Universal Design on a Diocesan Level

Essential Components

There is no question that organization and structure are essential to an effective ministry with people with disabilities. However, there is no one way to structure this ministry, as evidenced by the variety of configurations currently operating in dioceses throughout the country. We are witnessing the downsizing or consolidation of many programs, and in some cases, directors have been required to assume responsibility for additional ministries. These trends have made clear the need for creativity and openness to change when considering how best to create a welcoming and inclusive community of faith for all, including Catholics with disabilities. **While NCPD's mission of encouraging full and meaningful participation by people with disabilities in the life of the Church community has never wavered, the models and recommendations outlined in this section reflect NCPD's evolving judgment of how best to infuse disability concerns and perspectives into the consciousness, planning, and programs of every level of the church community.**

Structures, and the direction and speed in which this ministry evolves within any diocese will vary according to a number of factors, including the following:

- vision, mission, and ministerial focus of the Ordinary;
- size and demographics of the diocese;
- availability of funds;
- additional duties outside the disability ministry which have been assigned to the diocesan director (hereafter referred to as "the director");
- number of staff persons in this ministry;
- programs currently in existence; and
- needs that are particular to a local population (e.g., presence of an institution, group home or a school for the deaf).

The following components are essential to an effective ministry with people with disabilities, regardless of where the ministry is ultimately placed within the diocesan structure:

Provides access to the bishop or his designee.

It is desirable that the director have an opportunity to meet with the Ordinary to determine his priorities, and assure that the ministry fits within the mission and ministerial scope of the diocese. Ongoing communication with and support from the leadership of the diocese is critical to the success and relevance of the ministry.

•Clearly identifies placement of ministry within the diocesan structure.

Ideally, the bishop or his designee identifies the mission and goals for the ministry and where it will fit within the diocesan structure. In some dioceses, this ministry is coordinated through Catholic Charities or the offices of Family Life, Pro-Life, or Religious Education. In others, there is a separate office, while some utilize a diocesan commission composed of directors of various diocesan departments. Staffing patterns vary significantly as well. Some dioceses have a full-time director with several staff members, others have only a full-time director with a shared secretary, others have a part-time director who wears many other hats for the diocese, and still others rely solely on volunteers. Regardless of the ministry structure, the director should have access to colleagues from various diocesan offices to ensure collaborative efforts for integration and inclusion.

•Respects the discrete levels at which the ministry is carried out.

This ministry is truly successful if disability concerns are addressed by every diocesan and parish office as part of their regular plans and programs. Therefore, the director acts as a consultant to diocesan and parish personnel, infusing a knowledge of disability perspectives and concerns, but allowing the direct interaction with and welcoming of people with disabilities to be made by each office or parish. Thus the director, rather than running special programs, enables the various levels within the church structure to provide essential services.

For example, once parish advocates have been identified and trained, they are more effective in promoting access and welcome in their parish than could be the director operating from a diocesan level. Likewise, a parish would be encouraged and provided with support and resources to prepare a student with mental retardation to receive first reconciliation and Eucharist, rather than a separate program being offered at the diocesan level.

•Provides sufficient personnel and financial resources.

Adequate staffing and funding enables a ministry to achieve its goals, thereby enriching the diocese, and fulfilling its mission of building the Body of Christ.

•Utilizes competent personnel.

The bishop or designee hires a director qualified to implement the mission and goals throughout the diocese, whether establishing the ministry for the first time or assuming leadership for a ministry with pre-existing programs and possibly staff and volunteers. Section B of this chapter details necessary qualifications and responsibilities of the director.

·Delineates clear role descriptions and lines of authority, and provides adequate supervision.

This ministry more effectively carries out the diocesan mission when it is supported by competent staff, whose role is clearly defined and supervised.

·Creates opportunities for people with disabilities to participate meaningfully.

Diocesan offices and parishes, with the support of the director, create opportunities for meaningful participation for people with disabilities and their families in all aspects of the church community, including the following:

- faith formation and the sacramental life of the church;
- the ministerial, educational, and social life of the church;
- parish activities;
- offering their gifts to the community, including as priests and religious, and in other leadership roles.

·Incorporates a disability perspective into all areas of the faith community and facilitates collaboration.

