

**Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate
Georgetown University
Washington, DC**

***Study of Parish Disability Awareness and
Practices in the United States***

**National Catholic Partnership on Disability
Washington, DC**

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Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate

National Catholic Partnership on Disability Washington, DC

Study of Parish Disability Awareness and Practices in the United States

Executive Summary

The *Study of Parish Disability Awareness and Practices in the United States* was designed by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University in collaboration with the National Catholic Partnership on Disability. The survey portion of the study was programmed online, with two types of paper versions available as well (one version used a set of guidelines for accessible surveys and forms for responding persons with disabilities). Using a list of 5,000 randomly selected U.S. parishes provided by CARA, parishes were sent email invitations to respond to the survey by CARA from March to May 2024. In all, there were 351 valid responses from parishes, making for a 7% response rate. The margin of error for the survey is 5.2 percentage points.¹ In addition, as part of the survey, responding parish personnel were invited to fill in their contact information to volunteer for an interview about their parish. Altogether, CARA conducted 17 interviews with parish personnel (and two with diocesan personnel) from June to August 2024.

Major findings can be summarized as follows:

FINDINGS FROM THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF PARISH PERSONNEL

Characteristics of Responding Parishes

- Thirty-eight percent of responding parishes are located in the Midwest U.S. Census Region, 26% in the Northeast Region, 25% in the South Region, and 11% in the West Region.
- On average, responding parishes report having 1,157 registered households. Parishes were grouped into these four category sizes:
 - 499 registered households or less – 38%
 - 500-999 registered households – 22%
 - 1,000-1,499 registered households – 15%
 - 1,500 registered households or more – 25%

¹ Calculated for a population size of 16,400 U.S. Catholic parishes.

- On average, parishes of the various sizes have this many paid or volunteer staff members:
 - 499 registered households or less – 2 full-time and 3 part-time staff members
 - 500-999 registered households – 5 full-time and 5 part-time
 - 1,000-1,499 registered households – 5 full-time and 5 part-time
 - 1,500 registered households or more – 11 full-time and 8 part-time
- Asked to identify their parish's type of location, 40% identify as being in a suburban area, 37% in a rural area, and 23% in an urban area.

Incidence of Persons with Disabilities at Parishes

- More than half of responding parishes say they have ten or more persons with the following disabilities:
 - Chronic illnesses – 75% of parishes have ten or more
 - Chronic pain – 60%
 - Addictions – 54%
 - Physical/mobility – 52%
 - Mental health – 51%
- Generally, parishes with 1,500 or more registered parishioners, parishes in the West Census Region, and parishes in the suburbs are most likely to have high numbers of persons with disabilities.
- Parish personnel estimate that 20% of their parishioners, on average, have one or more of the disabilities mentioned on the survey. They further estimate that an average of 48% of their parish communities are ages 65 or older.
- Responding parish personnel report having persons with disabilities participate in all of the areas of parish life asked about on the survey, but they are especially likely to say they have participated in these areas:
 - Mass – 88%
 - Receiving low-gluten hosts – 69%
 - Parish community events – 68%
- About two-fifths to half of parishes have had to provide modifications or accommodations for persons with disabilities in these areas:
 - Mass/liturgical celebrations – 50%
 - Reconciliation/Eucharist preparation – 39%
 - Children's faith formation – 38%
- Generally, parishes with 499 registered households or less and parishes in rural areas are *least* likely to have provided such modifications or accommodations.

Accommodations and Modifications at Parishes

- More than half have facilities with these accommodations:
 - *Church buildings*: nearby dedicated accessible parking (98%), wheelchair accessibility (98%), and accessible restrooms (76%)

- *Parish halls*: nearby dedicated accessible parking (79%), wheelchair accessibility (77%), and accessible restrooms (65%)
- *Parish offices*: nearby dedicated accessible parking (69%) and wheelchair accessibility (60%)
- About three-tenths to half of parish personnel report these accommodations:
 - *Classrooms*: wheelchair accessibility (48%), nearby dedicated accessible parking (47%), and accessible restrooms (31%)
 - *School buildings*: nearby dedicated accessible parking (39%), wheelchair accessibility (33%), and accessible restrooms (29%)
- Overall, the accommodations *least* likely to have been made at parish church buildings, parish halls, classrooms, parish offices, and school buildings are electronic restroom doors, restrooms with adult changing tables, assistive listening devices, electronic door access to the buildings, and family restrooms.
- About two-fifths to two-thirds report having these services and accommodations at their parishes:
 - Low-gluten hosts – 65%
 - Posted hymn numbers for the hearing impaired – 61%
 - Pew cutouts in the church – 50%
 - Worship aids for the hearing impaired – 44%
- They are *least* likely to have these available: materials in Braille for lectionaries, missals, and curricula (3%), American Sign Language at Masses (4%), accessible/adjustable ambos (6%), resource rooms for special education/therapies (7%), and sensory-friendly Masses (9%).
- Fewer than half of parishes with Catholic schools say their school has a resource room for special education/therapies (46%).
- Roughly four-fifths of parishes have ministries to conduct visits and/or phone calls to the homebound (84%) or to visit local nursing homes (79%). One in seven offers respite for parishioners who serve as caregivers (15%).
- Less than one-third report that their parishes have support groups for persons/families with mental health instability or addictions (30%), website accessibility features such as the ability to increase the font size, captioning, or screen reader compatibility (28%), or lists of resources available for persons with disabilities and their families (19%).

