



2025

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**THURSDAY AUG 07**

**SATURDAY AUG 09**



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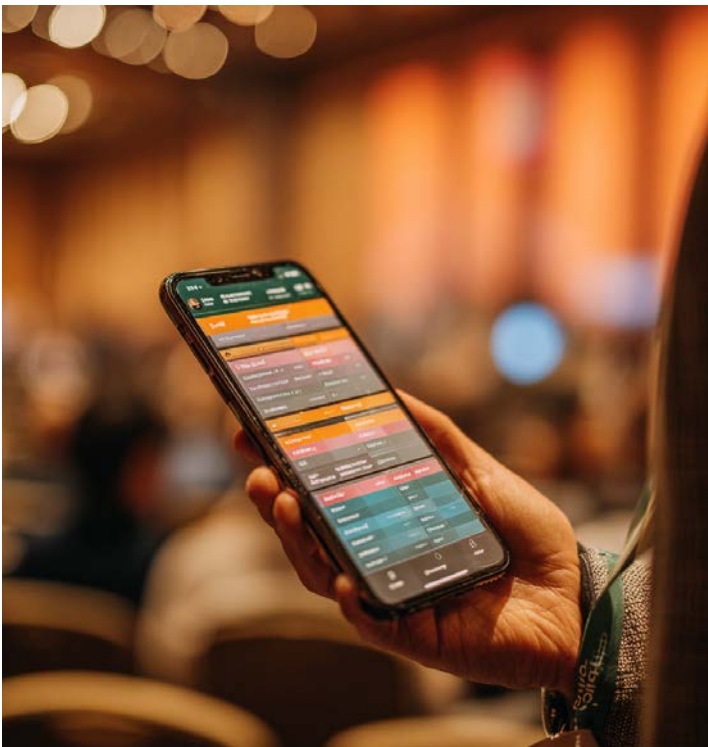
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Note: some language in ads and session listings may not be consistent with NCPD’s preferred terminology.



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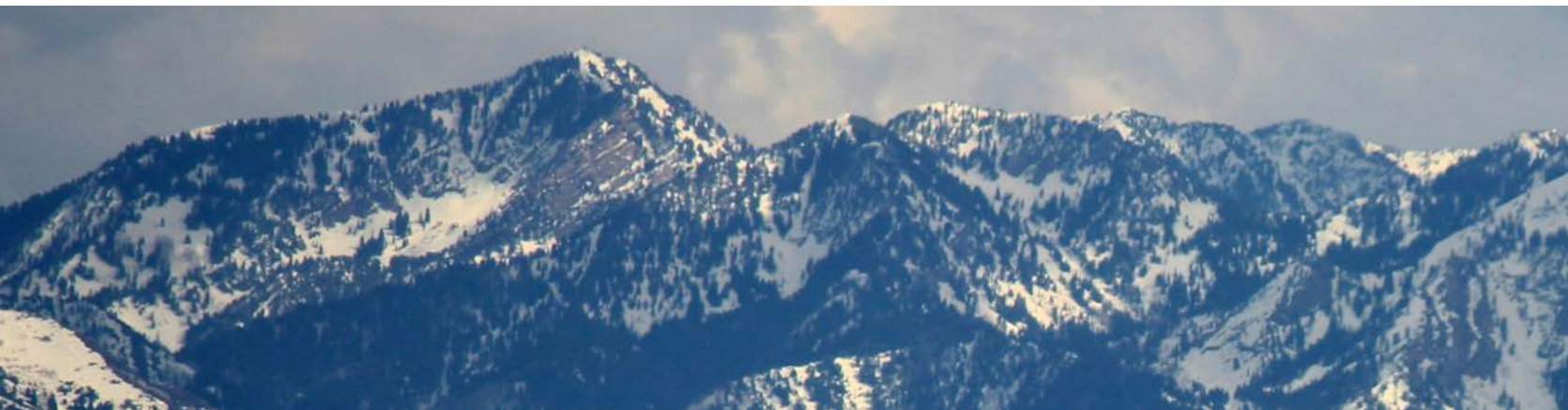
# Conference Schedule at a Glance

## **Wednesday, August 6**

9:30 am - 4:30 pm	Pre-Conference: Mental Health First Aid
4:00 - 6:00 pm	Check-in
7:30 - 8:30 pm	Affiliate Diocesan Directors Networking Social

## **Thursday, August 7**

8:00 - 9:00 am	Check-in/Exhibits/Coffee
9:00 - 9:30 am	Conference Welcome/Opening Prayer
9:30 - 10:30 am	Keynote: Most Reverend Brendan J. Cahill, S.T.D.
10:45 am - 12:00 pm	Round 1
12:00 - 1:15 pm	Lunch/Exhibits
1:15 - 2:30 pm	Round 2
2:45 - 3:45 pm	Special Interest
3:45 - 4:30 pm	Break/Exhibits/Coffee
4:30 - 5:45 pm	Round 3

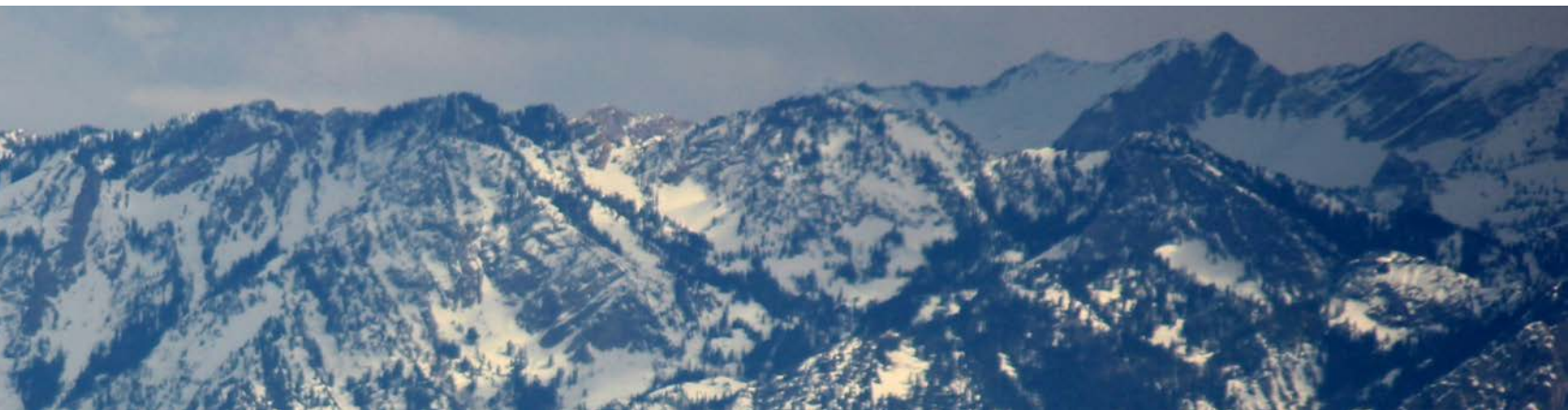


### **Friday, August 8**

8:00 - 9:00 am	Check-in/Exhibits/Coffee
9:00 - 10:15 am	Round 1
10:30 - 11:45 am	Round 2
11:45 am - 1:45 pm	Lunch/Exhibits/Special Interest
1:45 - 2:45 pm	Plenary Panel
2:45 - 3:45 pm	Keynote: Mary O'Meara
4:00 - 5:15 pm	Round 3
5:15 - 6:00 pm	Exhibits
6:00 - 6:30 pm	Social
6:30 - 8:30 pm	Ballroom Barbeque