Rather than focusing on running programs and providing direct services, the director helps diocesan offices and parishes to assume their responsibility to welcome and include parishioners with disabilities. Such consultation includes:

Diocesan level

- works with other diocesan offices, including, but not limited to, Building and Grounds, Worship, Family Life, Religious Education, Communications, Social Concerns, Vocations, Development;
- communicates with seminaries and religious communities;
- works with the Catholic media;
- identifies key resource people, such as architects knowledgeable on access, sign language interpreters;
- builds a resource library.

Parish level

- shares resources and offers strategies to pastors, DREs, parish councils;
- trains and supports parish advocates;
- utilizes parish bulletins and newsletters;
- trains catechists to support students with special needs.

Collaboration requires a linkage among offices and departments. Such linkage facilitates cooperation and communication, and helps to clarify lines of authority. Collaborative efforts may include co-sponsorship of a diocesan conference or special event, participation on an advisory commission, co-authorship of a manual for parishes.

- **Keeps abreast of current and emerging social policy issues, trends, and threats which impact on the life and options of people with disabilities and their families.**

In order to promote disability awareness adequately, the director must be informed on the myriad issues affecting the lives of people with disabilities, including the following:

- social security, welfare, and economic policy;
- health care, managed care, health maintenance organizations;
- education, rehabilitation, and independent living;
- family support issues;
- emerging ethical issues such as euthanasia and assisted suicide, eradicating of disability through abortion, genetic testing and pre-birth diagnosis.

Keeping abreast of such issues enables the director to address more adequately the concerns of people with disabilities and their families, as well as to educate others throughout the diocese.

Priorities, Goals, and Objectives

The director of this ministry is hired to coordinate diocesan services for people with disabilities in order to ensure their full and meaningful participation in the faith community. During initial planning, the director of a new office or ministry establishes goals and objectives for fulfilling the mission and priorities defined by the bishop or his designee. In some cases the bishop may delegate the responsibility of defining priorities to the director. In either case, the goals and objectives, and the time lines within which they are to be accomplished, should be based on a realistic assessment of staff and resource availability. Care should be taken not to set up the ministry for failure by being overly ambitious when defining and setting goals and objectives. Accomplishment of achievable goals sets a firm foundation for future growth.

When assuming responsibility for a pre-existing program or office, the director must familiarize himself or herself with the already defined goals and objectives, staff and volunteers, and must subsequently develop appropriate time lines and action plan. For each identified priority, goals and objectives are defined which describe a desired end to be accomplished through a series of concrete tasks. As the diagram on the following page illustrates, each level of the plan supports the next higher level. The priorities, goals, objectives, and tasks together constitute a plan of action for the director, staff members, and parish advocates. In order to accomplish the over-arching mission, components of the plan must work harmoniously and stay on target. Tasks must initially be clearly defined to ensure that actions do not stray, but rather stay related to goals and objectives.

Many directors establish two-year plans which are evaluated yearly and modified as the ministry evolves. As goals are accomplished, new ones are defined based on continued analysis of existing needs. Goals and objectives may be developed based on the input of the advisory bodies (see Section C of this chapter), as well as on suggestions solicited from people with disabilities throughout the year. Some dioceses solicit such input through an annual diocesan forum.

Ideally, the role of the director is to plan and oversee the ministry, rather than become involved in direct service and running programs. As mentioned previously, this ministry is most successful when people with disabilities are welcomed and served directly by their parish community, or are assisted by the diocesan office which can best serve their immediate concern. For example, a couple contemplating marriage should be referred to the appropriate diocesan office responsible for marriage preparation programs. Likewise, the diocesan Vocations Office should assist a young man with a disability seeking to discern a call to the priesthood. In such cases, the director acts as a consultant to these offices, providing counsel and offering resources and support.

Initially, the director of a new office or ministry may need to offer some direct service. It is important as the ministry matures and components of the action plan are accomplished that the director focus on the coordination of the ministry, moving from doing to enabling others to take responsibility.

A sampling of diocesan priorities and goals, with related objectives and tasks for a new director, may include those listed on the following pages. This is by no means an exhaustive list, but rather is offered here to spark ideas, and as an example of possible goals and objectives which can be expanded upon or utilized based on the specific diocesan situation. These diocesan-level objectives and tasks would be performed by the person designated by the Ordinary to oversee diocesan ministry with people with disabilities, whether a director, consultant, chair of an advisory committee or commission.