Parish Efforts to be More Inclusive of Persons with Disabilities

- Fewer than two-fifths of responding parishes say the needs of persons with disabilities are considered in pastoral council meetings (37%) or in finance council meetings (32%) “somewhat” or “to a great extent.”
- One-fifth of parishes says they have someone at the parish who is responsible for parish advocacy for persons with disabilities (21%).

- Forty percent of parishes report having worked with a Catholic organization to help them be inclusive persons with disabilities. Twenty-two percent have worked with a non-Catholic organization that serves persons with disabilities.
- When asked to write in how their parish communicates about the services it offers to persons with disabilities, about one-tenth to two-tenths report that they do so via:
 - Printed and online bulletins – 18%
 - Announcements at or during Mass and/or programs – 16%
 - Staff/team outreach and one-to-one meetings – 12%
 - As part of the registration process – 10%

Training Needed

- Nearly three-fifths of parishes say their diocese does *not* offer training to parish staff members on how to accommodate persons with disabilities (57%).
- When asked to write in suggestions about the kinds of training that would be most beneficial for making their parish more inclusive of persons with disabilities, survey respondents most commonly recommend the following:
 - Training to accommodate those with specific disabilities
 - Ministry-specific training and resources
 - Suggestions for renovating facilities with limited resources
 - Assistance with identifying those with disabilities
 - How to communicate to persons with disabilities that they are welcome
 - Strategies to encourage parish staff to prioritize inclusion of persons with disabilities
 - Building awareness of disabilities among parishioners
 - How to effectively refer those who need help to corresponding resources
 - Making persons with disabilities more visible in parish life
 - Parish facilities checklists
 - Providing formation for persons with disabilities of all ages
 - Building support networks and support groups
 - Spanish-language training and resources
 - Developing peer-to-peer and family-to-family programs
 - Advocating for those with disabilities
 - Counseling those with disabilities
 - First aid and defibrillator application training

FINDINGS FROM THE INTERVIEWS OF PARISH STAFF MEMBERS

- Of the 66 persons who volunteered at the end of the survey to be contacted for an interview, 19 agreed to an interview, which was conducted over Zoom. Two of the 19 were found to be diocesan personnel, with the other 17 parish personnel. One parish had two different persons from that parish be interviewed as they co-directed their parish's ministry to persons with disabilities.

- None of the parish or diocesan personnel feel their parish is succeeding well at identifying most of the persons with disabilities in their parishes and local communities. The primary ways they currently learn about persons with disabilities are through the participation of children with disabilities in their faith formation programs and by observing those who participate in parish life, especially those with mobility issues who come to parish worship services. Some interviewees believe that their major challenge is the persons and families trusting the personnel enough to disclose their disabilities.
- The two main ways interviewees say their parishes are being inclusive of persons with disabilities are by having programs that serve their needs (especially tailored faith formation programs for children and facility-based accommodations for those with mobility issues) and having persons with disabilities serve in ministries. Many interviewees expressed frustration with not knowing how to best accommodate children with disabilities in their faith formation classes and with being unable to afford to make the renovations necessary to be more inclusive.
- About a third of the interviewees say their Dioceses are actively encouraging parishes to be more inclusive of persons with disabilities. Dioceses employ different models for doing so, including putting resources into a limited number of parishes so that no parishioner is geographically too distant from a parish that has accommodations for persons with disabilities.
- Most parishes are unaware of any local or national organizations that might help them to better include persons with disabilities in parish life. The organization mentioned most frequently is their local Knights of Columbus groups.
- Both through asking directly and from the interviewees speaking about what they lack in the course of the interviews, these 16 kinds of resources have been identified as ones they most commonly wish were available to them:
 - Help identifying persons with disabilities in their parishes
 - Help inviting persons with disabilities in their local areas to come to the parish
 - Creating a culture of welcome at their parish so persons with disabilities and their families feel welcome
 - Creating disability-friendly ways of communicating and being inviting
 - Training materials and instructions for clergy and other parish staff members
 - Training materials and instructions for volunteer catechists
 - Training materials and instructions for hospitality and liturgical ministers
 - Creating short fact sheets about specific disabilities
 - Resources in languages other than English
 - Best practices for making referrals
 - Increasing parishioner awareness and understanding of disabilities
 - Disability checklists for programs and facilities
 - Accommodating person with disabilities in parishes with limited resources
 - Best practices for accommodating persons with specific disabilities
 - How to accompany the families of persons with disabilities
 - Guidance on disability-friendly faith formation programs for children with disabilities

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Study of Parish Disability Awareness and Practices in the United States

Introduction

The *Study of Parish Disability Awareness and Practices in the United States* was designed by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University in collaboration with the National Catholic Partnership on Disability. The survey portion of the study was programmed online, with two types of paper versions available as well (one version used a set of guidelines for accessible surveys and forms for responding persons with disabilities). Using a list of 5,000 randomly selected U.S. parishes provided by CARA, parishes were sent email invitations to respond to the survey by CARA from March to May 2024. In all, there were 351 valid responses from parishes, making for a 7% response rate. The margin of error for the survey is 5.2 percentage points.² In addition, as part of the survey, responding parish personnel were invited to fill in their contact information to volunteer for an interview about their parish. Altogether, CARA conducted 17 interviews with parish personnel (and two with diocesan personnel) from June to August 2024.