### **Saturday, August 9**

8:00 - 8:45 am	Check-in/Exhibits/Coffee
8:45 - 9:45 am	Keynote: Jason Shanks
9:45 - 10:30 am	Break/Exhibits
10:30 - 11:45 am	Round 1
11:45 am - 1:15 pm	Lunch/Exhibits/Special Interest
1:15 - 2:30 pm	Round 2
2:45 - 4:00 pm	Round 3
4:30 - 5:30 pm	Eucharistic Celebration: Sensory-Friendly Mass



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OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

August 1, 2025

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Greetings of Christ's peace and love! In the name of the people of God of the Diocese of Salt Lake City and the members of our Diocesan Commission for people with disabilities, I am delighted to extend my warm welcome to all the participants of the National Catholic Partnership on Disability Conference.

We are deeply honored to serve as host for your national gathering. Your organization reminds us of the vital role people with disabilities have in the life of our Catholic Faith and in society. You raise our awareness of the respect due people with disabilities because they are children of God with unique gifts to be shared.

The theme of your gathering, *Pilgrims of Hope*, is most appropriate as we celebrate the Jubilee Year 2025. Our Holy Father, Pope Francis, exhorts us to make this Holy Year a special time to strengthen our faith that we might together recognize the Risen Christ in our daily lives and in one another as pilgrims of Christian hope. We are delighted with our partnership in our advocacy that people with disabilities are not outsiders, but among the pilgrims searching for that hope.

We thank God for this opportunity to enliven our faith and to renew friendships, as well as strengthen our commitment to engage, inspire and empower us to bring the Gospel to life through works of charity and service to the Church and the people of God. I hope that you have an enjoyable and fruitful meeting in our mission Diocese of Salt Lake City.

With prayerful wishes for a grace-filled gathering, I remain,

Sincerely yours in Christ,

The Most Reverend Oscar A. Solis, D.D.  
Bishop of Salt Lake City



DIOCESE OF ARLINGTON

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August 7, 2025

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to Salt Lake City for the *Pilgrims of Hope Disability Ministry Conference* hosted by the National Catholic Partnership on Disability. By taking time from your busy schedules to attend this conference, you demonstrate true discipleship. Your generous support and attendance here today shows how Catholics across the country are committed to helping parishes thrive through the implementation of comprehensive disability support systems.

Please be assured of my prayers for you as you leave this conference to implement new ministry initiatives in your parishes and dioceses. I encourage you to take advantage of the extensive resources NCPD has to offer as you continue this journey post-conference. May Our Lord Jesus bless you with his peace and may Mary our Mother watch over you always.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Michael F. Burbidge".

Most Reverend Michael F. Burbidge  
Bishop of Arlington

## Welcome from NCPD Executive Director



On behalf of the NCPD staff, governance board and committee members, allow me to express our great joy in being with each of you for Pilgrims of Hope: National Catholic

Disability Ministry Conference!

As with any meaningful event, much thought, prayer, and planning came first. Every day, NCPD staff listen to and learn from conversations occurring in the broader disability community, social and political advocacy efforts, Catholics with disabilities, their families, and leadership within the Church. This allows us to develop specific resources and offer events that strengthen our mission of making parishes everyone's home!

Parishes, dioceses and other ecclesial communities continue their current level of support for persons with disabilities for a variety of reasons. Moving forward from the status quo requires intentionality, training, and resources. Furthering existing efforts also entails a clear and inspired vision of what we are striving for as well as the necessary attitudes, knowledge, and skills to do so successfully. This conference is designed to address these realities and to provide much needed

inspiration and formation to promote progress which will bless everyone.

We want to be inclusive and create places of belonging consistently and effectively to support persons with disabilities to thrive and to deepen their faith. Though inclusion and belonging are crucial for persons with disabilities in the Church, they are not the end. They open the door for something greater and more important – advancing the full participation of persons with disabilities and striving toward communion – a kinship we experience because we are loved by God and saved by his son, Jesus Christ. Persons with disabilities have the same baptismal rights to be educated in the faith, to celebrate sacraments and to respond to God's call. To further our efforts to support their response to God's call is justified, for it allows the Church to become more fully what Christ instituted her to be and the fulfillment of her mission. Inclusion and belonging are ordered to the communion of all.

NCPD will continue to deliver on our promise to the Church: to advocate for persons with disabilities, and their families, so that they find a home in parishes across the United States. We are grateful for your partnership that affirms our collective passion for God's people. Our sincere hope is that our time together will have a significant impact on our evangelization and hospitality efforts, forward our mission, and inspire us to do more!

In joyful hope,

*Charleen Katra*

# Tell Us Your Story: Disability Ministry Recording Room

Do you have a story to share about your journey in disability ministry? Visit our Recording Room to offer a 10-minute reflection on the impact, challenges, and blessings of your ministry. These stories will help inspire others advancing this important work.

Recording sessions are available in 10-minute time slots before the first session and during breaks each day. A sign-up sheet will be posted, and walk-ins are welcome as time allows.

Stop by the NCPD exhibit booth for more information and to reserve your spot!  
Your story matters—help us build a library of witness and encouragement for the Catholic disability community.





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Gene Iannucci

# Agenda: Wednesday, August 6

**9:30 am - 4:30 pm      Pre-Conference: Mental Health First Aid**

**4:00 - 6:00 pm      Check-in**

**7:30 - 8:30 pm      Affiliate Diocesan Directors Networking Social**





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**You've created great  
resources—now share  
them with others!**

On our Catholic Disability Exchange (CDX) you can now share  
tools, ideas, and templates to strengthen and support the work  
of others in disability ministry.