PRIORITY 1: NETWORKING

Goal 1 Learn the general diocesan structure and the relationship of the ministry within it.

<u>Objectives and Tasks</u>

- Clarify to whom director is responsible, and the mechanisms by which this accountability happens.
- Request such information from supervisor or personnel office.
- Obtain information on diocesan policies, structure, and decision-making processes through an in-service training or by other means

- Gather information on other offices and ministries within the diocese.
  - Informally visit offices and introduce yourself.

Goal 2 Establish working relationships with Catholic offices and personnel.

Objectives and Tasks

- Work within the diocesan structure with secretariats, departments, and offices, including but not limited to Family Life, Vocations, Personnel, Campus Ministry, Chaplains, Catholic Youth Organization, Vicar of Priests, Buildings & Grounds, Social Concerns, Faith Formation, Schools, to incorporate disability concerns into their plans and programs.
  - Read documents to become familiar with the goals and objectives of other diocesan offices.
  - Meet with directors of these offices to discuss their goals and objectives, and ways in which you can work together to achieve your mutual goals.
  - Meet with the development director for assistance with grant writing as indicated.
- Work with religious communities and seminaries to inform administration and seminarians on disability issues, and to encourage and support the vocations of people with disabilities.
  - Meet with vocations personnel, offering services and support.
  - Offer in-service opportunities for seminarians.
  - Offer to teach a course or workshop on disability concerns.
- Work with priests and religious throughout the diocese, offering assistance and resources.
  - Offer to speak at meetings of priests and religious.
  - Write articles for appropriate newsletters.
- Correspond with and participate in activities of the National Catholic Office for Persons with Disabilities, National Apostolate with People with Mental Retardation, National Catholic Office for the Deaf, and other Catholic ministries with people with disabilities on a national level.
  - Contact these national Catholic organizations to solicit information regarding their services, and, where appropriate, to receive their newsletters or join as members.
  - Participate in regional and national gatherings.
  - Respond to surveys and other requests for dialogue and input.
- Correspond with and participate in activities of national Catholic organizations whose mission affects the life of people with disabilities, including the National Conference of Catechetical Leadership, the National Catholic Educational Association, the National Conference of Catholic Women, National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice, Catholic Charities, USA.

    - Contact these national Catholic organizations to solicit information regarding their services, and, where appropriate, to receive their newsletters or join as members.
    - Participate in local, regional, and national gatherings.
    - Respond to surveys and other requests for dialogue and input.
- Maintain contact with directors of disability ministry in other dioceses.
    - Request list of diocesan contacts from NCPD.
    - Participate in regional and national gatherings of NCPD and other offices to meet and share ideas with colleagues in this ministry.

Goal 3 Educate colleagues, on an ongoing basis, on the ways in which their programs affect the lives of people with disabilities and their families.

Objectives and Tasks

- Share newsletters and other appropriate resources with diocesan colleagues.
    - Maintain an accurate mailing list of diocesan personnel.
    - Discern with whom to share various resources and information.
- Invite diocesan colleagues to appropriate meetings, training sessions, and diocesan celebrations.
    - Maintain an accurate mailing list of diocesan personnel.
    - Discern whom to invite to various meetings and gatherings.
- Participate in meetings, sharing a disability perspective when appropriate.
    - Prepare for meetings, anticipating the disability issues involved in various agenda items.
- Offer information on access and assistive technology to diocesan colleagues to enhance the availability of their services to Catholics with disabilities (i.e., captioning of videotapes, accessible meeting space, tty's).
    - Maintain resource reference shelf and files.
    - Advertise the availability of your assistance.
- Offer to conduct disability awareness sessions for diocesan colleagues, pastors, chairs of parish councils, committees, and boards.
    - Read Chapter One, Section A of this volume for information on disability awareness programs.
    - Order videotapes and other resources from NCPD.
    - Collect resources from conferences and meetings attended.

Goal 4 Establish working relationships with personnel in relevant secular offices to share resources and keep abreast of current information and trends.

Objectives and Tasks

- Identify and visit area agencies providing services to people with disabilities (e.g., independent living center, Deaf club, sheltered workshop).