Interpreting This Report

The questions in this survey include ones where respondents enumerate how many persons in their parishes fit into categories of disabilities, check-all-that apply questions,³ yes/no questions, and open-ended questions. To examine how respondents answered each question, including the percentage not responding to a question, the reader should refer to Appendix I of this report. That appendix shows the percentage responses for each item, calculated out of 100%, as well as the percentage of all respondents that did not respond to each question, separately calculated out of 100% for clarity of comparison.

In addition to summarizing the responses to most questions for respondents as a whole, the report also compares the responses of those from selected subgroups. The first section of the

² Calculated for a population size of 16,400 U.S. Catholic parishes.

³ For check-all-that-apply questions, there can be some ambiguity about whether someone who do not check all of the questions in a section did not find any applicable or just did not respond to the question as a whole, lending some ambiguity to the interpretation of the questions. For these questions, the researchers made an effort to distinguish between non-respondents and the other group.

report describes the characteristics of the respondents as well as the subgroups that are used in the analyses that follow. Throughout the report, the tables and charts that compare differences between and among these various subgroups are presented following the responses for parishioners as a whole in each section.

The margin of error for *differences between subgroups*, such as the differences among those of different age groups or those with different levels of involvement, depends on the size of the subgroups being compared. Unless otherwise noted, all subgroup differences described in the graphs of this report are statistically significant: that is, they pass standard tests of statistical inference and can be considered to be “real” differences. In some instances, differences between or among subgroups that are not statistically significant are also noted. These differences should be treated as merely suggestive of real differences that may exist between the subgroups under consideration.

In addition to the quantitative data analyzed in this report, two open-ended questions on the survey collected qualitative data. For these data, respondents were prompted with a question and given an open box for written comments, rather than select from a set of response options. These comments are analyzed along with the quantitative data as well as in separate sections throughout this report. While these responses are not suitable for statistical analyses, they do add depth to the data that is not attainable through closed-ended questions only.

For the interview portion of this report, it should be remembered that interviews add depth to a study but the numbers/percentages should not be treated as representative of the population as a whole, as the interviewees were not selected from a national, random sample.

Organization of This Report

Besides the Executive Summary presented earlier and this Introduction, this report is comprised of two parts with five sections each and three appendices:

- Part I: National Survey of Parish Personnel
 - Section I: Characteristics of Responding Parishes
 - Section II: Incidence of Persons with Disabilities at Parishes
 - Section III: Accommodations and Modifications at Parishes
 - Section IV: Efforts to be More Inclusive of Persons with Disabilities
 - Section V: Training Needed
- Part II: Interviews with Parish Staff Members
 - Section I: Background and Location of Parishes and Interviewees
 - Section II: How Parishes Identify Persons with Disabilities
 - Section III: How Parishes Are Inclusive of Persons with Disabilities
 - Section IV: Help Parishes Receive from their Dioceses and Outside Organizations
 - Section V: Resources Parishes Would Find Helpful

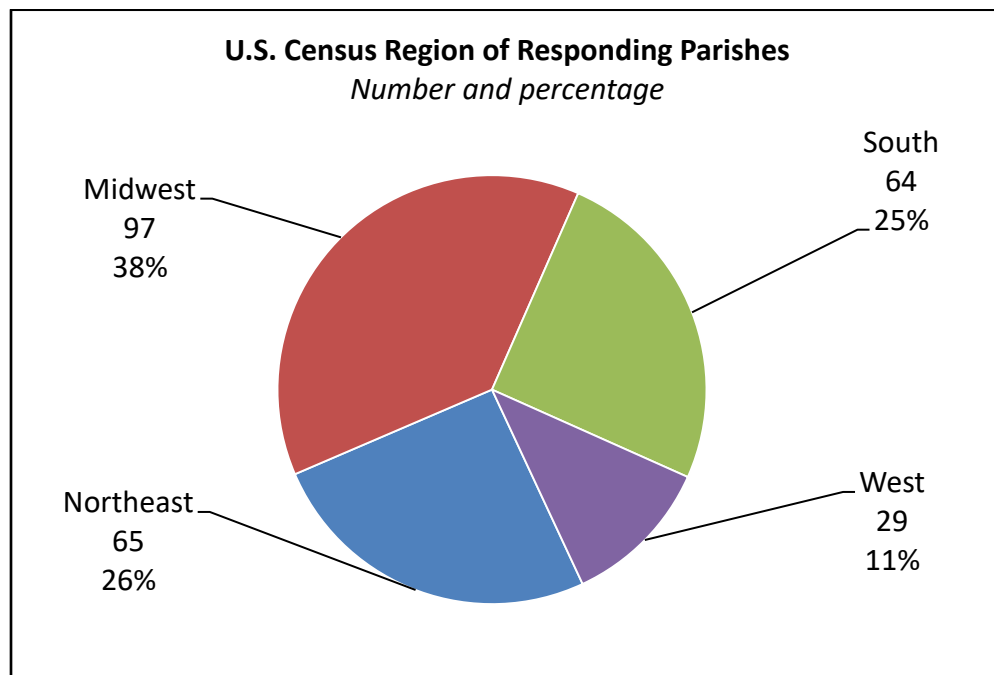
PART I: NATIONAL SURVEY OF PARISH PERSONNEL

Section I: Characteristics of Responding Parishes

This section of the report includes descriptive data for the 351 parishes responding to this survey. These data may be helpful in considering who responded to the survey.