# Agenda: Thursday, August 7

**8:00 - 9:00 am**

**Check-in/Exhibits/Coffee**

**9:00 - 9:30 am**

**Welcome/Opening Prayer**

**9:30 -10:30 am**

**Keynote: Most Reverend Brendan J. Cahill,  
S.T.D.**



## **Pilgrims with Joys and Hopes – Reflections on the 60th Anniversary of Gaudium et spes**

As the Second Vatican Council was coming to a close in 1965 the Bishops from around the world chose to make an address to all of humanity. Called *Gaudium et Spes*, this address took its title in the traditional way from the first words – “The Joys and the Hopes.” In #27 of this document the Bishops declared: “Coming down to practical and particularly urgent consequences, this Council stresses reverence for the human person; every person must consider every person like a neighbor, without exception, just as if another self, taking into account first of all his life and the means necessary to living it with dignity (cf. Jas. 2:15-16), so as not to imitate the rich man who had no concern for the poor man Lazarus (cf. Lk. 16:18-31).” Bishop Cahill hopes to show that this teaching reflects the consistent desire of the leaders of the Council to promote the activity of the Church in the world to contribute to a community of peoples. In response to the wars and violence of their times, they showed that the words of Jesus call us to be hopeful and active workers for peace and non-violence. Our practical work together helps us to grow in appreciation of the value and purpose of each life as a gift given by God for the building up of community.

**10:45 am - 12:00 pm Round 1**

### **Accompanying Families with Catechetical Learning Plans – Noelle Collis-DeVito**

This workshop will explore how to improve accessibility in faith formation, focusing on how parishes can more effectively accompany families with children with disabilities in their catechetical journey. Participants will learn practical strategies for creating inclusive learning environments, developing individualized Catechetical Learning Plans (CLPs), and providing spiritual and emotional support to families. By emphasizing the dignity of all persons and our call to foster a culture of belonging in the Church, this presentation will offer insights into how parishes can improve communication in order to cultivate a catechetical environment that can meet the needs of diverse learners, ensuring that every child has the opportunity to encounter Christ and grow in their faith. Practical tools, resources, and personal testimonies will help attendees understand how to make catechesis accessible and meaningful, fostering a more inclusive, compassionate, and supportive community.

### **But, Who do You Say that I Am? – Mark Bradford**

This presentation will be a spiritual meditation on disability focusing on past and present perceptions of persons with disabilities in the broader culture and the Church. Just as Jesus received various answers when he asked this question from persons around him, we too can be influenced by political and legal contexts and miss the reality that stands before us. Ultimately, this question is a spiritual one that asks us to reflect on the true nature of our own humanity, and then to respond from the dignity that we know, as Christians, is inherent in each of us.

Thursday, August 7

10:45 am - 12:00 pm

### **Living a Mission of Discipleship – Megan Wedwick**



I have witnessed through disability ministry that persons thrive when they are given the opportunity to discern and live out their mission of discipleship in parishes. By this witness I have been compelled to think of disability ministry differently, not just about how we can serve persons with disabilities, but also, how we can provide opportunities to serve. When I think of how fulfilling working in ministry has been for me, I realize how powerful giving someone else the opportunity to minister to others can be as well.

### **Open Wide the Doors: Celebrating & Empowering Vocations for Persons with Disabilities – Julia Sauter, Josh Ruoff**

Every person created in the image and likeness of God has a unique vocation God foretold before the person even came to be. But many persons with disabilities encounter resistance from their families, friends, parish leaders, and others when they begin to discern their vocation. It is often assumed that disability prevents, rather than aids, a person from truly living out a vocation. Rather than being seen as a wonderful future spouse, religious sister or brother, priest, or other state in life, many persons with disabilities are advised that they are not called to a particular vocation due to their disability. This presentation will invite persons with different disabilities to describe their experience of discerning and living out different vocations and provide resources and suggestions for ways Catholics can promote and support the vocations of persons with disabilities.

12:00 - 1:15 pm

### **Lunch/Exhibits**

**1:15 - 2:30 pm**

## **Round 2**

### **Deaf Ministry as an Integral Part of Parish or Diocesan Ministry – Minette Sternke**

This presentation will discuss the specific cultural and linguistic needs of the Deaf community as they pertain to Deaf ministry in the Catholic Church. It will then discuss meeting those needs as an integral embedded practice within parish or Diocesan ministries. Practical guides will be provided for the development and maintenance of deaf ministry and for the use of sign language interpreters. The presentation will be presented in American Sign Language, with voice interpretation.

### **Dyslexia & Dysgraphia - What Catholic Educators Need to Know – Pamela Patnode, Ed.D., ObISB**

The International Dyslexia Association says that as many as 15-20% of students will struggle with reading. Because the ability to read affects learning in all content areas, every Catholic teacher needs an understanding of how best to serve learners who struggle to read in their classroom. This presentation will explore dyslexia and dysgraphia, separating the myths from the realities. In addition, it includes hands-on simulation exercises to help educators better understand the challenges that students with dyslexia face – and it includes practical ideas for all educators to know how to respond. Many Catholic schools lack the resources necessary to hire abundant specialists to support struggling readers. Therefore, all Catholic educators must understand this common learning disability so that their students can reach their full potential.

Thursday, August 7

1:15 - 2:30 pm



**Best wishes for a successful  
conference**

**from the Knights of Columbus  
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**St Olaf Catholic Church, Bountiful,  
Utah**

### **Leadership and Self-advocacy Development through Volunteerism – Robert Furtado**

This presentation offers a model parishes and ministries can use to connect volunteers with disabilities to meaningful opportunities to serve the parish and the Church at large. It empowers faith communities to support persons with disabilities as they find and maintain vocations aligned with their gifts, passions, and skills. This pathway to contribute is forged by tapping into the personal network, creativity, and commitment of an existing parish.

## **From Hurt to Hope: Recognizing Complex Trauma & Building a Parish of Healing – Steve Nash, Cathy Lins**

Trauma affects every community, including parishes, with profound implications for physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Catholic teachings affirm the dignity of every person as created in the image of God, emphasizing the Church's call to be a place of healing and reconciliation. This presentation will explore the prevalence and impact of Complex Trauma and introduce practices for adopting a trauma-informed and trauma-educated approach within parish ministries and evangelization that leads to post-traumatic growth. By integrating practical strategies and theological principles, participants will learn foundational steps to foster safer, more compassionate environments that reflect Christ's healing presence. Cathy Lins and Steve Nash will share research, practical examples, and personal insights to equip leaders with tools to build trauma-informed and educated parishes.

**2:45 - 3:45 pm**

**Special Interest**

**3:45 - 4:30 pm**

**Break/Exhibits/Coffee**

**4:30 - 5:45 pm**

**Round 3**

## **At a Universally Designed Parish, Everyone Belongs – Elizabeth Potts, Ph.D.**

This session introduces a framework for the universally designed parish (UDP), developed by the National Catholic Partnership on Disability as a way to proactively limit barriers for persons with disabilities. Learn how the framework has already been used to increase accessibility and limit barriers in several pilot parishes, making them parishes of belonging.