- Meet with staff to learn about the services provided, and to offer information about the ministry.
- Solicit information from and request to be on mailing list of agencies.

- Maintain contact with national and local disability organizations to keep abreast of developments in the field, and to offer the diocese as a resource for information and referral.
  - Get on mailing lists of organizations.
  - Create files of resources and conference materials.

PRIORITY 2: ASSESSMENT

Goal 1 Identify currently existing programs and services.

Objectives and Tasks

- Following meetings with diocesan colleagues (see Priority 1, Goal 1), identify and assess their programs as they serve people with disabilities.
  - Maintain files on each office with information on their programs and services and any involvement they have with people with disabilities.
- Interview a sampling of disabled Catholics and their families through personal visits or group meetings to learn of services, programs, and organizations which they utilize and recommend.
  - Identify people through diocesan census records, referrals from diocesan colleagues and pastors.
  - Advertise diocesan or deanery/vicariate meetings through parish bulletins and the diocesan newspaper.
  - Conduct meetings at which you solicit information on current services and ideas for improving opportunities for involvement.
  - Visit group and nursing homes, rehabilitation and other residential facilities to assess if their Catholic residents are being served by local parishes.
- Maintain files on Catholic and secular agencies serving people with disabilities, as identified through the networking process (see Priority 1).
- Contact state and city offices serving people with disabilities to identify available resources and services.

Goal 2 Determine unmet needs.

Objectives and Tasks

- Contact a sampling of disabled people and their families through personal visits or group meetings.
  - Identify people through diocesan census records, referrals from diocesan colleagues and pastors.

- Advertise diocesan or deanery/vicariate meetings through parish bulletins and the diocesan newspaper.
- Conduct an access survey of diocesan facilities and programs and, as time and personnel allow, survey parishes.
  - Develop access survey (see Chapter One, Section B.3).
  - Train volunteers to assist in conducting survey.
  - Schedule visits to facilities.
  - Conduct survey.
  - Compile and analyze survey data.
- Conduct a survey of priests, pastoral ministers, directors of religious education, youth ministers, and principals to determine their level of involvement with people with disabilities.
  - Develop survey.
  - Conduct survey.
  - Compile and analyze survey data.
- Encourage and offer input in the development of a census or other ways of assessing the needs of those at the parish and diocesan levels.
  - Develop questions to be included in census (see Chapter One, Section B.3).
  - Work with colleagues responsible for the diocesan census to ensure that such questions are included.
  - Share questions with each pastor.
  - Review census data.

PRIORITY 3: PLANNING

Goal 1 Prepare a two-year action plan for diocesan disability ministry.

Objectives and Tasks

- Gather information to assist in establishing priorities, goals, and objectives.
  - Review data collected from networking with diocesan and secular colleagues.
  - Review data collected from assessment of current diocesan programs and buildings.
  - Review data collected from meetings with Catholics with disabilities and their families.
  - Review data collected from survey of priests, pastoral ministers, directors of religious education, youth ministers, and principals.
- Define achievable priorities, to be accomplished by realistic goals, objectives, and tasks.
  - Familiarize self with diocesan mission, and priorities and goals determined by the Ordinary or his designee for disability ministry.
  - Define priorities and goals, in the absence of any developed by the Ordinary.

- Determine objectives and tasks necessary to accomplish priorities and goals.
- Set realistic time lines by which priorities, goals, and tasks will be accomplished.
- Submit action plan to appropriate person for approval.

Goal 2 Set-up the location of the ministry.

Objectives and Tasks

- Identify and procure an accessible location for the office.
- Procure needed equipment and supplies, including letterhead, telephone, tty, computer.

PRIORITY 4: TRAINING AND SUPPORTING VOLUNTEERS

Goal 1 Utilize volunteers to assist in this ministry in a variety of capacities.

