larger group, or a different rite of the church.

In this photo, notice the large number of chairs which allows more options in how the space can be reconfigured for different liturgical seasons and rites.

A good rule of thumb is to make the aisles wide enough for two wheelchairs to pass each other. This does exceed what most codes require but the benefit is to achieve less congestion and therefore more calmness and attentiveness to the liturgy.

When I think about floors, I want you to consider some critical design concepts. I believe you should avoid highly polished floors, as they can be too slippery and can cause glare. Of course, too much texture should also be avoided as they can be a tripping hazard.

You must involve the architect in these decisions. Along with thinking of physical aspects of flooring materials, the choice of flooring can support sacramental spaces. I suggest a change of flooring materials at entrances so as to designate a threshold or transition from one space to another space.

A light textured floor at a door threshold will also instruct the visually impaired to know when they're entering or leaving the worship or devotional space. You can also change floor materials to mark sacramental spaces. This photo shows a band of cut

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limestone surrounding the font. The textural and color change marks the importance of the baptismal font and creates a zone of significant action and memory.

Of course, one purpose is that flooring should not hinder a person's movement. But even more important flooring should heighten our experience. I must tell you, when I discuss access and movement, my number one goal is that everyone, whether they're an adult, child, person with a wheelchair, walker, cane, everyone should take the same path. We need to start from the parking lot to the main entrance. Questions that should be asked: What obstacles prevent everyone from taking the same path? What is the distance from drop-off to main door?

Is there shade along the path for people who move slower? These are both key physical as well as experiential things to be explored.

How we provide access and movement is a critical element of equivalent experience. Because a key component in the liturgy is movement, be it processions by many or a path taken by an individual.

Too often I have found a double standard used in the design of worship spaces. Many new churches are designed so that there is a ceremonial pathway accessed primarily by able-bodied people. And then a separate handicap pathway that is only for people with a disability.

In this photo, the wheelchair ramp is located away from the altar at the back of the sanctuary. Please understand that while this is a common design approach, you need to ask the question: What does this say to a person who has to use this path? Do they feel equal? Do they become embarrassed because it takes them longer to get to the Ambo?

One very important feature for designing with the concept of equivalent experience is to create one pathway to be taken by all people. As this is the last -- as in this last photo, the bishop is moving down the sloped walkway at the end of mass.

Notice in the photo that the path is wide enough for two ministers to walk side by side.

Equivalent experience allows everyone to take the same pathway and have access to the major liturgical spaces, be it ambo, altar, sanctuary, baptistery, reservation chapel, et cetera, all going the same route, designed with one concept of one pathway to the sanctuary. Design it as a sloped walkway, not a ramp. A sloped walkway is so gradual it doesn't require handrails. It means the floor slope is so gradual it's easier for people with disabilities to move up and down the slope.

When you do have steps, keep them at a six-inch height or lower. Steps at this height allow people with crutches to maneuver up and down the steps. The idea is that the steps are only supplementary to the primary sloped pathway.

In this photo the gradually sloping pathway was designed with the intention that all ministers would take the same path. Notice its gradual slope. Notice how it leads directly behind the altar and ambo allowing the celebrant to move easily to the altar,

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reader to move to the ambo, notice how the floor material stays the same so as to invite the ministers up the path from the main floor.

As was shown in previous photos, the width of the pathway is very important. We know that spaces needed for wheelchairs, but do not make it just one narrow pathway.

Aisles and paths need to be wide enough for, like I said, two wheelchairs to pass, not because the situation will never necessarily occur, or that they will occur, but if it does occur and it becomes a normal occurrence, then that would mean that your church has become known for accommodating all people. But my main reason for providing a wider than code required aisle or wider path is to introduce a calm presence for everyone moving along the pathway.

Think of it this way: When there's ample room to move, people have a reduction in their level of tension because their personal space is not being infringed.

How different people experience a place through the senses of visual, oral and touch is another critical aspect of equivalent experience. This photo is taken at a cathedral parish that has a deaf ministry. Note that the signer is adjacent to the reader at the ambo that they have ample space to stand.