Thursday, August 7

4:30 - 5:45 pm

### **Every Body, Every Soul: Stories of Belonging in Catholic Life – Julia Sauter, Robert Furtado, and Josh Ruoff**

Our presentation will give audience members the opportunity to learn about the parish life experiences persons with disabilities have. Some examples include physical accessibility experiences for someone who is blind or uses a wheelchair, a parish community's reactions to guide dogs and service animals, and the liturgical experiences of someone who is hard of hearing. Each topic discussed will reflect the lived experiences of a member of the Physical Disabilities Committee who has this disability. In addition to physical access to buildings and liturgical experiences, this presentation will also discuss other areas of parish life, such as religious education, social activities, volunteering, and participation in leadership roles. Presenters will discuss positive and negative experiences. They will also share areas of growth after providing feedback with parish staff or others in leadership. The presentation will also include a panel component and opportunities for questions from the audience. Presenters will recommend best practices, support, and opportunities for collaboration after the conference.

### **Inclusion in Catholic Schools: Low-cost, High-Impact Strategies to Help Your School Serve and Educate Students with Disabilities – Mary Stroka**

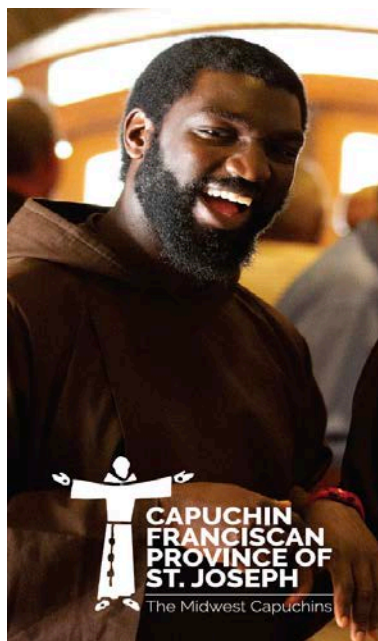
This presentation will review examples of Catholic schools and dioceses that are finding ways to make strides toward better inclusivity. It will also present methods of finding more ideas, both within and outside of the local community, to accept more students. Finally, it will provide suggestions regarding how to decline admission to a student while minimizing harm.



Thursday, August 7

**A Guide to Developing a Ministry to Address the  
Unhoused/Homeless in your Parish –  
Br. Fred Cabras, OFM Cap., LCSW**

This presentation explores the intersection of Catholic parish life, homelessness, and mental illness, offering parishes practical tools for self-assessment and discernment. Attendees will learn to evaluate their parish's current engagement with individuals experiencing housing insecurity, especially persons affected by mental illness. The session will guide participants in identifying their parish's strengths and limitations, helping them discern feasible steps toward meaningful outreach. Topics include understanding the unique needs of this population, building a ministry of accompaniment, and fostering partnerships with local organizations. Rooted in Catholic social teaching and Christ's call to serve the marginalized, this presentation equips parishes to respond compassionately and effectively to the needs of some of the most vulnerable members of their community.



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NATIONAL CATHOLIC PARTNERSHIP ON DISABILITY

# PILGRIMS OF HOPE

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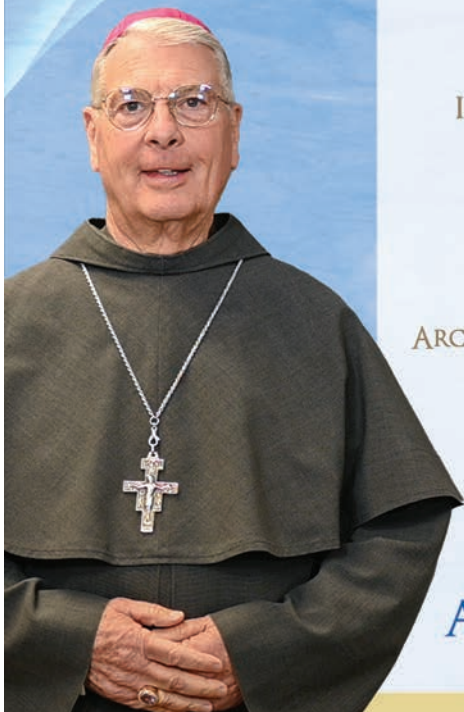
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*Wishing NCPD blessings and success on  
the Pilgrims of Hope Conference!*



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# Agenda: Friday, August 8

**8:00 - 9:00 am**      **Check-in/Exhibits/Coffee**

**9:00 - 10:15 am**      **Round 1**

## **Delivering Faith and Inspiration in Braille, Audio, and Large Print – Malachy Fallon, Aisling Redican**

For 125 years, Xavier Society has provided free, accessible reading materials to blind and visually impaired Catholics, assisting them in learning about, developing, and practicing their faith. While sighted Catholics expect the availability of printed Missalettes and other religious texts in their parishes, Xavier Society's accessible materials remain essential to our patrons for leading an active Catholic life. The Mass Propers in braille remain at the heart of our mission. Also, we provide Sunday Mass readings in Spanish braille, and our production of audiobooks is robust. Recently we released an update of the New American Bible, Revised Edition in audio. Now, this version of The Bible is available for download on smartphones, and we've reintroduced the Bible and Mass Propers in extra-large print. Xavier Society continuously explores ways using technology, freelance experts, and partnerships with other organizations, to offer a greater variety of accessible reading material to our faithful patrons.



Thank you for attending *Pilgrims of Hope*! As a special thank-you, we're offering an exclusive **25% discount** on our *Sacraments for All* course. Take advantage of this special pricing through October by using code **POH25** at checkout.

Friday, August 8

9:00 - 10:15 am



**Mission Possible: Nonprofits that Support Catholic Education – Colleen McCoy-Cejka, Ph.D., Anthony Armitage, Jennifer Kirsch, Molly Fisher, Jim Pogge, Carmen Chiappetta, Ph.D.**

In this session, a panel of nonprofit leaders share their stories of supporting Catholic education through advocacy and philanthropy. Not all schools include students with disabilities for various reasons. Supporting students with disabilities in schools often takes entities outside of the Catholic schools' office and beyond the administrative offices of the diocese. These organizations seek to remove barriers and make inclusion possible. Often led by passionate individuals with a personal stake, these organizations pursue a mission of inclusivity that is deeply personal, a labor of love, and not for the faint of heart. Learn how they got started, why they persist, and what they experience in the way of obstacles and successes.

