

# **Accessibility Plan of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois**

## **Introduction**

The following pages from the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois represent their efforts from 1989 to the present to create access and welcome for Catholics with disabilities within the diocese. The pastoral letter promulgated by their Ordinary in January, 1989 can be found in part 2.a.6. of this Section, with the companion access plan following this introduction. While written prior to the update to the bishops pastoral statement in 1989, we include it here as a helpful example of a five-year plan with specific goals for increasing access and awareness. It was reported in 1996 that following this five-year plan, more than 65% of the parishes in the diocese are accessible, with many more in the process of becoming accessible. In addition, where there are several small mission parishes under the leadership of one pastor, at least one of the churches in that cluster is accessible.

Additional components of the access plan are a one-page accessibility audit, recommendations for pew cuts in churches, and “Checklist of Procedures for Construction or Major Renovation of Buildings” issued in January 1993.

For further information on these documents or other elements of the accessibility plan of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois contact:

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*Access Plan of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois  
Opening Doors, Chapter One, Sect. B.3.b.(2)*

# **Integrating People with a Disability into the Life of the Church Plan for the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois**

Each parish, diocesan office, agency and institution is asked to:

- I. Raise its awareness about the message of the United States bishops' *Pastoral Statement on Persons with Disabilities* of 1978, which calls for the full participation of people with a disability in the life of the Church.
- II. Assess how fully people with a disability can participate in the life of the parish or receive services from the diocesan office, agency, or institution.
  - A. Consulting with people who have a disability, the appointed liaison with the Office for Ministry with Persons with Disabilities, known as the Parish Coordinator with Persons with Disabilities, and other professionals as needed, is recommended.
  - B. Using the accessibility survey made specific for the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois may be helpful in this process.
- III. Identify, price, and prioritize:
  - A. The barriers that need to be removed to provide an accessible environment (include attitudinal as well as physical barriers);
  - B. The assistive devices that may need to be acquired to provide accessibility (examples: sign language interpreter, braille or large print materials, adequate sound system such as FM/audio loop, grab bars in rest rooms);
  - C. Programs that need to be developed to include people with a disability in the life of the Church (examples: special religious education, transportation system, parish visitors, senior clubs).
- IV. Determine ways of financing the needed renovations and programs.
- V. By January of 1990, develop a long-range plan with a five year or less timeline for providing a fully accessible environment in the parish, diocesan office, agency or institution. Although some entities may require a few extra years, each long-range plan aims for accessibility and full participation as soon as feasible yet within five years. In the long-range plan, the place of worship is

the first priority followed by parish hall, educational facility, and other structures open to the public.

VI. By 1995, implement the long-range plan.

To assist in planning and implementation, the following actions are strongly recommended.

- I. Appoint parish coordinators with persons with disabilities (if not already done) to be a liaison with the Office for Ministry with Persons with Disabilities and the parish leadership. Inviting this person to work with the parish council by making written reports and/or regularly speaking at meetings may be helpful.
- II. Assist the Office for Ministry with Persons with Disabilities to be a resource which provides current and accurate information to the parishes and diocesan offices, agencies, and institutions. Sending the office a copy of an annual update of the accessibility survey will facilitate this goal.
- III. Encourage deanery councils to facilitate the networking among parishes to maximize resources (examples: special religious education programs, sharing of accessible facilities and devices, etc.)
- IV. Continue to send plans for major construction projects to the Diocesan Commission on Buildings and Grounds for review. All new construction and major renovations must be in compliance with the *Illinois Environmental Barriers Act* [and the *Americans with Disabilities Act*].

November 9, 1988

*Editor's note: The Office for Ministry with Persons with Disabilities was suppressed in 1990 by decree of the Bishop. The Office for Social Concerns was established by the Bishop to address several ministries. Among them are issues of accessibility, inclusion of persons with mental retardation or special needs, and pastoral ministry with the Deaf Community.*

# Parish Access Audit

## ACCESSIBILITY

### Outside Church & Hall

- Parking signs
- Curb cuts
- Accessible entrance
- Door openings (automatic/slide handles)

### Inside Parish Hall

- All levels accessible
- Audio system with assistive listening device
- Accessible bathroom

### Inside Church

- Pew cuts
- Accessible sanctuary
- Accessible confessional
- Accessible bathroom/proper handrails
- Accessible drinking fountain
- Audio system with assistive listening device
- Is there a need for sign language interpreters?
- Large print missalettes

## INCLUSION

Mental Retardation    Mental Illness    Physical Disabilities    Hearing Loss    Frail Elderly

- religious education
- serving, lectors, ushers, etc.
- family support groups
- administration
- outreach

## Recommendations for Pew Cuts in Churches

There are no specific guidelines on the removal of pews for accessibility to wheelchairs because distance between pews as well as overall seating arrangements vary from church to church. However, some recommendations that may be helpful are:

1. Consult with disabled people in the parish to see what their preference is regarding location of pew cuts, e.g. front, center, or back rows.
2. Make pew cuts in several different areas of the church, e.g. front, center, and back rows allowing the disabled person to choose their seating.
3. Remove 36" to 48" from each pew. This will allow ample room for wheelchair placement.
4. Remove two pews to enable wheelchair to move and turn freely. This may vary depending upon the distance allowed between pews.
5. If floor slants to the front, take this into consideration by placing pew cuts in the most level areas.

**Please note:** Taking out complete rows of pews in the front, center or back of church is not recommended because this makes people in wheelchairs conspicuous, creates an obvious segregation from the rest of the community and does not allow a person to sit close by family and/or friends.