People who are deaf can either read lips, read the signer or do both. Therefore, to access the deaf ministry language they must position themselves where they can see the signer but also the action of the liturgy itself. Flexible seating can more easily accommodate this need.

Other oral issues include, for the hearing impaired, you need to provide sound assistance apparatuses. High levels of sounds can also be harmful. A worship space that's too live acoustically can create a sound level that makes it hard for people to hear.

Be concerned with lighting and windows. Avoid silhouetting people in the sanctuary. This strong brightness behind a person causes too much contrast and reduces a person's ability to see the minister's face or their gestures. Avoid large sections of windows behind any sacramental setting. Windows that are high and surround the worship space such as in this photo provides the most even distribution of daylight. And you must provide even lighting within the sanctuary and the place of worship.

Eye strain is reduced when a person does not have to compensate for high contrast and are trying to focus on a face that is in a shadow. Also, it is important to note that dark hallways, uneven lighting are also very much a problem for the visually impaired.

So let's not forget the sensory iterations issues such as sensory overload of touch, sound and smell which can be disturbing or unmanageable. For example, people with autism need clarity and consistency. We must consider how people with a mental illness will respond to the liturgical space.

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What we change and what we keep as being the same in that physical environment will respond to these experiential needs of all people. Chemical sensitivity issues may require a special designed room that allows access with protection.

A quick word about furniture. Furniture should not act as a hindrance for people with a disability to not perform the rightful ministerial function. It's a place for action, not the piece of furniture that's important. An example is when an ambo is not designed to accommodate a person with a disability who is to read the scripture. We tend to think it's the ambo that's important for the reading but it's the word itself that's of importance not the piece of furniture.

We understand and accept this concept when the homilist comes out behind the ambo to more closely interact with the assembly. This in effect is demonstrating that the place for proclamation does not necessarily reside at the piece of furniture.

One significant reality for many parishes, though, is that the cost of building an ambo that allows for necessary adjustment may be too much. So until you can build that replacement piece of furniture, set aside a place where a person can be present with the word.

Furniture, however, can be designed to accommodate different aspects of physical ability. At an ambo, the book-rest can extend down and be brought into position, such as this photo shows. This allows a person in a wheelchair to have access to the ambo as well as helping them be seen by the assembly at the ambo. These two photos show an ambo in position for a standing adult and then lowered and extended for a person in a wheelchair. This lowered position also supports a child reading at, let's say, a school liturgy or some ritual that may accommodate a child.

The goal that is sought is to have an inviting space. And people with various disabilities participate in a manner that has them feel connected and with a sense of equality. The photo shows the anointing and altar dedication. The altar was designed in a square shape as a symbol that the altar is approachable from all sides. There's an equal access to everyone.

What I'm advocating, though, is more than just a visual access. It must include physical and psychological access. In the background of this photo a walker is visible. That's the way it should be. All should have access and all should feel welcomed in their access.

How to make the liturgical space inviting for people with disabilities was a question we received prior to this webinar. First to create an inviting worship space, this is an issue for all of us, not just for people with disabilities.

So the question provides the opportunity to express to you some important concepts to use when designing and inviting liturgical space for people with disabilities but also to a quiet for everyone else.

So what can you do? Be intentional. Make it your purpose to be inclusive. Design should always include a dialogue with people of disabilities. Start the conversation

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but don't presuppose you know what people want or need. Ask questions, listen, and then ask more questions.

Maybe offer a response then and then listen some more. Include a disability consultant on the professional design team. They become an invaluable partner, especially for exploring how a person experiences various situations. Explore situations disabled people face when in a worship space. Try to experience what it's like to use a walker and to enter into a fixed pew.

Get a wheelchair and move to the worship space, just having your eyesight at a lower level may bring you new insights or things that you see need to be changed.

Lastly, don't succumb to the belief that it's too difficult to accomplish. I am the first to admit that it is hard work. It does take more effort because there still exists prejudices but it's not impossible.