**Evolution of Adapted Youth Ministry: From Teen to Adult – Tricia Borah**

Learn about how a ministry developed for middle and high school students with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) evolved into an active and thriving community for teens and young adults with IDD at a parish in Johns Creek, GA. Through photos, stories, and testimonies from individuals in the ministry, Tricia will share what a typical session looks like, specific examples of adaptations and sacramental preparation, the role of volunteers, how parents are supported, and practical tips for getting started with an adapted youth ministry program.

## **From Inclusion to Belonging: Being Human & Being Church – Lillie Rodgers**

Too often in the Church, conversations about persons with disabilities are limited to the issues of service and inclusion, as if persons with disabilities are objects of our service at best or, at worst, persons whom we merely must open our doors to. A more authentic approach recognizes that persons with disabilities are persons we should be learning from in the Church, for disability offers a unique lens to understand what it means to be fundamentally human, and what it means to be Church. Combining anthropology with Christology, this talk offers a theology of disability and an ecclesiological praxis that moves from mere inclusion to belonging, from service to mutual enrichment. It is in receiving and sharing the gifts that each person brings that we become the united Body of Christ, where each person belongs.

## **The Adult IDD Residential Housing Crisis – Angie Harder**

As people of faith, we believe every human person has intrinsic value and deserves to be cared for throughout their entire life, regardless of their abilities. However, what will happen to our loved ones with IDD once their primary caregivers pass away? Caregivers, parents, and persons with special needs eventually must face the nerve-wracking reality of enormous waiting lists for residential services in the United States. Finding residential placements for adult children is no simple task and many parents try to start their own non-profit or housing agency merely so their child can survive after a parent has passed away. Parents can find themselves isolated and suddenly way out of their line of expertise - founding, managing, and funding a business adventure in their twilight years. Come learn about important questions to ask when considering starting a new non-profit agency and current options available for long term IDD residential housing.

10:30 - 11:45 am

## Round 2

### **A Spirituality of Caregiving: Care for the Caregiver's Soul – Maureen Pratt**

Millions of adults in the United States provide billions of dollars of unpaid care to family members, friends, and others in our communities. These caregivers are present in our parishes, and the unique concerns they face in their journeys with vulnerable loved ones offer abundant opportunities for intentional ministry. Yet, to date, there has been a lack of theologically and spiritually sound resources in the Catholic tradition that provide specific, ongoing support and encouragement for persons who care. This workshop-style presentation will provide the context of what constitutes Catholic Christian caregiving, the scriptural supports that caregivers can access, and activities that parishes and groups of caregivers can engage in to not only build individual spiritual strength and enthusiasm for the sacraments and other resources in the Church, but also to increase among all the faithful the presence of caregivers and the example they set as followers of Christ.

### **Decoding the Spirit: A Practical Tool for Sacramental Preparation with Autism and other Neurological Differences – Valerie Smitheman Brown, Ph.D.**

Decoding the Spirit offers a practical method for understanding how the sensory perception of persons diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and similar Neurological differences can be applied toward religious education and spirituality. The Religious Education Sensory Profile is a simple tool that exposes the commonalities of human sensory reactions. Understanding the commonalities rather than the differences can lead toward a deeper connection to the unique behaviors that are experienced in children with ASD.

## **Euthanasia, Assisted Suicide & Disability: Lessons from the Canadian Experience – Taylor Hyatt**

The Canadian federal government legalized both assisted suicide and euthanasia in 2016. As Catholics, we recognize that these life-ending measures are a distortion of God's plan for our lives, and an offense against the inherent dignity of the human person. What do Church teachings and Catholic thinkers have to say? Why should euthanasia and assisted suicide be considered disability rights issues, and how can parishioners advocate against them from a disability rights perspective? What lethal mistakes have Canadian health and legal authorities made, that policymakers in the United States should not repeat as they explore the issue? Attendees will learn answers to questions like these, as well as both policy and personal solutions to the problems of ending one's life prematurely.

## **Meeting the Needs of Every Learner: Inclusive Learning Environments – Jennifer Kirsch**

A catechist, classroom teacher and parent all play significant roles in a child's education and faith formation. What better way to foster the realization of living Gospel values in the Body of Christ than learning how to serve our children and adults better with differing needs and disabilities and by doing so, how to serve everyone better. This presentation will explore how we all benefit when we include persons with disabilities and learn or pray together. By equipping educators with best practices including universal design for learning, addressing fears, parent partnership, multi-sensorial learning and role playing this presentation connects this work to a greater evangelization in our communities.

**11:45 am - 1:45 pm Lunch/Exhibits/Special Interest**

**1:45 - 2:45 pm Plenary Panel**

**2:45 - 3:45 pm Keynote: Mary O'Meara**

**Pilgrims of Hope – Journeys of Belonging and Giftedness**



Persons with disabilities often find profound hope and strength in their Catholic faith, which affirms their inherent dignity and God's unwavering love. Through prayer, the sacraments, and the support of their faith communities, they experience a deep sense of purpose and belonging. The teachings of Christ, who showed compassion for the marginalized, offer them comfort and encouragement. Mary's keynote will reflect on the Office of Deaf and Disability Ministry's Pilgrimage to Rome in April 2025, celebrating the Jubilee Year as "Pilgrims of Hope." This journey offered a profound opportunity to witness how faith empowers individuals with disabilities to embrace life with resilience. Grounded in God's grace and the Universal Call to Holiness, it reaffirms our worth as integral members of the Church, actively contributing to evangelization and the faith community.

**4:00 - 5:15 pm Round 3**

**Parish Retreats: Children and Youth with disAbilities – Ana Barraza**

Participate in an adaptive trust prayer which will lead into practical ideas to plan and implement parish retreats with children and youth with disAbilities. A step-by-step retreat planning tool will serve in making an adaptive retreat experience meaningful for everybody. Learn how to effectively involve parish staff, volunteers, and parents as partners in ministry.

## **Sensory Friendly Adoration – Joshua Ruoff, Lisa Wagner-Carollo**

Typically, adoration takes place in a reverent environment with strict limitations on noise and movement, making it difficult for many persons with disabilities to feel welcome. Learn how to design an equally reverent adoration that is sensory-friendly, allowing a wider range of worship. This session will explore a guidebook created by NCPD's Committee on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities for offering a sensory friendly adoration. The guidebook describes everything from creating a friendly environment, training greeters, hosting a social and liturgical considerations.

## **Tale of Two Professions: Legal & Therapeutic Approaches to Increasing Support for Students with Disabilities in Catholic Schools – Christina Jones, Veronica Webb**

Catholic schools are increasingly opening their doors to students with a variety of disabilities. We will examine legal challenges and opportunities to get more support from the state and/or the public school district, whether it be in services or funds to meet the needs of students. Topics will include the Child Find/eligibility process, the equitable share of federal/state funds, and school choice initiatives in different states. Funds and public services are one part of the equation, however; Catholic schools must be equipped to welcome and serve students with disabilities in their classrooms. We will also explore how teachers and administrators can support students with learning, attention, and behavioral challenges. Using an occupational therapy approach, Catholic schools can make their classrooms more accessible to children with and without disabilities.