Objectives and Tasks

- Identify ways in which volunteers can assist in the ministry.
  - Make list of tasks volunteers could accomplish on a one-time or ongoing basis, clearly defining responsibilities of each position.
- Determine date and plan by which you will establish an advisory committee and/or commission to offer counsel related to the ministry.
  - Read *Opening Doors*, Volume I (pp. 26-28) and Volume II, Chapter Two, Section C.1. for information and ideas regarding these advisory bodies.
  - Solicit information from directors of disability ministry in other dioceses with successful programs (NCPD can provide names of such dioceses).
- Determine date and plan by which you will establish a parish advocacy program.
  - Read *Opening Doors*, Volume I (pp. 38-39) and Volume II, Chapter Two, Section B.2. for information and ideas regarding these parish advocacy programs.
  - Solicit information from directors of disability ministry in other dioceses with successful programs (NCPD can provide names of such dioceses).

Goal 2 Train volunteers to ensure that they are adequately prepared to assist in ministry.

Objectives and Tasks

- Develop training program(s) based on specific ways in which you will utilize volunteers.

- Define tasks to be conducted by volunteers in each program.
- Consult Volume II of *Opening Doors* for information on working with volunteers (Chapter Two, Section C).
- Plan specific training curriculum and identify qualified trainers.
- Set schedule for training sessions.

- Recruit volunteers.
  - Advertise the need for volunteers in diocesan paper, church bulletins, newsletters.
  - Consult with diocesan volunteer coordinator for ideas and names of likely volunteers.
  - Consult with area volunteer agency for ideas and names of likely volunteers.
  - Interview prospective volunteers to evaluate their appropriateness for your programs, determine interests and talents, and make assignments.
- Conduct appropriate volunteer training.
  - Determine dates and locations for trainings.
  - Conduct trainings.

Goal 3 Provide ongoing support and supervision to volunteers.

Objectives and Tasks

- Place volunteer in appropriate job and provide ongoing support and supervision.
  - Conduct a commissioning ceremony in which volunteer is sent forth to service.
  - Contact volunteers on a regular basis to offer support, listen to concerns, and encourage ongoing communication.
  - Conduct periodic in-service meetings.
  - Conduct annual volunteer appreciation event, offer token of gratitude, and provide opportunity for volunteer to re-pledge commitment to the ministry.

PRIORITY 5: ADVOCACY

Goal 1 Develop statistical data to assist diocesan leadership and personnel, parish advocates, volunteers, and others in understanding the pervasiveness of disability issues.

Objectives and Tasks

- Consult Volume II of *Opening Doors to People with Disabilities*, Chapter Four, Section B.

- Determine disability statistics for diocese by applying national disability statistics to specific diocesan population profile.

Goal 2 Increase awareness of people with disabilities as welcome and essential members of the church community.

Objectives and Tasks

- Utilize church bulletins, and parish and diocesan newsletters to share statistical and other information about Catholics with disabilities.
  - Maintain a mailing list of parishes and diocesan contacts.
  - Develop and distribute bulletin inserts and press releases with information about events or news of interest to, and about, people with disabilities.
- Utilize the Catholic media to share information on disability issues.
  - Establish rapport and maintain contact with staff of the diocesan newspaper.
  - Submit periodic press releases with information about events or news of interest to and about people with disabilities.
- Alert people to available access through the use of access symbols on flyers and listings of activities and parishes.
  - See Chapter One, Section B.6.e. of *Opening Doors*, Volume II for camera-ready symbols.
  - Utilize symbols to advertise events sponsored by the ministry.
  - Send to diocesan colleagues and pastors an information packet, which includes a set of camera-ready access symbols.
- Sponsor events to highlight disability issues in the diocese.
  - Identify diocesan events at which a disability perspective could also be presented and offer expertise to meeting planners.
  - Plan events which bring together the entire community of faith to worship and celebrate the gifts of diversity.

Goal 3 Encourage action necessary to facilitate the full and meaningful participation of Catholics with disabilities.

Objectives and Tasks

- Identify barriers and recommend appropriate accommodations.
  - Analyze the data from the diocesan and parish access surveys.
  - Research and provide information on available resources and assistive technology.
- Meet with diocesan planners and architects to discuss access issues.
  - Make appointments.
  - Prepare for meetings, and bring along copies of relevant materials to share.
- Maintain and offer current resources to diocesan colleagues, pastors and their associates, deacons, and pastoral ministers.

- Share stories of the ways in which people with disabilities are successfully serving the diocese and their parishes.

Goal 4 Have a disability perspective represented in official documents, programs, and plans of the Catholic Church on national, diocesan, and parish levels.