Census Region of Responding Parishes

Respondents were asked to provide their ZIP codes. The U.S. Census Regions of the 255 responding parishes are displayed in the figure below.⁴ About two in five of the are parishes are from Midwest Region (38%).



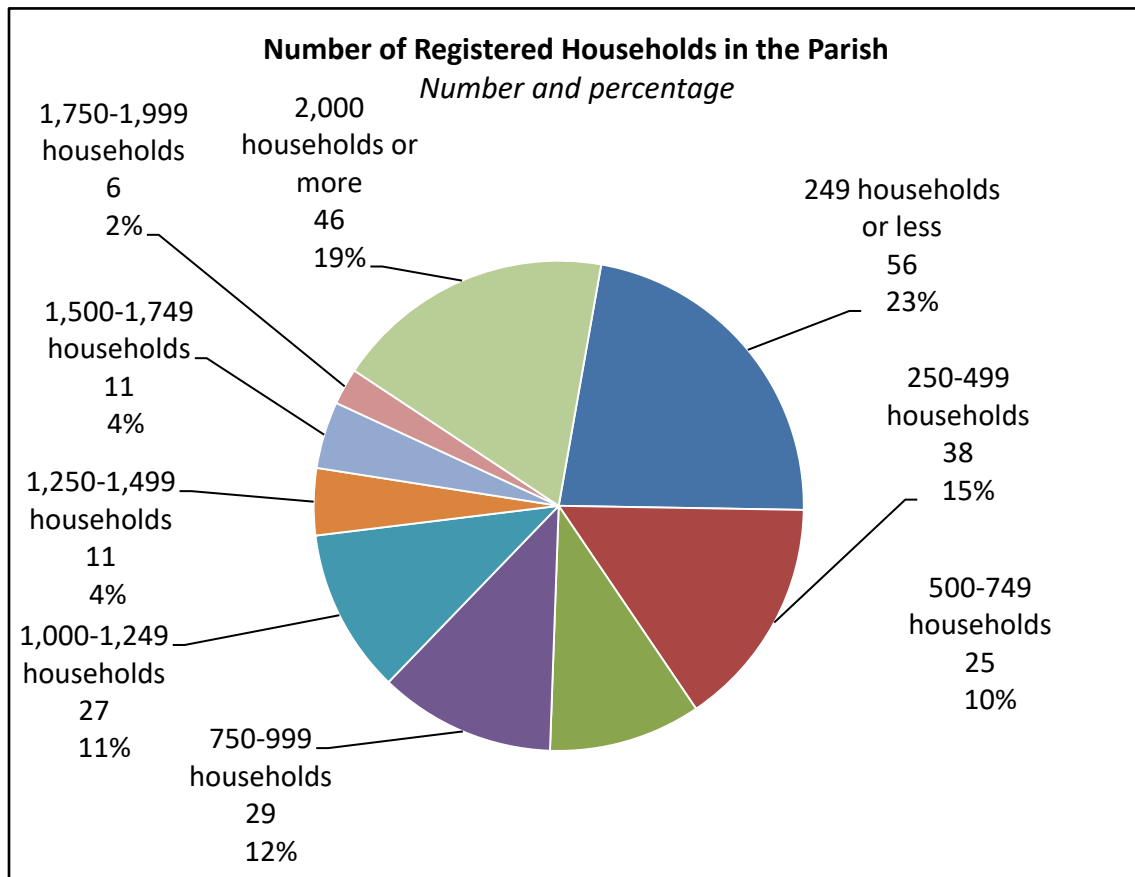
Where appropriate throughout the remainder of the report, comparisons are presented for the findings among the four Census Regions.⁵

⁴ Twenty-eight percent did not respond to the question of their ZIP code.

⁵ When presented in a table, these findings are presented regardless of whether the differences are statistically significant ones or not.

Parish Sizes

Responding parish personnel were asked to estimate the number of households at their parish. The smallest number of households reported is 20, with 6,100 households the largest. CARA grouped the parishes by size into the eight categories shown in the figure below. Their responses – both the number writing in a response that fits into each category and the percentage of all respondents writing in a number in that category – are presented in the figure below.

