



NATIONAL CATHOLIC PARTNERSHIP ON DISABILITY

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June 15, 2017 Sr. Kathleen Schipani, 215-272-8028
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Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments With Persons with Disabilities, Revised Edition

Washington, D.C. The National Catholic Partnership on Disability is pleased to announce the ratification of the **Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities, Revised Edition, (Guidelines)** by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) at their semi-annual meeting held June 14 and 15, 2017, in Indianapolis, Indiana. The **Guidelines** passed overwhelmingly by a vote of 180 - 1. These revised and expanded **Guidelines** supersede the previous version issued by the USCCB in 1995.

The **Guidelines** reflect the pastoral response of the U.S. Catholic Bishops to the growth in knowledge and understanding of the gifts and needs of individuals in parish communities who live with disabilities and their desire for full participation in the sacramental life of the Church. In addition to stating general principles to be followed for the celebration of the sacraments in this revised document, the Bishops address each specific sacrament and the issues pertinent to that sacrament for persons with various disabilities. For example, with respect to the administration of Holy Communion, the **Guidelines** provide specific guidance where an individual uses a feeding tube, is gluten intolerant, or is in the advanced stages of Alzheimer's or other age-related dementias.

Prior to the vote on the Guidelines USCCB President Daniel Cardinal DiNardo spoke of the "beautiful improvement of the document" and guidance on supporting people with dementia and their families. Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz, Episcopal Moderator of NCPD and immediate past President of the USCCB, urged wide circulation of the Guidelines noting the great opportunity they offer for parishes. A press release from the USCCB can be found at <http://www.usccb.org/news/2017/17-104.cfm>.

Sr. Kathleen Schipani, I.H.M., chairperson of NCPD's Board of Directors, learning of the USCCB's ratification of the **Guidelines**, emphasized the significant impact that the Bishops' actions will have for the vast number of Catholics with disabilities and their families who have hoped for such clarity regarding access to the Sacraments.

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Sr. Schipani praised the actions of the Bishops, “the revised **Guidelines** address a number of real-life pastorally-sensitive sacramental issues with deep theological insight and, like the Good Shepherd who knows and is attentive to the flock, seeks to bring all its members to the embrace of the God’s love through the Sacraments.” She also noted that NCPD will provide a link to the Guidelines on ncpd.org, as soon as the **Guidelines** are posted on the USCCB website.

Janice Benton, executive director of NCPD, reflecting on the **Guidelines**, noted the important input on the part of many dedicated advocates and pastoral leaders around the country that shaped what she sees as a “beautiful refection of the Church’s response to the sacramental life of persons with disabilities.” Further, she comments that “the **Guidelines** will have a profound and lasting impact on countless persons with disabilities in their participation in the sacraments and in their life of faith.”

Dr. Miguel J. Romero, Th.D., Th.M., faculty member in the Theology and Religious Studies Department of Salve Regina University and an NCPD Board member, in commenting on the revisions made by the Bishops, emphasized the foundational principle of the Guidelines: “Christian reflection on the ordinary vulnerabilities and diverse dependencies of our bodies begins with the inalienable dignity of every human being. We are formed in the image of God, and have an immortal spiritual essence—for that reason, regardless of our particular limitations, even in the most profound cases of physical or cognitive impairment, each of us is capable of receiving and responding to the reconciling grace of God.”

Dr. Romero, whose brother has a profound disability, in learning of the Bishops’ ratification of the **Guidelines**, noted, “Those of us whose lives are shaped by the rhythm and gait of disability sometimes experience, in ordinary parish life, forms of alienation and exclusion that reflects the brokenness of our wider culture. The Bishops have called the Church, once again, to remember that providing ready access to the sacraments and promoting full participation in the sacraments is integral to the way Catholics perform the unity and holiness of the Church held forth in the Nicene Creed.”

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Since 1982, the National Catholic Partnership on Disability (NCPD) has served the U.S. Catholic Church by providing resources, training, consultation and advocacy for the estimated 14 million U.S. Catholics who live with disability. Visit www.ncpd.org for more information on NCPD’s programs and services.