Think inclusivity, not separation. You must always stay focused on the goal of inclusivity, bringing the body of Christ together in unity of spirit, mind and soul.

Most parishes are not at the stage of building a new worship space. So they don't have this opportunity to maybe include a lot of these points. So what can you do with an existing environment? This photo shows a typical church built 20 years ago, prior to any code or moral mandate that accessibility was to be a priority.

Notice that it is a very beautiful but very inaccessible sanctuary to many people. Now the same photo, but I have now Photo Shopped into the photo of proposed ramp up into the sanctuary.

Notice how access to both the ambo and altar is possible. I want to encourage you to visit with your parish leaders and seek commitment from them to look at ways the existing space can be adapted. Not in an out-of-the-way manner, but in a way like this image shows, where everyone is invited to take the same path. Of course in this case the ambo and celebratory chair would have to have changes made to them. This is not a current project just an example to use for purposes of this discussion today.

One of the ways to work towards making changes to the worship environment is to tap into your local crafts people and artists, have them help you in this exploration.

The presentation part of this webinar is coming to a close. I want to give you -- I want to leave you with these summary concepts first. Equivalent experience is not about creating the same experience but about offering a similar experience with dignity.

Think about the experience. Analyze how different people will experience the space and/or spaces. Discussion leads to better solutions. Talk about the ideas. Explore the concepts. Ask what we can do. Learn and understand connections between disabilities, accessibilities and active participation and the liturgy.

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Include people with disabilities on the building committee. This last point is probably one that's too often missed. Thank you for your attention. We now welcome the questions that you may have.

>> Anne Koester: Thank you, Robert, for your important insights and practical suggestions.

We will now turn to some of the questions our participants have sent to us. Note that the directions for sending in questions are back up on your screen.

Robert, one question we received concerns whether churches are covered under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

>> Robert Habiger: That's an interesting -- that's a good question. No, they are not legally covered. What's happened in the last now 18 years, 19 years, from the Americans for Disabilities Act, is that the legal -- it was a civil rights legal law that went into place.

And since then what came with that was standards from the federal government for accommodating the public buildings. Those standards have started to be adapted as being code requirements by different jurisdictions, states as well as cities and local administrators for the buildings themselves.

Deeper into the question, though, is that it needs to be morally something that we do. It's a moral yes. We should be doing this for all of our people.

>> Anne Koester: Thank you, Robert. Another question we have is going back to the difference you mentioned between a ramp and a sloped walkway, can you explain that further or perhaps provide some specifications to distinguish between the two?

>> Robert Habiger: Sure thing, Anne. And this picture that's on the screen right now shows lower sloped walkway rather than a ramp. A ramp in terms of technical terms is as you go one foot in vertical height, you are going about 12 feet in length. So it has what's called in the industry a 1 to 12 ratio in terms of slope to height.

A walkway needs its steepest slope to be a 1 to 20-foot distance. So every one foot vertical you go 20 foot in length.

And this brings it then into the manner of where you have an easier and gradual rise of the floor. It's much easier for people to maneuver. It does take up more space and that's one of the consequences that we have to deal with.

>> Anne Koester: Someone else asked to explain more about what you meant when you said that a place could be too alive acoustically or too visually stimulating for people with autism or mental illness, can you give us a few more details about what to consider there?

>> Robert Habiger: I'll try. What I found is I have to start asking these questions when I'm in a building committee meeting. I can also say that my wife is executive

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director of a school that is for children and up through high school that have just were not able to make it in the regular school system. A lot of times it's because the environment around them is too stimulating.

So it can become too overly visual, too alive. The sense of clarity and consistency means that: if we're in a liturgical setting, there are some things that need to stay the same from day-to-day or week-to-week. And there are other things that can change for the liturgical seasons. But when they change, it needs to have a presentation to people that need to hear about that change, to understand what the change is about.

So it really helps them to assimilate into that space change.