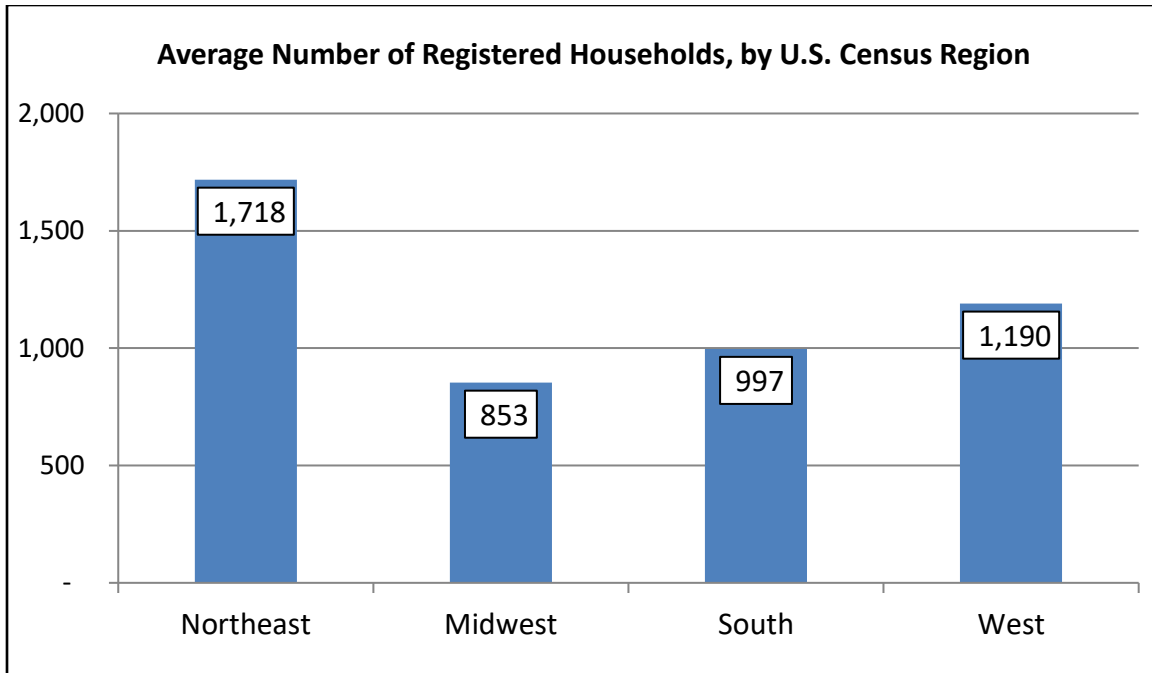


The following categories for size of parish will be used throughout this report for comparison purposes:

- Less than 500 registered households – 38% or 94 parishes
- 500 to 999 households – 22% or 54 parishes
- 1,000 to 1,499 households – 15% or 38 parishes
- 1,5000 households or more – 25% or 63 households

Differences by U.S. Census Regions

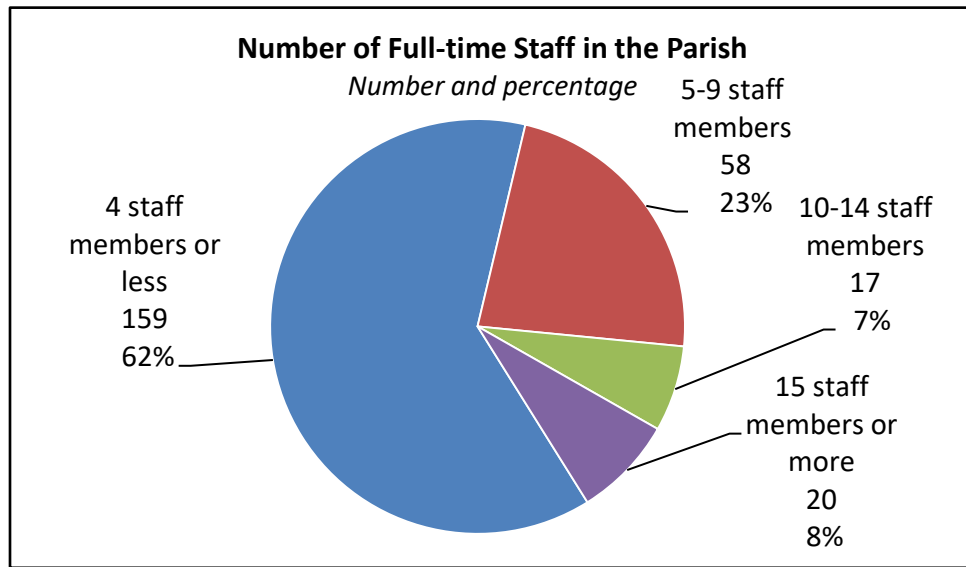
As can be seen in the figure below, responding Northeast U.S. Census Region parishes have the largest average number of registered households. Midwest Region parish personnel report the smallest average number.



