



Diocese of Owensboro

McRaith Catholic Center

INCLUSION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

The Diocese of Owensboro is committed to the promotion of the participation of *all* persons in the life of the Catholic Church. If you or someone you care for has a disability, we encourage you to speak to the pastor if there are challenges to receiving the sacraments or participating in liturgy and parish life. Every person and situation is unique and requires the discretion of the pastor.

The Diocese of Owensboro's Office of Worship serves as a resource to parishes for matters of inclusion in the liturgy and reception of the sacraments for persons with disabilities, as well as a consultant for accessibility in design of worship spaces. It is highly recommended that parishes train their hospitality team to anticipate and meet the needs of those with disabilities. Also, parishes should have clearly marked designated seating for those with disabilities who require it so that all, especially visitors, can recognize it as such. Universally recognized signage is recommended.

In answer to common questions concerning sacraments in regards to persons with disabilities, below is a paraphrased version of the USCCB's *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities* revised in 2017. The full version may be found as a resource under the Office of Worship's website: www.owensborodiocese.org/worship.

GUIDELINES FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENTS WITH PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES* Revised Edition, 2017, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

General Principals: All humans are equal in dignity in the sight of God. Just like any other person, persons with disabilities have a right to the sacraments. The sacraments should never be denied to a person because of a disability, but should be made accessible to them. Special effort should be made to welcome all into the life of the parish, including people with disabilities. This effort may necessitate that adaptations be made to parish facilities so that it is accessible by all. Having received the sacraments, persons with disabilities, like all other parishioners, should be encouraged to participate in all levels of pastoral ministry that are available and for which they are qualified.

Baptism: Baptism is available for all who freely ask for it, are properly disposed, and are not prohibited by law from receiving it. Disability itself is never a reason for deferring baptism. In the case of infants, no adaptations to usual preparation are necessary. For catechumens of catechetical age, catechesis must be adapted in content and method to their particular situations. Catholics with disabilities may serve as sponsors and godparents, and like others who fulfill these roles, they are to be carefully chosen and formed for these responsibilities.

Confirmation: All baptized persons who possess the use of reason may receive the Sacrament of Confirmation if they are "suitably instructed, properly disposed and able to renew the baptismal promises" (*Order of Confirmation*, c. 889). Persons who because of intellectual or developmental disabilities may never attain the use of reason can receive the Sacrament of Confirmation and should be encouraged to receive it. In these cases, pastoral guidance is needed, along with the welcome and embrace of the whole community of faith. At times, pastoral need may necessitate an accommodated setting and a simpler manner.

*Paraphrased version of USCCB's *Guidelines for the Celebration of Persons with Disabilities, Revised Edition*

Eucharist: The criterion for reception of Holy Communion is that the person be able to “distinguish the body of Christ from ordinary food,” (*Code of Canon Law*, c. 913, §2) even if this recognition is evidenced through manner, gesture, or reverential silence rather than verbally. Cases of doubt should be resolved in favor of the right of the Catholic to receive the sacrament.

Feeding Tubes: Catholics who require nourishment through feeding tubes are encouraged to receive Holy Communion; however, it is not to be administered through a feeding tube. The full presence of Christ is found even in the smallest piece of the consecrated host or in a mere drop of the consecrated wine, and must be received through the mouth. Please be aware that even a drop of consecrated wine on the tongue may be detrimental to the health of someone using a feeding tube; be sure to ask before administering communion in any manner.

Celiac Sprue Disease or other Gluten Intolerant: Catholics with conditions that make them gluten intolerant should be given the opportunity to receive a small fragment of a regular host, and made aware of the options to receive a low-gluten host or to receive under the form of wine alone. Clergy and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion need to be aware of the possibility of cross-contamination and related issues in order to plan for the safe administration of the sacred species to Catholics with gluten intolerance.

Alzheimer’s or other Age-Related Dementias: When baptized Catholics who have been regular communicants develop advanced Alzheimer’s or other age-related dementias, there is to be a presumption in favor of the individual’s ability to distinguish between Holy Communion and regular food.

Reconciliation: Only those who have the use of reason are capable of committing mortal sin. Nevertheless, even young children and persons with intellectual disabilities often are conscious of committing acts that are sinful to some degree and may experience a sense of guilt and sorrow. As long as the individual is capable of having a sense of contrition for having committed sin, even if he or she cannot describe the sin precisely in words, the person may receive sacramental absolution. In the case of individuals who are nonverbal or have minimal verbal communication ability, sorrow for sin is to be accepted even if this repentance is expressed through some gesture rather than verbally.

Catholics who are deaf should have the opportunity to confess to a priest able to communicate with them in sign language, if sign language is their primary means of communication. An interpreter, if utilized, has the obligation to observe secrecy. Catholics who are deaf should also be permitted to make their confession in writing or through the use of an appropriate portable electronic communication device that can be passed back and forth between the penitent and confessor. The written or digital materials are to be returned to the penitent and properly destroyed or deleted.

Anointing of the Sick: Since disability does not necessarily indicate an illness, Catholics with disabilities should receive the Anointing of the Sick on the same basis and under the same circumstances as any other member of the Christian faithful.

Holy Orders: The existence of a disability is not considered in and of itself as disqualifying a person from Holy Orders. However, candidates for ordination must possess the necessary spiritual, physical, human, moral, intellectual, emotional, and psychological qualities and abilities to fulfill the ministerial functions of the order they receive. The bishop makes the judgment that candidates are suited for ordained ministry in the Church and cases are to be decided on an individual basis.

Marriage: For matrimonial consent to be valid, it is necessary that the contracting parties possess a sufficient use of reason; that they be free of any grave lack of discretion affecting their judgment about the rights and duties to which they are committing themselves; and that they have the mental capacity to assume the essential obligations of the married state. Medical and canonical opinions should be sought in determining the presence of any impediments to marriage. In case of doubt with regard to impotence, marriage may not be impeded.

Catholics who are deaf are to be offered the opportunity to express their matrimonial consent in sign language, if sign language is their primary means of communication. Marriage may also be contracted with the assistance of a sign language interpreter whose trustworthiness has been certified by the pastor.