Friday, August 8

**4:00 - 5:15 pm**

**The iCare Experience – Kevin M. Hill**

This presentation will tell the story of iCare Ministries, Inc., a grassroots organization serving individuals with special needs and their families that was started in the year 2016, in Overland Park, Kansas. The presentation will cover how the inspiration of a 1970's ministry called REACH inspired several volunteers to start a ministry that provides adapted Masses, sacramental prep, religious education, and socials to hundreds of persons with special needs and their families in Metropolitan Kansas City. It will cover the steps, challenges, and blessings that have made iCare Ministries what it is today.

**The Miracle of Catechesis: An Adolescent Encounter – Sherry Moitoza**

The phrase “It’s not rocket science” can apply to many things—including catechesis. Organizing engaging catechesis for young persons with special needs may seem daunting, but it doesn’t have to be. Adults often overthink the process, over-plan programs, and struggle to think outside the box. In this session, discover how one parish tapped into the incredible gifts of adolescent parishioners to offer an engaging, inclusive experience through an Adaptive Religious Education Program. When young persons accompany one another on their faith journeys, everyone involved soars—contributing meaningfully to the life of the Church.

**5:15 - 6:00 pm**

**Exhibits**

**6:00 - 6:30 pm**

**Social**

**6:30 - 8:30 pm**

**Ballroom Barbeque**

# Agenda: Saturday, August 9

**8:00 - 8:45 am**

**Check-in/Exhibits/Coffee**

**8:45 - 9:45 am**

**Keynote: Jason Shanks**



## **A Hope Shines Through**

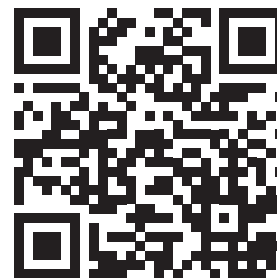
In “A Hope Shines Through”, Jason Shanks shares his deeply personal journey of faith, resilience, and recovery. From raising a child with a rare genetic condition to enduring a life-threatening battle with COVID-19, Jason reflects on how hope has sustained him through these challenges. His experience includes months of intubation and sedation, followed by the immense struggle of learning to walk, talk, and function again. Through these trials, Jason came to a deeper discovery of Jesus in the tabernacle and able to finally relate to his daughter. He also explores the self-emptying nature of Christ, emphasizing how embracing humility and sacrifice can be an empathic pathway of walking with others. Jason’s testimony is a powerful reminder that hope isn’t just something we feel, but something we live. His story invites us to find resilience, faith, and hope in our own struggles, especially in the face of adversity.

**9:45 - 10:30 am**

**Break/Exhibits**

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10:30 - 11:45 am      Round 1

**From Grief to Gift: A Catholic Response to the Grief of  
Parents and Caregivers following an IDD Diagnosis –  
Lori Wieder**

Receiving a diagnosis of an intellectual and developmental disability (IDD) for a child can bring profound and often unspoken grief. Many parents and caregivers experience a deep sense of loss—not for the child they love, but for the hopes, dreams, and expectations they once held for their child’s future. This grief, often misunderstood or overlooked, can impact faith, family dynamics, and emotional well-being. This session provides a faith-based framework for understanding and processing this grief while offering practical pastoral and emotional support. Through theological reflection, shared experiences, and pastoral care strategies, participants will explore how to move from grief to gifts, learning to welcome God’s unique plan with hope and renewed faith.



When disabled persons feel left out, sometimes, all we need is a

**PATCH**

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A smile, a kind word, a helping hand... simple gestures help everyone feel welcomed and loved. But there's more we can do.

***The best outcome:***

- Everyone feels they fully belong when there is clear access to the opportunities all members of the church family can freely enjoy.
- This includes uncomplicated entry and needs-based adaptation for gathering spaces and restrooms.
- Because the distinct needs of each person are met, everyone can build relationships and use their unique gifts.

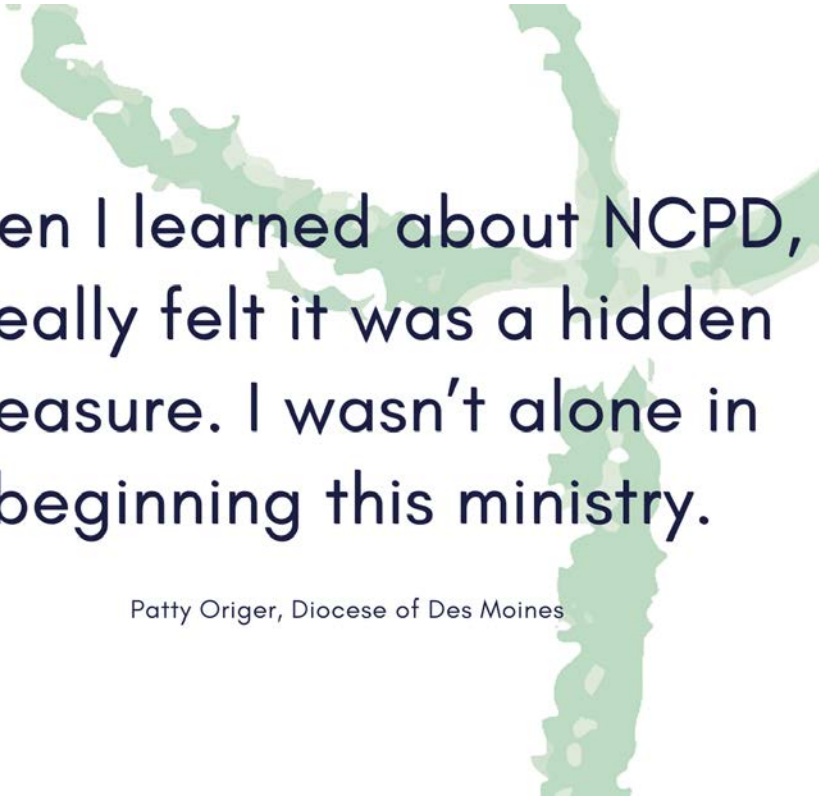
*Pocket Pine Hill is a Colorado based ministry founded to promote awareness of disability and the accommodations necessary to make everyone feel welcomed and wanted. For more information, visit*

**[www.pocketpinehill.org](http://www.pocketpinehill.org)**



## Marketing Your Mission to Foster Tangible Growth – James Polis

Leveraging the highest level of expertise from donors, community leaders, and leading marketers with proven track records, this panel explores integrating mission-based programs with advocacy and performance marketing into a unified strategy for nonprofit organizations looking to serve more communities and larger audiences. We'll discuss the limitations of one-time outreach and the accelerating power of reaching crucial audiences – from parents to policymakers – through effective marketing: including but not limited to effective video production. We will cover how to build trust and connection with the communities we serve through authentic storytelling, and how to shift to an “always-on” marketing approach for sustained growth and engagement.