Parish Staff Size

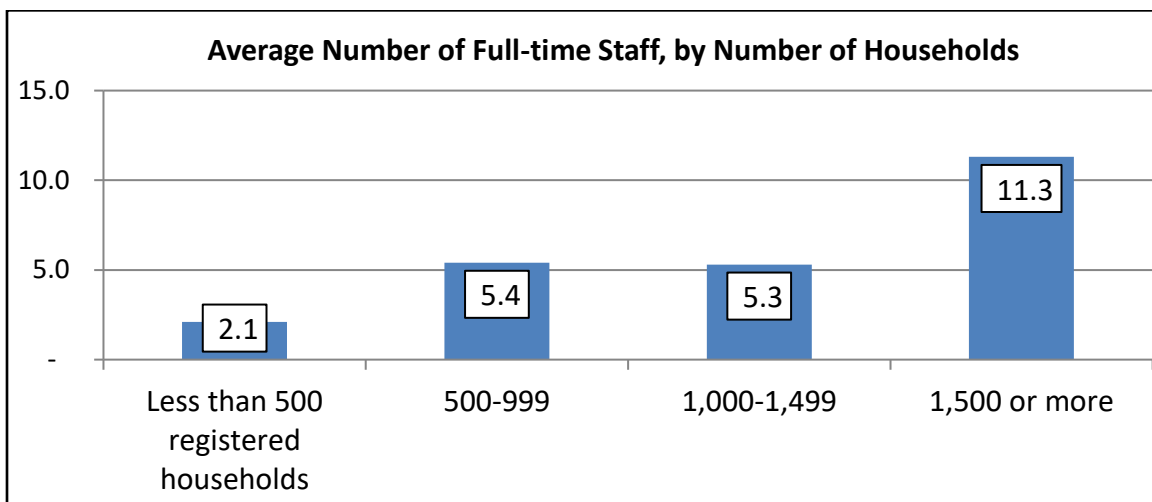
Number of Full-time Staff

Parish respondents were asked how many full-time and part-time staff members they have at their parish. The figure below shows the number of full-time staff members, with an average of 5.5. Most parishes have four full-time staff members or less (62%).⁶



Differences by Number of Households in the Parish

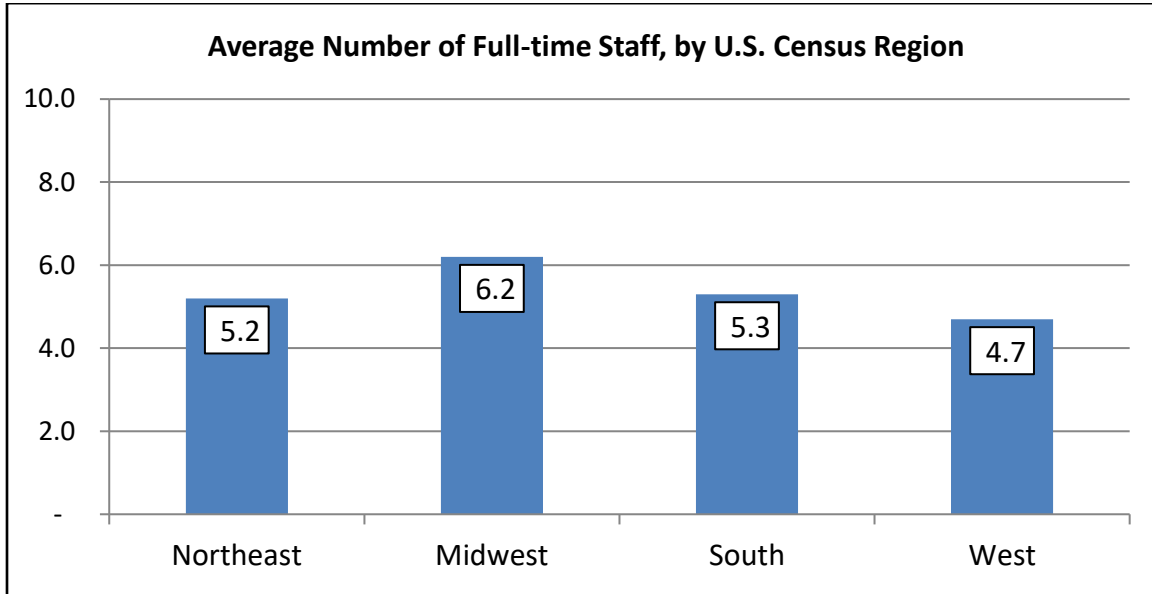
Parishes with 1,500 or more registered households have an average of 11 full-time staff members, compared to two among parishes with less than 500 registered households.



⁶ Twenty-seven percent did not respond to this question.