Objectives and Tasks

- Offer knowledge and expertise to the bishop and his designates in order to ensure that a disability perspective is included in documents, programs, and plans at both the diocesan and national levels.
- Offer to review church documents during the comment stage in order to infuse a disability perspective, as appropriate.

PRIORITY 6: PROMOTION

Goal 1 Increase awareness about people with disabilities, and the existence of the ministry with people with disabilities.

Objectives and Tasks

- Advertise the existence of the office for ministry with people with disabilities.
  - Publicize the existence of the office and ministry through the following channels:
    - church bulletins;
    - diocesan and secular newspapers;
    - local disability publications or newsletters; and
    - public service announcements on radio and television.
  - Consult with the Diocesan Communication Office for assistance.
- Offer to conduct disability awareness sessions for diocesan colleagues, priests, deacons, religious educators, administrators, chairs of parish councils and committees, parish school administrators, seminarians, and newly ordained priests.
  - Read Chapter One, Section A of this volume for information on disability awareness programs.
  - Order videotapes and other resources from NCPD.

PRIORITY 7: RESOURCING

Goal 1 Keep abreast of current technology and issues of concern to the disability community.

Objectives and Tasks

- Read relevant magazines and journals, both religious and secular, relating to disability issues.

- Join or request information and newsletters from disability organizations.

- Participate in conferences and training sessions on disability issues.

Goal 2 Maintain a current resource file relating to disability issues.

Objectives and Tasks

- Review resources and maintain a section in the resource library of current books, audiotapes, and videotapes to be shared.
  - Solicit information on available resources from Volume II of *Opening Doors*, and from newsletters.
  - Request review copy of and purchase books from publishers.
- Maintain files on issues of concern to people with disabilities.
- Maintain a database on local, state, and national organizations and resources.
  - Review and update periodically to ensure accuracy.
  - Utilize database in making referrals, and maintain a log of such calls to assist in reporting on the activities and services of the ministry.
- Prepare and distribute a resource list advertising the availability of your resources for loan.
  - Distribute list to diocesan colleagues and pastors.

Goal 3 Provide information and referral services to inquirers.

Objectives and Tasks

- Respond to inquiries regarding people with disabilities.
  - Direct inquirers to appropriate services, organizations, and agencies utilizing current resource lists.

- Develop model letters on various issues to assist in responding in a timely and appropriate manner.
- As possible, follow up to ensure that inquirer received needed assistance.

PRIORITY 8: SUSTAINING STAFF

Goal 1 Keep Christ at the center of ministry.

Objectives and Tasks

- Take time for prayer and reflection each day.
  - Schedule prayer into staff meetings or other gatherings.
- Participate in annual days of recollection or retreat.

Goal 2 Keep abreast of trends and new developments in ministry and disability issues.

Objectives and Tasks

- Participate in staff development opportunities.
  - Read announcements and sign up for available seminars and workshops.

- Regularly schedule time to read appropriate journals and newsletters.
  - Build time into schedule to read relevant materials.
- Regularly schedule opportunities to meet with colleagues to share ideas.
  - Build time into schedule for lunch or other meetings with colleagues.
- Attend conferences on disability and ministry issues.

Goal 3 Avoid overwork which may lead to burnout and ineffectiveness.

Objectives and Tasks

- Organize schedule and work load in order to meet realistic and achievable deadlines.
- Maintain orderly files and work habits to increase productivity.
- Agree to do only what you know you can reasonably accomplish.
- Whenever possible, delegate.

Goal 4 Take time for rest and recreation.

Objectives and Tasks

- Take vacation leave.
- Exercise on a regular basis.
- Make time for activities which are restful and enjoyable.

While these myriad goals, objectives, and tasks may seem prohibitive for one person to accomplish, they should be seen as a process to be achieved over time and with the assistance of staff, volunteers, and colleagues. Additional goals and objectives will be added to address issues identified through the above process.

Organizational Models of a Universally Designed Ministry

As mentioned throughout this section, there is no one way in which to structure ministry with people with disabilities in a parish or diocese. Various factors within a diocese determine the ways in which this ministry is established and carried out. The models on the following pages are offered as examples of current successful structures within various dioceses in which people with disabilities are being called to full membership in their faith communities.