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How Dioceses and Catholic Charities Accommodate and Serve People with Disabilities

Washington, DC, February 2, 2017 Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) released the first nationwide survey of how Catholic dioceses and Catholic Charities agencies throughout the United States are including and serving people with disabilities in their ministries.

The survey was commissioned by Potomac Community Resources, Inc. (PCR), the National Catholic Partnership on Disability (NCPD), the Department of Special Needs Ministries of the Archdiocese of Washington, and Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Washington. Together with CARA they designed a questionnaire to measure participation of people with disabilities in diocesan and Catholic Charities activities. It also measures how dioceses and Catholic Charities improve access to the sacraments for people with disabilities, evangelize to people with disabilities, and improve facilities to accommodate people with disabilities.

“Detailed and comprehensive, the report highlights areas of progress made in the 39 years since the American Bishops’ *Pastoral Statement on People with Disabilities*,” says Steve Riley, PCR Executive Director. “It also identifies specific areas where more needs to be done to fully include and effectively serve people with disabilities in the Church.”

The survey notes that almost all dioceses and Catholic Charities agencies have found ways to make their buildings and facilities accessible to people with physical disabilities. Dioceses and Catholic Charities agencies with more accommodations for people with disabilities are also more likely to have an employee with a disability. Although six in ten dioceses have sacramental norms or guidelines addressing issues related to disabilities, fewer than half have an office responsible for services for people with disabilities. Areas in which diocesan chancellors say additional resources are needed include training for staff, catechetical and pastoral programs, visual and deaf resources, and family and caregiver support.

Janice Benton, NCPD executive director notes, “This data will provide invaluable assistance to bishops, pastoral leaders, and service providers as they plan for the most effective ways to create programs where Catholics with disabilities experience a true sense of belonging and contribute their gifts in service to the community.”

“The report provides, for the first time, nation-wide data from which a menu of best practices can be developed and shared efficiently across the U.S. Through this survey, CARA has made a significant contribution to work devoted to improving the quality of life for individuals with

disabilities in America,” adds Riley.

To obtain a copy of the CARA Special Report, *How Dioceses and Catholic Charities Accommodate and Serve People with Disabilities*, please visit Potomac Community Resources, Inc. website at <http://pcr-inc.org/>, The National Catholic Partnership on Disability website at www.ncpd.org, or The Department of Special Needs for the Archdiocese of Washington website at <http://adw.org/specialneeds/> or visit the CARA website at cara.georgetown.edu

The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate is a national, nonprofit research center that conducts social scientific studies about the Catholic Church. Founded in 1964 and affiliated with Georgetown University since 1989, CARA has three major dimensions to its mission: to increase the Church’s self-understanding, to serve the applied research needs of Church decision-makers, and to advance scholarly research on religion, particularly Catholicism.