Mission to Catholics with Disabilities:

Creating a universally designed ministry at diocesan and parish levels- Presented by Melissa Waldon, Coordinator of Ministry to Persons with Disabilities and to the Deaf, Roman Catholic Diocese of Dallas, mwaldon@cathdal.org
**Missionary Discipleship**

- What is missionary discipleship?
  - Pope Francis states in *The Joy of the Gospel* that “Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are ‘disciples’ and ‘missionaries’, but rather that we are always ‘missionary disciples’.

- We are all called to be missionaries, by virtue of baptism—proclaiming the faith wherever we are (We aren’t missionaries because we have a passport, but rather because we have a baptismal certificate).

- This is what the new evangelization calls for: “Each of the baptized whatever their role in the Church or the educational level of their faith, is an active agent of evangelization...The new evangelization should involve a new central role for each of the baptized.”

Excerpts taken from Catechetical Leader, September 2014, volume 25, No 5
Embracing the New Evangelization

- Mission: to go out and spread the faith
- How can we be missionary disciples to our brothers and sisters who have disabilities at the national, diocesan and parish levels?
- The goal of this missionary work, whether conducted on a national, diocesan, or parish level, is to facilitate the implementation of the *Pastoral Statement of U.S. Catholic Bishops on People with Disabilities* which calls for “realizing the unique gifts individuals with disabilities have to offer the Church...[and] the need for their integration into the Christian community and their fuller participation in its life.” (par. 1)

- Leadership, Dedication and Creativity are key!
Foundational Principles of a Universally Designed Ministry (universally designed-inclusive for all with a carefully thought out plan)

- Is Christ-centered, and fits within the mission and ministerial scope of the diocese
- Has a broad vision in its coordination and planning
- Recognizes and values the dignity and uniqueness of each individual
- Fully includes people with disabilities in the life of the Community of Faith
- Calls each person forth to share in and contribute to the celebrations and obligations of the faith.
Foundational Principles of a Universally Designed Ministry Cont.

- Acknowledges disability and functional limitations as a common and prevalent part of the living process.
- Identifies human vulnerability as a catalyst in bringing people together and renewing the community.
- Does not generalize about disabilities, recognizing every person's experience of disability, skills, and coping mechanisms as unique.
- Appreciates accessibility features and inclusion as of mutual benefit to the entire community.
- Is open to change and growth.
Universal Design on a Diocesan Level

- There is no one way to structure the ministry.
- Factors to consider: size, demographics, resources, duties, number of staff, present programs, needs of population.
- Components essential to the ministry: access to the bishop or his designee, clear placement of ministry within the diocese, awareness of the different levels ministry is carried out, sufficient personnel & funds, employee/volunteer competence in the area of disabilities, clear role description and lines of authority, opportunities for people with disabilities to be engaged, clear priorities and objectives.
Priorities

- Networking - within diocese, other organizations, collaboration
- Assessment - current programs and needs
- Planning - action plan with phases
- Training and support - PCL’s, catechists and other volunteers
- Advocacy - disability issues and awareness
- Promotion - current issues, programs
- Resourcing - referrals, community
- Sustaining staff/volunteers - keep current, appreciation, avoid over working
Catholic Diocese of Dallas example of a universally designed diocesan ministry to people with disabilities

- Full Time paid Coordinator of the ministry - Melissa Waldon
- Operates the GRACE Disabilities committee with 5 sub-committees in the areas of Training, Community Resources, Parish Connections, Deaf, Events
- Sub-committee volunteers plan an Annual Day of Retreat, an Annual Bishop’s Disability, an Annual Advent social, and other events as determined by the needs
- Conducts parish surveys, applies for grants
- Provides training to Priests, Parish Staff, Volunteers, Catechists, Parishioners and Teens
Catholic Diocese of Dallas example of a universally designed diocesan ministry to people with disabilities cont...

- Partners with community agencies to be a resource to parishes, parishioners and families who are in need
- Offers specialized catechetical programs in to the deaf and to students with autism
- Operates a mobility assistance program to provide people with mobility equipment to help them get to Mass
- Participates in conferences to raise awareness
- Assists parishes in developing their disability ministries
Universal Design on a Parish Level

- Provides access to the Pastor
- Placement of ministry is clearly identified within the parish structure
- Commitment to ministry at all levels
- Respects the levels at which ministry is carried out
- Sufficient staff or volunteers & financial support
Universal Design on a Parish Level – Continued...

- Competency
- Delineates clear role and lines of authority
- Creates opportunities for people with disabilities to participate
- Incorporates a disability perspective into all areas of faith community
- Keeps abreast of current social issues and policies
Creating an Access Plan Utilizing the Principle of Universal Design

- **Goal:** To achieve universal design which creates enabling and inclusive environments to serve all people, all stages, all abilities.
- **Focus:** To consider the totality of the community and its interactions that allows for individual and communal growth.
- **Emphasis:** Active participation by all members of the Body of Christ
Creating an Access Plan Utilizing the Principle of Universal Design Cont..

- Assess Needs
- Focus on universal design
- Develop Access Plan addressing attitudes, Common sense approaches, and components
- Identify and Implement Renovations
- Create Program access
- Develop Policy Statements
All Saint’s Parish-Dallas, Tx
Example for Development of Disability Ministry

- Develop questionnaire
- Disabilities Sunday
- Set up first meeting
- Call and invite all who signed up to attend
- From initial meeting, needs mentioned should become goals
- Board members should be elected and committee members appointed.
- Develop an organizational chart
All Saint’s Parish-Dallas, Tx
Example for Development of Disability Ministry Cont...

- Have monthly meetings to develop ways in which the needs all can be met in an inclusive way
- Find ways to raise funds
- Hold workshops/mini-conferences
- Make sure to operate within the goal of being an inclusive family where all feel welcomed.
- Participate as a group in church functions such as running a booth at the carnival.
Welcoming people with Disabilities so that ALL may encounter Christ from Diocese of Harrisburg

- **Tips:**
  - Focus on the person, not the disability
  - Treat adults with disabilities as adults
  - Speak directly to the parishioner not to companion/interpreter
  - Ask for instructions before providing assistance
  - Recognize that a person may have multiple disabilities and therefore multiple needs
  - Use a normal voice
  - Offer to shake hands when introduced
  - Relax; we are all people with gifts and challenges
Welcoming people with Disabilities so that ALL may encounter Christ from Diocese of Harrisburg

- It is helpful if the Parish...
- Includes people with disabilities in liturgy, ministries, etc.
- Recognize that people with disabilities have talents and skills that are useful to the parish community
- Has appropriate and accessible signage in all parish facilities
- Ask persons with disabilities for input
- Train volunteers and parish staff
Credits and Links

- [http://www.ncpd.org/accessible-design](http://www.ncpd.org/accessible-design)
- All Saint’s Disability Ministry
- Diocese of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania
- [https://www.cathdal.org/Disabilities_and_Deaf](https://www.cathdal.org/Disabilities_and_Deaf)