Acoustically alive spaces happen because of the sound bouncing off the walls and ceilings. That's very common for older spaces such as the pictures I've got on the screen. Basically my statisticians says I must have at least some surface to start observing that sound because it's going to start feeling difficult for a lot of people particularly hearing impaired people to be able to concentrate or be able to hear. And in that action of concentration too deeply they really miss some of the liturgy. And that's not what we're after.

>> Anne Koester: You also mentioned in passing what might be considered with respect to people with chemical sensitivities. What are the current issues surrounding that today? And what kinds of things can be done?

>> Robert Habiger: I've only had one opportunity to deal with that issue. It was a project in the southwest, and how we approached it was to hear about the need and then to go beyond just providing a room that they could go to of a TV or something like that, in the sense we didn't want to isolate these people from the rest of the assembly.

So we actually created on both sides of this sanctuary two full height glassed openings and the glass went from wall to wall, so if you're there you don't feel like you're separated from the rest of the assembly, but it does create that needed separation in terms of the chemical and aspects related to air movement and so forth.

As we're going -- as we find, as we're moving into sustainable design elements, like leadership and energy and education design programs lead, we know that there's chemical filters that are getting better and better, and we need to think about designing with these better filters.

>> Anne Koester: Thank you, Robert. One of the questions I've received more than once since we launched the EnVision Church website which you and I have discussed relates to accessible baptismal fonts and poles, and I wonder if you could give can you say a sense of what needs to be considered in respect to baptismal fonts in our accessibility.

>> Robert Habiger: I'd like to start by showing a font that's not accessible to all people. Too often we find fonts like this that has the water at a level where even able

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bodied people can't reach in to touch the water. You can see how difficult it is for the father with the baby holding the child to be baptized.

When I worked with a convent and the convent had several of the sisters in wheelchairs. We purposely talked about how they are going to have access to the primary symbol, which is water.

Again, it's the water that they wanted to have the ability to touch. Not just to be looking at a font. And so in this design, the water flows over the edge and the sister in a wheelchair could come up and let her hand be in the water and let the water touch her.

So what I've done, in thinking about baptismal fonts, is to move to having the water be the most primary symbol and be placed where people can easily reach it. That to me is providing the most access to the primary, the symbol of water itself in baptism.

>> Anne Koester: Do you make any recommendations in terms of the flow of the water or the water coming down from a certain height as we see in some spaces?

>> Robert Habiger: I do. I think there's an auditory problem with having water cascade more than a couple inches in height.

As soon as that happens we start finding that people will turn the font off because it's making too much noise and interrupting the liturgy, and therefore we've just -- we've eliminated the symbol.

So my rule of thumb is I don't let that water fall more than two inches. I prefer to have it glide over the edge of a surface. In this image of the font at a cathedral in Colorado Springs, the water goes over the edge and goes down to the face of the bronze container.

>> Anne Koester: Staying with a question about liturgical furnishings, you also mentioned in the past in passing about ambos that some parishes it might be a costly feature. I'm wondering if you can give us a sense of the price range that we're talking about for these specifically designed accessible ambos.

>> Robert Habiger: I'd be glad to. This is a photo of the ambo at the Los Angeles Cathedral. I don't know the actual cost to it. I do know it does provide complete accessibility for a person in a wheelchair. And this part of it, through the mechanism of this part of the apparatus, allows it to move up and down from a wheelchair to standing height, and can adjust. I'm guessing it's in several thousands of dollars, probably over 10, could be under 20, but it is very expensive.

One that I like that I showed in the webinar is a simpler type of device that allows for the ambo to have a part that extends down. It can be first lowered, which is this part, and it can lower and be expended out to the person that's in the wheelchair. But you don't have to -- and that probably cost in the range of about \$5,000.

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But we can get even less. We can get into more simple kind of designs where here's an ambo that is sitting and in the same ambo has adjustability for standing. These now can be just between 1,000 to \$2,000. Again, it depends on who you're hiring as being the crafts person...if it's a local person versus a company that's out of state.

>> Anne Koester: Yes. Thank you. We also received a question about kneelers in church and wonder if you have any recommendations about what to do when we have to have kneelers behind pews or kneelers when there's chaired seating.

