
Invisible Disabilities



Have you ever raised your eyebrows at a parishioner parking in your church's "handicapped" parking places, someone who had no visible sign of disability? In fact, there are more invisible disabilities than those that are apparent by appearance or by the use of assistive devices. Chronic illnesses that have no cures, back injuries, neurological disorders, cancer and brain injuries are some conditions that may cause pain and fatigue and limit physical function. Other conditions, such as cognitive impairments, chemical sensitivities, hearing loss and post traumatic stress disorder are invisible, but very real disabilities. Besides living with the actual symptoms of their condition, having increased medical costs, and having to accept a loss, people living with invisible disabilities may face misperceptions and a lack of compassion from others who don't understand the scope of their disability. Since faith plays a significant role in reducing stress, loneliness and pain for any illness or disability, it is important for faith communities to maintain engagement with these potentially marginalized members of the Body of Christ. Here are some practical ways to show compassion.

Things to do:

- Keep inviting them to Sunday mass and parish events, even after repeated declines.
- Instead of saying, "I'll pray for you," go and pray with them.
- Listen attentively at length without commenting, and then listen more.
- Invite them to same day activities. They may not know how they're going to feel too far in advance.
- Wash their car and tuck a care note inside.
- Take care of their pet during a hospital stay.
- Ask if you can come over and sit with them while they await medical test results.
- Ask if you can run an errand for them before coming over.
- Deliver meals in containers that don't need to be returned. Label ingredients and directions for heating and storing.

Conversation Starters:

- Would you feel comfortable having your name on our parish prayer list so others can pray for you?
- How are you coping with the changes in your life?
- What do you wish people understood about your condition?
- How do you feel God is working through, or despite, this disability in your life?
- Would you be willing to talk to my friend who was recently diagnosed with a similar condition to offer your encouragement?
- Would you like to write an article for our parish newsletter, perhaps about living with an invisible disability?

Resources:

<http://restministries.com/>

<http://www.invisibledisabilities.org/>

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