When I learned about NCPD,  
I really felt it was a hidden  
treasure. I wasn't alone in  
beginning this ministry.

Patty Origer, Diocese of Des Moines

Saturday, August 9

10:30 - 11:45 am

**Martha and Mary's Kitchen: Creating Opportunities for Self-Advocates to Lead in Ministry – Rachel M. Chung**

Ongoing faith formation is an essential part of creating vibrant parishes and is also vital to one's own spiritual growth. How can we create ongoing faith formation opportunities led by persons living with IDD in our parishes and ministries? How can we encourage young adults living with IDD to stay involved in Church life? Come learn about Martha and Mary's Kitchen, a young adult virtual faith group. Learn how persons in this ministry explored their faith in a relatable way and also learned how to cook! This group was co-led by a young adult living with Down syndrome and her co-worker in the vineyard, Rachel Chung.

The Archdiocese of Washington's  
Office for Deaf and Disability Ministry wishes NCPD  
a productive and engaging conference filled with insightful  
discussions and valuable networking opportunities!



Deaf and Disabilities Ministry  
The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington



## **Supporting Lifelong Faith Formation for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities: A Catholic Perspective – Nanci Lukasik-Smith**

This presentation will outline the importance of lifelong faith formation for persons with intellectual disabilities, theological and pastoral perspectives, and practical strategies to support the process. Opening doors, providing liturgical opportunities and offering continuing formation encourages fellowship and belonging with parishes and creates a supportive community.

### **11:45 am - 1:15 pm Lunch/Exhibits/Special Interest**

### **1:15 - 2:30 pm Round 2**

## **Guiding Parents and Clergy Towards Sacramental Access – Fr. Daniel Hess**

There is often confusion and frustration when it comes to sacramental access for persons with cognitive impairments. Clergy, well-formed in the theology of the sacraments, may experience discomfort or uncertainty with regard to persons with disabilities in light of certain sacramental principles and the requirements of Canon Law. Parents and others who care for persons with disabilities often have varied challenges: conflicting answers, fears of being turned away, and presumptions either “for” or “against” the possibility of sacramental access. This presentation aims at reducing anxieties and uncertainties for everyone involved in sacramental formation. Even if the resolution and path forward must be individualized, and not all difficulties will be resolved, the objective is to make progress toward understanding why the Church has the current framework for sacramental access, as well as guidance on how to navigate and proceed within the Church’s approach.

1:15 - 2:30 pm

## Education as the Formation of the Human Person – Abriana Chilelli

This session will present the philosophy of the necessity of inclusion of children with disabilities in schools of Catholic liberal education. The session will also include school and diocesan steps as well as “must-do’s” before and during the welcoming of children with disabilities into a Catholic liberal education at a school or diocesan level.



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individuals of all ability levels!



Visit [LoyolaPress.com](http://LoyolaPress.com) for more information

## **Faith for All: Building Inclusive Adult Faith Formation for Persons with IDD – Lori Wieder, Lorna DesRoses**

This workshop is dedicated to empowering diocesan leaders, catechists, ministers, volunteers, clergy, persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), and their caregivers with the knowledge and tools necessary to create inclusive and meaningful faith formation opportunities. By focusing on both integrative approaches within the larger Catholic community and tailored strategies specific to the needs of adults with IDD, this session will explore best practices for fostering a deep, accessible connection to the Catholic faith.

## **Making your Electronic Communications Accessible to All – Paul Fontaine**

Electronic communications including newsletters, bulletins, text messages and web sites are a cornerstone of the Church's evangelization efforts. However, many churches and schools struggle to engage parishioners who are blind or visually impaired, often unintentionally excluding them from essential messaging. This gap arises from two key challenges: limited access to tools for creating accessible correspondence and a lack of awareness about accessibility needs. This session will emphasize the importance of addressing visual accessibility in parish and school communications, introduce the principles of electronic accessibility for blind and visually impaired persons, and provide practical strategies and tools to help clergy and staff ensure their outreach is inclusive.

**1:15 - 2:30 pm**

**Reimagining Sacred Spaces to Include Sensory-Friendly Design that Supports All: Children with Disabilities and their Families – Molly Pierce**

Our Catholic parishes have the ability to consider a sensory design perspective in the sacred spaces within churches and schools that support children with disabilities that may include autism, ADHD (neurodiversity), developmental delays, and neurological challenges. Often these children's sensory nervous systems can be easily overstimulated by the environment. There are tools and design recommendations that can be integrated within churches, crying room spaces, and within Catholic school classrooms that lessen emotional dysregulation and be a space for sacred learning and calm. Thoughtful design of rooms and spaces using sensory design that focuses on features to support sight, sound, touch/tactile, and movement will be discussed. Suggestions will be provided that includes Catholic materials for children that support regulation while engaging in our Catholic faith, developmentally appropriate sensory tools and resources that promote spiritual well-being and peace during Mass or creating a space in classrooms to support regulation.

**2:45 - 4:00 pm**

**Round 3**

**Autism and the Church: A Family's Story and an Educator's Expertise – Leo Zanchettin, Elizabeth Potts, Ph.D.**

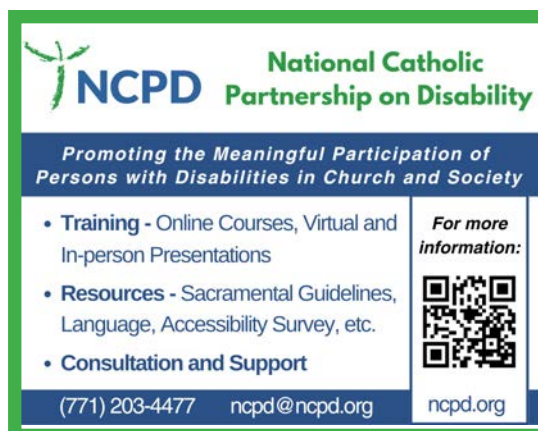
This session explores autism spectrum disorders through the lens of families and the Church. Hear stories about one family's experiences in the Church from the father of 6 children, all of whom are on the autism spectrum. Then learn about ways parishes can create an environment that supports persons on the autism spectrum and their families, such that it is a place of belonging.