>> Robert Habiger: First off, I never recommend not putting kneelers in. Kneeling is part of our liturgical action, part of the celebration. It's part of our bodily movement.

Some people cannot kneel, though, and so we need to have the ability for them to sit in different locations or to be in different locations, and I always convey that the space that's not taken up by the piece of furniture is more important than or as important as the piece of furniture itself.

So the width that we give between pew to pew for even able bodied people for the kneeler is extremely important. Our brethren in the Episcopal church use a lot of kneeling pads rather than kneelers that come that off the pews. The kneeler pads allow that to be a part of the chair and more easily used. The disadvantage is sometimes the pad doesn't give you any support. But with a chair in front of it, you have people moving up from being kneeling, the chair can move. There's a host of issues and the primary thing we try to do is to provide multiply ways of dealing with these issues.

>> Anne Koester: Thank you, Robert. Another question we received is: How do you approach a renovation of an older building, especially if that building has an historic designation?

>> Robert Habiger: That's a good question. If it's actually listed with the, I forget now, but the National Registration for Historic Buildings, there is definitely some parameters that have to be followed. Some designations are just for the exterior parts of the building. Some designations are just for the interior parts of the building, some are both. So they have to be really thoughtfully put together.

And a lot of work involved. In this photo we can see the ramp was installed at the back of the sanctuary, and yet the rest of the space really has a sense of clarity to what that historic church was about. I can't give you specifics. It is an issue that needs to be brought forth with your architect, with really the historic presentation people.

>> Anne Koester: Another question we received relates to your showing an example of an ambo that could be raised and lowered so as to facilitate a wide range of users. You have the experience with accomplishing the same function with the altar, don't you? Especially for wheelchair using clergy?

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>> Robert Habiger: Right. It's been less asked than for ambos. It is still an important feature. Most altars are 39 inches high. If you go into the ADA regulations, or I should say ANSI parameters, 34 inches is the maximum height. And then you have to have a 27-inch clearance, plus an eight inch deep top and 12 inches at the bottom clearance to allow a person in a wheelchair to have access to that piece of furniture.

The concept of moving a top of the altar up and down is not one that I've done. And I'm not certain how to approach that at this point. I'd have to really think about it. There may be -- but it sounds like it would be an important thing that could be done. It should be easily done.

>> Anne Koester: You mentioned that the architect must be consulted when creating accessible environments. Could you speak again about involving parishioners with disabilities in the conversation and maybe with your own work with parishes how you've gone about doing that or ensuring that that happens.

>> Robert Habiger: Thank you. What occurs by inviting the parishioners that have experiences related to disabilities is it opens up new avenues to exploration of the design. An architect is the person that has to be responsible for submitting plans to the jurisdictions and getting approvals.

So they have to incorporate any ideas that are being developed by the building committee. Via if it's something that's addressing accessibility issue or addressing anything else.

When I'm involved, I try to gear the conversation to think about some of those practical code issues. Like on my ceremonial doors, I don't want to have the ceremonial door be the exit door for legally getting out of the building, because then I have to put different hardware on that door and defeats the purpose about being a ceremonial door and allowing accessibility to all people at any time. The same is true for the pathways.

As I mentioned, I don't like to put a steep walkway, I like to have it more gradual. Those are the kinds of things that to try to get the architect to understand and therefore apply and put it into their plans to get approvals for.

>> Anne Koester: And the last question we have time for I will briefly actually respond to. And it relates to whether there's a checklist available for reviewing a site and making recommendations or ideas for improvement of access.

Very quickly, two sources: NCPD is developing an access manual which will include this information. So continue to check the NCPD's website for the availability of this manual. The other thing I mentioned at the beginning of the webinar is that Robert Habiger here has written two articles for the EnVision Church website and one of them is a checklist for equivalent experience. So that might be helpful as well.

Unfortunately, we're out of time and apologize for not being able to address all of the questions that we received. We will, however, post responses to the questions you submitted on the EnVision Church's website and the NCPD website after March 24th.