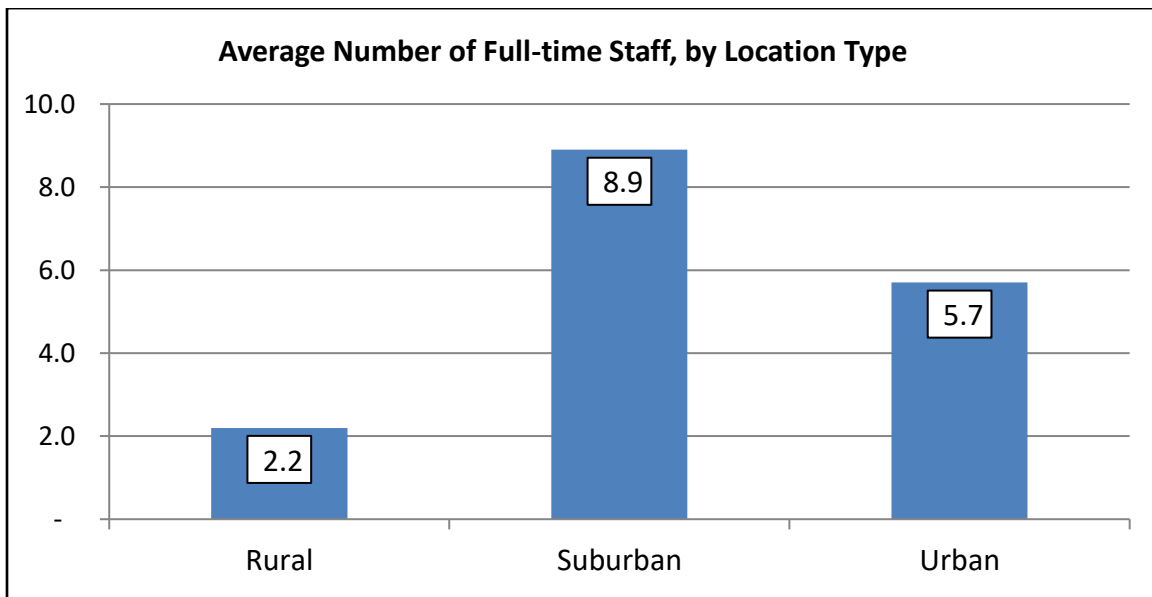
Differences by U.S. Census Regions

Midwest Region parishes have the largest average number of full-time staff members at their parishes. Parishes in the West Region report the smallest average number.



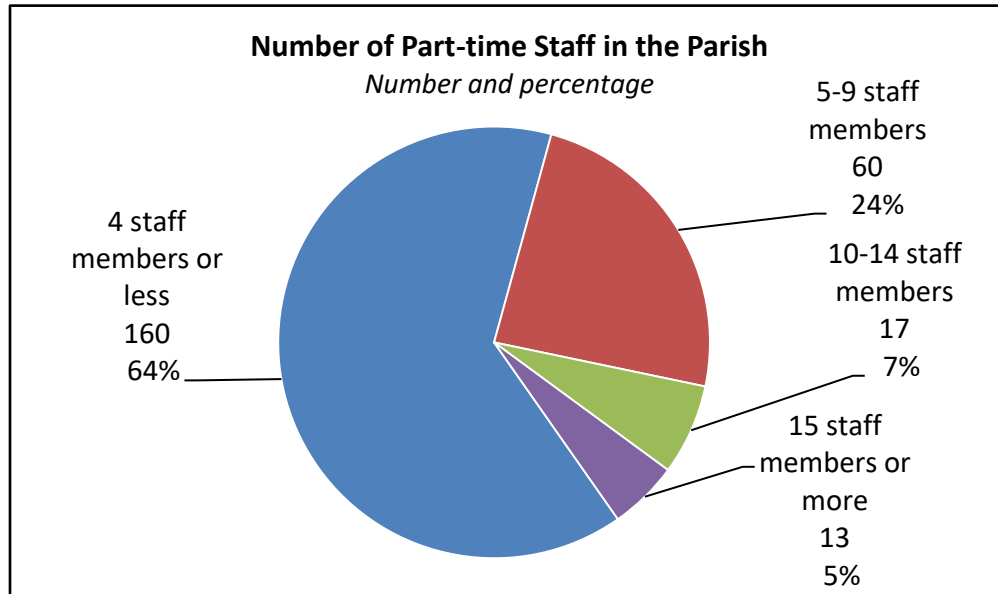
Differences by Location Type

Suburban parish personnel report having the largest average number of full-time staff members at their parishes.



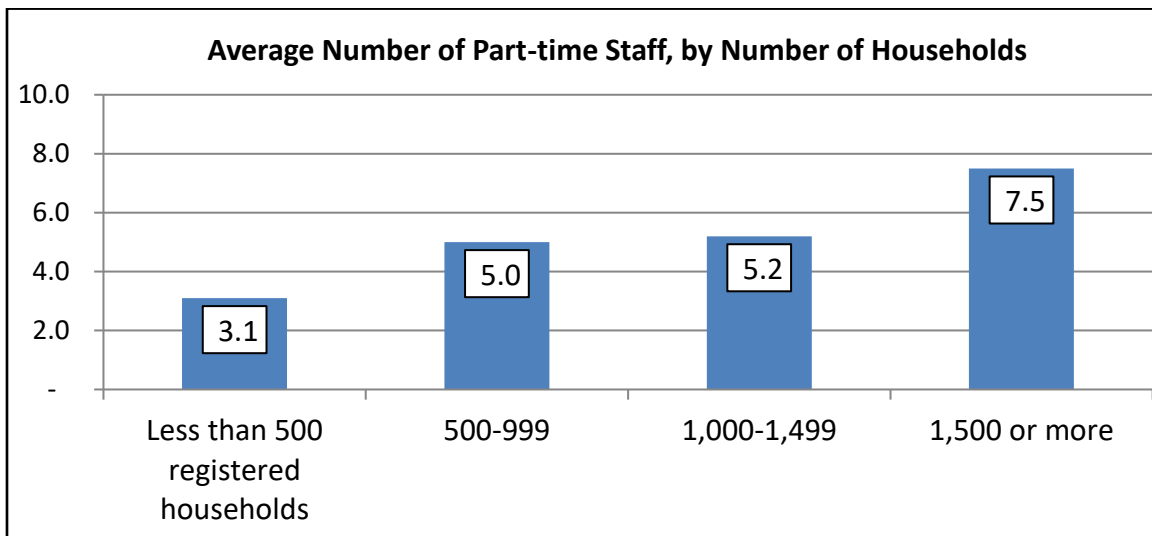
Number of Part-time Staff

The figure below shows the number of part-time staff members. Most parishes have four part-time staff members or less (64%).⁷



