

NCPD Board Statement on the Provision of Catechetical and Academic Instruction to Catholics with Disabilities

“All persons with disabilities have the capacity to proclaim the Gospel and to be living witnesses to its truth [.]”¹ Christ calls the Church to provide for the spiritual, intellectual, and emotional needs of all her people as they journey toward maturity in the faith. Catechetical and academic instruction are essential components of that journey. Catholics with disabilities are equally entitled with all the faithful to such instruction appropriate to their needs.

Our Gospel values and Church teaching call us to address the catechetical and instructional needs of persons with disabilities within the Catholic community. Often our efforts do not measure up to this calling. Too frequently, children and youth with disabilities are missing from catechetical classes or parochial classrooms. For example, those with unique learning styles or emotional difficulties are often misperceived as posing challenges surpassing the capacity of the faith community to address. Thus, they tend to be excluded from those efforts to foster the education of children and youth that is called for by our Catholic faith. Catechetical programs and parochial classrooms bereft of such individuals are symptomatic of a culture that denies children and youth with disabilities their rightful place within the faith community.

Catechetical programs vastly under serve the needs of adults with disabilities. The U.S. bishops have ranked the catechesis of adults as a priority the Church must address. Only rarely, however, do adults with disabilities receive the attention and tailored catechetical services that will enhance their faith lives. It is imperative that the Church address these needs as it seeks to enrich the parish experience for all its members.

The foundational basis for responding to these needs is a realization that each individual is a unique gift of God to the faith community, imposing responsibilities for nurturing and care that cannot be ignored or minimized. Recognizing each person as a unique gift, NCPD commits to the following:

- To increase awareness of the unique catechetical and academic needs of children and adults with disabilities within diocesan and parish communities;
- To identify and promote best practices that most effectively address such needs;
- To share success stories of parishes and Catholic educational institutions around the country, to demonstrate that progress in this area can be achieved without highly specialized knowledge, extensive training, and significant financial investment;
- To promote catechetical and academic instruction tailored to address unique learning needs through differentiated instruction and other appropriate modifications utilizing adaptation, innovation, and flexibility;
- To demonstrate that providing instruction through a variety of methodologies and delivery systems, rather than following one educational ideology or methodology, best serves the needs of all; and
- To advocate that people with disabilities and their families be included in the discussions and decision making to implement these programs and services.

¹ *National Directory for Catechesis*, Par. 49.

Ultimately, what is essential is a commitment to one body, one baptism, one Church, and one God. When persons with disabilities are excluded from catechetical and academic programs, a piece of the Body of Christ is missing. NCPD is committed to fulfill its mission to make the Body whole by ensuring that Catholics with disabilities receive the catechetical and academic instruction essential for their full and equal membership in the Church community.

Approved
NCPD Board of Directors
May 14, 2010

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