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Also, after March 24th, there will be a complete archived copy of this webinar, in addition to an online transcript, the slides you saw today and handouts. You'll be able to link to this archived copy of the webinar from the EnVision Church website.

I want to thank again Robert Habiger for all his good work in helping to make this webinar possible. On a personal note, it's been a privilege for me to participate in this webinar. And I also invite all of you to visit the EnVision Church website in the near future. The address is [www.EnVisionchurch.org](http://www.EnVisionchurch.org).

And now Janice Benton, executive director of NCPD, has a few announcements.

>> Janice Benton: I'd like to add the thanks of both the NCPD board and staff to Robert Habiger and Anne Koester for all of their work in presenting this excellent webinar. And we thank the Georgetown Center for Liturgy and [EnVisionchurch.org](http://EnVisionchurch.org) for proposing this webinar topic and partnering with NCPD in presenting it.

This is such an important topic, and Anne and Robert have both done a wonderful job in bringing it to life and providing many helpful suggestions for our efforts and creating an inclusive liturgical environment. We'll be adding just for your information to the toolkit on NCPD's website the thoughtful reflection questions that Anne posed in her earlier presentation.

We're grateful, too, for our other partners who supported this webinar in many different ways, and they include: The National Conference for Catechetical Leadership; the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Dubuque; the Federation of Diocesan and Liturgical Commission; the National Apostolic for Inclusion Ministry, and the National Catholic Office for the Deaf.

Creating partnerships with others in ministry helps strengthen all of our work. We thank all of you, our listeners, who have participated this day. We trust that what you've learned will be helpful to you in your own ministry. Please keep in touch with NCPD, with [EnVisionchurch.org](http://EnVisionchurch.org), and the Georgetown Center for Liturgy if we can be of further assistance.

I'd like now to invite you to our future webinars which are posted on our website at [www.ncpd.org](http://www.ncpd.org). Please plan to join us on Tuesday, May 12th, at 1:00 p.m. EST daylight time for an expanded 1.5 hour webinar on the topic of access to tools and addressing suicide, pastoral supports and prevention strategies.

We're pleased to have Father Ron Rolheiser who will be joining Dr. Thomas Welch and Mrs. Claire Woodruff to speak on this timely topic.

Also remember our July 15th webinar, which is part two in the series on liturgy access. We'll focus specifically on access within liturgy, explaining how parishioners with disabilities can play active roles in the liturgical ministries of the parish.

We'll be partnering with the Federation of Diocesan and Liturgy Commission to present this webinar. NCPD continues to develop and provide face-to-face

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**Transcript:  
National Catholic Partnership on Disability  
Access to Liturgical Spaces  
March 10, 2009**

opportunities for in-service through regional meetings for diocesan disability directors and workshops at national conferences or as free-standing events. We're pleased to announce that we'll be presenting three one-day awareness workshops this summer on supporting people with mental illness in parish life. They will be hosted in Portland, Oregon, Washington D.C. and a location in the Midwest in either June or July. The dates and locations will be finalized soon. Please consult our website, [ncpd.org](http://ncpd.org), next week for specific details.

In the fall, we'll also be piloting another new workshop called Foundations and Disability Ministry. We hope to make this available around the United States in support of requests we've received for a workshop that's a disability ministry 101, introductory event for people in church ministries who need to know more about people with disabilities so they can serve them more effectively in their own areas of ministry.

We also invite you to keep an eye on our website [ncpd.org](http://ncpd.org) and NCPD E-News for these and other opportunities. Speaking of that website, we'll be launching a new format later this month. We hope for a seamless transition and look forward to your comments and some of the new features you will find.

Again, thank you for being a part of this webinar. We hope that you'll join us again and will tell your friends and colleagues about future events.

>> Anne Koester: Finally, we ask that you complete the evaluation for this webinar. When the webinar ends in the next few seconds, you will have up to 30 minutes to complete the evaluation before the system shuts down.

We are grateful for your feedback. Thanks very much.  
(End of presentation)

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