

November 14, 2018

Holy Redeemer Disability Ministry Meeting

Attending: Carol Hom, Larry Hilliard, Beth McAllister, Rob & Monique Bourque, Fr. Mark Smith, Kat Pearthree, Christina DiSalvo, Mary O'Meara

Topic: 40th Anniversary of the USCCB Pastoral Statement on Disability

Documents discussed:

1. Pastoral Statement: [CLICK HERE](#)
2. Sacramental Guidelines: [CLICK HERE](#)
3. Universal Design: [CLICK HERE](#)
4. Sample Parish Survey: [CLICK HERE](#)

There were other books, articles and resources shared as well. One being a program called "Welcomed and Valued" - A Catholic approach to supporting persons living with Mental Illness.

Review of the history and content of the Pastoral Statement:

Our USCCB Pastoral Statement on Disability is the best 10 minute read for anyone in any way involved with supporting access to the faith.

Section 13 of the Pastoral Statement states, 13." If people with disabilities are to become equal partners in the Christian community, injustices must be eliminated and ignorance and apathy replaced by increased sensitivity and warm acceptance. The leaders and the general membership of the Church must educate themselves to appreciate fully the contribution people with disabilities can make to the Church's spiritual life. They bring with them a special insight into the meaning of life; for they live, more than the rest of us perhaps, in the shadow of the cross. And out of their experience they forge virtues like courage, patience, perseverance, compassion and sensitivity that should serve as an inspiration to all Christians."

The Pastoral Statement has been described in many ways. As prophetic, groundbreaking, far-reaching, cutting edge, inspirational.

For all of us as Church, this 1978 Statement gave permission to advocate for persons who are Deaf and those living with disability to be welcomed, valued and celebrated in all our parishes. Not only this- but it also recognized, all those many 40 years ago- that without this part of our Church represented- we are an incomplete Body of Christ.

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

Clearly the Catholic Church through this pastoral was leading the way for people with disabilities. And of course, since the passage of the ADA, people's expectations of access have been increased in all aspects of their lives, including their life of faith.

With their statements, the bishops affirmed what so many individuals, family members and pastoral leaders already knew. That is, and I'm quoting from the pastoral, which was quoting Pope John the 23rds' encyclical Pacem in Terris, "In an ordered and productive community it is a fundamental principle that every human being is a person. One has rights

and duties flowing directly and spontaneously from one's very nature. These rights are therefore universal, and viable, and inalienable."

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

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

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

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

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

"The same Jesus who heard the cry for recognition from the people with disabilities of Judea and Samaria 2,000 years ago calls us, his followers, to embrace our responsibility to our own disabled brothers and sisters in the United States." (USCCB)

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

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

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

T, transforms. Let's take a minute to describe the power of the pastoral to transform our church, society, and our ministry in ever new and fresh ways. So how has our ministry been transformed?

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

Historically, disability has been considered as far from the norm and something to be feared and shunned. However many prefer to define disability as the normal and anticipated outcome of the risks, stresses and strains of the living process.

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

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

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

A few more trends that really impact our ministry. The face of the U.S. Catholic Church is changing. It's estimated, as you may know, that by 2050 Hispanic Catholics will make up over 50 percent of the U.S. church. We need to keep pace with these shifts and assure that the issues and culture of these communities are incorporated into our ministry. Another vital statistic is by 2050 the population of people over 65 will have doubled from our current rate.

Another trend is that we are becoming an increasingly individualized society. More and more, each of us is accustomed to focusing on our personal rights, often to the exclusion of the common good of the needs of others.

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

And finally, remember that many of our current bishops were not bishops at the time the pastoral was adopted. Many pastors and pastoral staffs are not aware of the resources. So here we are to find ways to share the message with our parish. This work and ministry is not for OTHER to do... it is for US to do!

Next steps and action items:

- * At Fr. Mark's invitation, Rob will share the desire of this committee to make our parish more accessible to persons with disabilities and their families, with the Holy Redeemer Parish Council Monday, November 19th. It was suggested that, if possible, Paul Fontaine also attend. The parish survey (link above) was one item thought important to share with the council as they consider if this is an area we wish to work toward improving as a parish community.
- * Rob (and possibly Paul) will report back to this group, via e mail, what the results of the Parish Council meeting are.
- * At our next gathering, we will discuss what steps we should work on first- develop an action plan
- * Mary will send a doodle poll to the group to find a day/time to meet. Tuesday or Thursday nights were suggested

Peace,
Mary

Mary O'Meara
Executive Director

THE ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON

Department of Special Needs Ministries

BELONGING STARTS HERE

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