**Checklist of Procedures**  
**for**  
**Construction or Major Renovation of Buildings**

**Office of the Vicar General**  
**Office for Finance**  
**Office for Insurance**  
**Office for Social Concerns**  
**Office for Worship**  
**Commission for Buildings and Property**  
**Commission for the Liturgy**

**Diocese of Springfield in Illinois**

**January 1993**

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Name of Parish: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**A. Organizing for the Proposed Project**

- 1. Pastor with parish pastoral council discerns need for the project.
- 2. Pastor contacts bishop and/or the vicar general/moderator of the curia in writing for a meeting to discuss the proposed project.
- 3. Meeting with bishop and/or the vicar general/moderator of the curia, the diocesan finance officer, pastor and parish representatives to discuss necessity, nature, and funding of project.
- 4. Meeting with the Commission for Buildings and Property, pastor, and parish representatives to discuss the proposed project.
- 5. Parish planning committee organized.
- 6. Letter to pastor giving permission to hire architect.

**B. The Discernment Process**

- 7. Collection of data on parish membership, community, history, traditions, and needs assessment completed.
- 8. Meeting of pastor, parish planning committee, architect, and Office for Worship personnel to discuss proposed project, appropriate liturgical space, and steps to be taken. (+ )
- 9. Meeting of pastor, parish planning committee, architect, and Office for Social Concerns personnel to discuss accessibility for persons with disabilities.
- 10. Study of church documents by pastor and parish planning committee completed.
- 11. In the case of renovation, schedule an on-site visit with the Office for Worship and the Office for Social Concerns as appropriate.
- 12. Begin education of parish in church architecture, liturgical space, and accessibility. (+ )
- 13. Pastor and parish planning committee meet with parishioners to discuss the proposed project.
- 14. Proposed project description completed.
- 15. Affirmation of proposed project description by the parish pastoral council and the parishioners.
- 16. Forward to Office for Finance the proposed project description and indication of parishioner affirmation.
- 17. Commission for Buildings and Property reviews proposed project description.
- 18. Letter to pastor giving preliminary financial approval for the project and permission to proceed with project design process.

(+ ) = applies to worship spaces only

### **C. The Project Design Process**

- \_\_\_ 19. Continue education of parish in church architecture, liturgical space, and accessibility.
- \_\_\_ 20. Pastor, parish planning committee, and architect proceed with design of proposed project.
- \_\_\_ 21. Share design information with parishioners.
- \_\_\_ 22. Pastor sends four sets of preliminary design plans to the Office for Finance which will distribute them to other appropriate diocesan agencies (i.e., Office for Insurance, Office for Social Concerns, Office for Worship/Commission for the Liturgy, Commission for Buildings and Property).
- \_\_\_ 23. Design plans reviewed by agencies listed above and dialogue continued as needed.
- \_\_\_ 24. Recommendations from agencies sent to Office for Finance which compiles and forwards them to pastor and architect.
- \_\_\_ 25. Parish modifies design plans to reflect recommendations of agencies.
- \_\_\_ 26. Meeting of pastor, parish planning committee, diocesan finance officer, and Commission for Buildings and Property to discuss design plans and financing of the project.
- \_\_\_ 27. Diocesan finance officer and Commission for Buildings and Property give recommendations to the bishop.
- \_\_\_ 28. Letter to vicar general/moderator of the curia to pastor to prepare final design plans and specifications.
- \_\_\_ 29. Pastor sends four sets of final design plans and specifications to the Office for Finance which will distribute them to other appropriate diocesan agencies (i.e., Office for Insurance, Office for Social Concerns, Office for Worship/Commission for the Liturgy, Commission for Buildings and Property).
- \_\_\_ 30. Final design plans and specifications reviewed by agencies listed above and dialogue continued as needed.
- \_\_\_ 31. Recommendations from agencies sent to Office for Finance which compiles and forwards them to pastor and architect.
- \_\_\_ 32. Bishop gives final approval.
- \_\_\_ 33. List of potential contractors sent to Office for Finance for approval by Office for Insurance.
- \_\_\_ 34. List of approved contractors sent to pastor and architect.
- \_\_\_ 35. Letter from bishop or vicar general/moderator of the curia to pastor to receive bids.
- \_\_\_ 36. Bids opened and bishop or vicar general/moderator of the curia gives permission in writing to award contract.

(continued)

#### **D. The Construction Process**

- \_\_\_ 37. Before construction begins, architect sends certificates of insurance to Office for Finance.
- \_\_\_ 38. Letter from pastor to Office for Finance when construction begins.
- \_\_\_ 39. Pastor and architect inform bishop and Office for Finance of any changes during construction.
- \_\_\_ 40. Pastor and architect maintain listing and price of permanent fixtures.
- \_\_\_ 41. Pastor and architect maintain inventory of movable contents.
- \_\_\_ 42. Listing of permanent fixtures and movable contents sent to Office for Finance.
- \_\_\_ 43. Pastor and architect notify Office for Finance of completion of project.
- \_\_\_ 44. Architect sends “as-built” plans to Office for Finance and pastor within thirty days of completion of construction.

#### **E. The Celebration of the Project Completion**

- \_\_\_ 45. Contact the Office for Worship as needed for appropriate ritual text to be used regarding dedication or re-dedication of a church, blessing of a parish hall, etc.
- \_\_\_ 46. Celebration of the completion of the project, involving as is appropriate the ministry of the diocesan bishop.

This checklist intends to assist parishes in knowing the steps to be taken in the renovation or construction of all parish buildings. During such a process one copy of the checklist will be maintained in the parish and another in the Office for Finance. The Office for Finance will serve parishes, if requested, in coordinating all the steps in a renovation or construction endeavor.