## Question – Persuade – Refer (QPR) – Carol Ruddell

QPR stands for Question, Persuade, and Refer — the 3 simple steps anyone can learn to help save a life from suicide. Just as people trained in CPR and the Heimlich Maneuver help save thousands of lives each year, people trained in QPR learn how to recognize the warning signs of a suicide crisis and how to question, persuade, and refer someone to help. Each year thousands of Americans, like you, are saying “Yes” to saving the life of a friend, colleague, sibling, or neighbor.

## Why is Public Policy and Advocacy So Important Anyway? – Mary O’Meara

By engaging in public policy advocacy, the Church can amplify the voices of persons with disabilities, ensuring their concerns are heard and addressed in decision-making processes. This advocacy aligns with the Church’s mission to protect human rights and foster communities where all persons, regardless of ability, can thrive. Such involvement reflects a commitment to justice, compassion, and the creation of a society that upholds the common good. This workshop will explore practical ways for pastoral workers, diocesan directors, family members, and, most importantly, self-advocates to engage in the legislative process to support bills that uphold the dignity of all human life at every stage.



4:30 - 5:30 pm

## Eucharistic Celebration: Sensory-Friendly Mass

A sensory-friendly Mass is a specially adapted celebration of the liturgy designed to welcome persons with sensory sensitivities as well as families seeking a calmer, more inclusive worship environment. These Masses feature intentional adaptations such as lower lighting, softer music, visual aids, and a more literal homily to create a calming and accessible environment. Most importantly, this is a stigma-free space where all are encouraged to participate as they are. Movement and vocalizations are welcome, and a designated sensory room will be available nearby for persons who need a break. Additional supports including alternative seating, fidget items, noise-canceling headphones, and adaptive worship aids will be available for use, and Mass participants are invited to bring any necessary comfort items with them. A sensory-friendly Mass reflects the Church's mission to ensure that everyone is truly welcome at the table of the Lord.





Porto Charities builds a culture of belonging for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities through inclusive Catholic education, meaningful employment, and community outreach in the Diocese of Arlington, VA.

Learn more about our work and resources available for all at [www.portocharities.org](http://www.portocharities.org)



## NCPD Online Courses



Clergy and religious receive a 60% discount on NCPD online courses.  
Email [ncpd@ncpd.org](mailto:ncpd@ncpd.org) to request the code.

## Our Sincere Gratitude to...

Most Reverend Oscar A. Solis, D.D., Bishop of Salt Lake City

- and his staff for generously hosting the Pilgrims of Hope Conference
  - Lorena Needham, Director, Office of Worship
- Carol Ruddell, Chair of the Diocesan Commission for Persons with Disabilities

**JD Flynn, Co-Founder of The Pillar, for serving as Master of Ceremonies**

Noelle Collis-DeVito for our Sensory Room & Sensory-Friendly Mass

Tia Korologos and ESI Management for conference event planning

### NCPD Board & Committee Member Presenters/Facilitators

**Governance Board:** Leo Zanchettin, Chair, Br. Fred Cabras OFM Cap., LCSW,  
Most Rev. Brendan J. Cahill, S.T.D., Tom Crishon, J.D., Kevin Johnson,  
Colleen McCoy-Cejka, Ph.D., James Polis, Tison Thomas, & Julia Sauter

**Catholic Schools Committee:** Colleen McCoy-Cejka, Ph.D.

**Ethics and Public Policy Committee:** Michael Waddell, Ph.D., & Tom Crishon, J.D.

**Committee on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities:** Lori Wieder, Chair,  
Noelle Collis-DeVito, & Lorna DesRoses

**Physical Disabilities Committee:** Robert Furtado, Josh Ruoff, & Julia Sauter

**Committee on Mental Illness and Wellness:** Steve Nash, Chair,  
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**Elizabeth Potts, Ph.D.**, Associate Director of Diocesan Relations

**Bob Quinlan**, Project Manager

**Julia Whitney**, Associate Director of Programs and Resource Development

**Kelsey Bell**, Associate Director of Hispanic Formation

**Trinity Ruiz**, Intern

# NCPD Catechetical Resources

The National Catholic Partnership on Disability (NCPD) was founded in 1982 to implement the *Pastoral Statement of U.S. Catholic Bishops on Persons with Disabilities* (1978). NCPD provides (arch)dioceses across the nation with disability resources, training, and support to advance the full participation of persons with disabilities in the life of the Church.



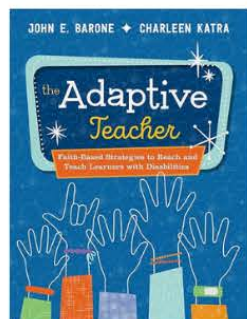
## Adapted Faith Formation

View adapted faith formation activities for catechists and families to use every month of the year. Available in English and Spanish.

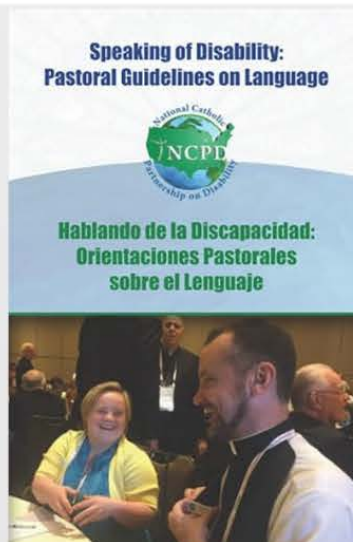


Use the QR code below to view catechetical resources on NCPD's website.

Be sure to review other links on this page for additional helpful resources.



*The Adaptive Teacher: Faith-Based Strategies to Reach and Teach Learners with Disabilities* will guide you on how to maximize the effectiveness of your lessons with concrete strategies you can implement tomorrow to benefit all learners. Published by Loyola Press.



## Popular Resources



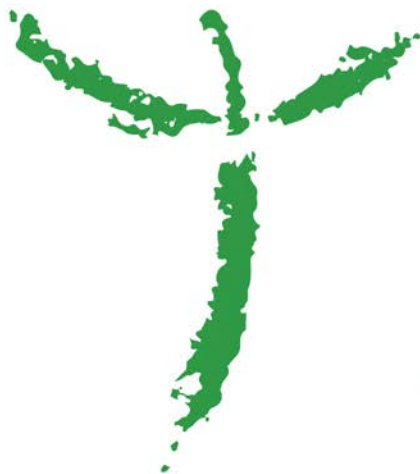
**Most Reverend Michael Burbidge**  
**Diocese of Arlington, VA**

NCPD Episcopal Moderator  
visits National Eucharistic Congress  
guests at NCPD's booth.



## Contact Us

[ncpd@ncpd.org](mailto:ncpd@ncpd.org)  
(771) 203-4477



# NCPD

National Catholic  
Partnership on Disability

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