Differences by Number of Households in the Parish

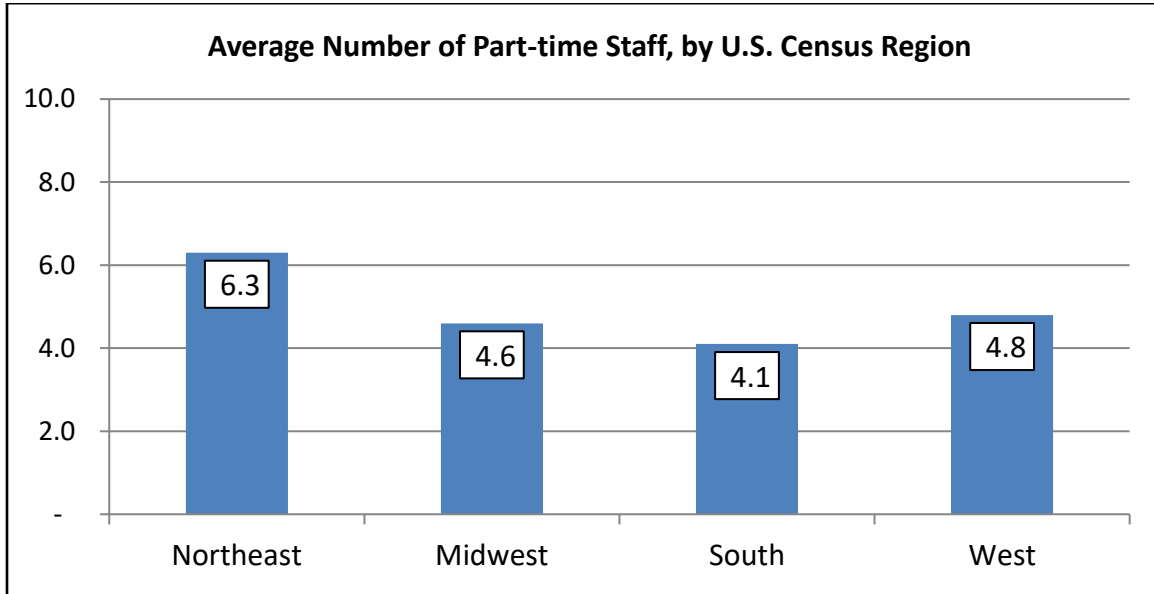
Parishes with 1,500 or more registered households have an average of eight part-time staff members, compared to three among parishes with less than 500 registered households.



⁷ Twenty-seven percent did not respond to this question.

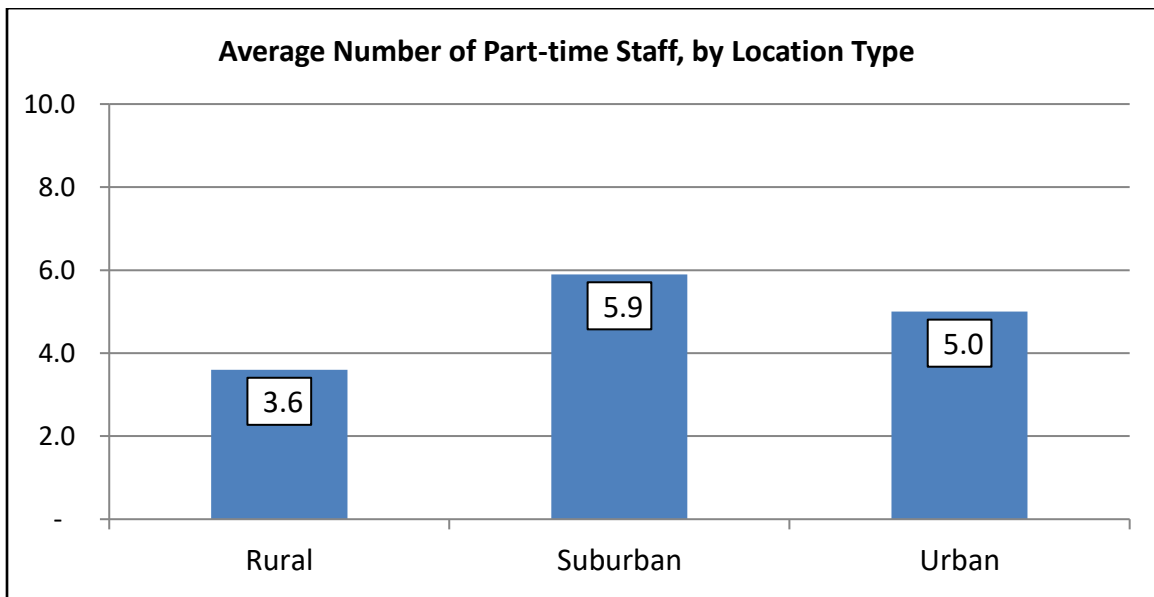
Differences by U.S. Census Regions

Northeast Census Region parishes have the largest average number of part-time staff members at their parishes. Parishes in the South Region report the smallest average number.



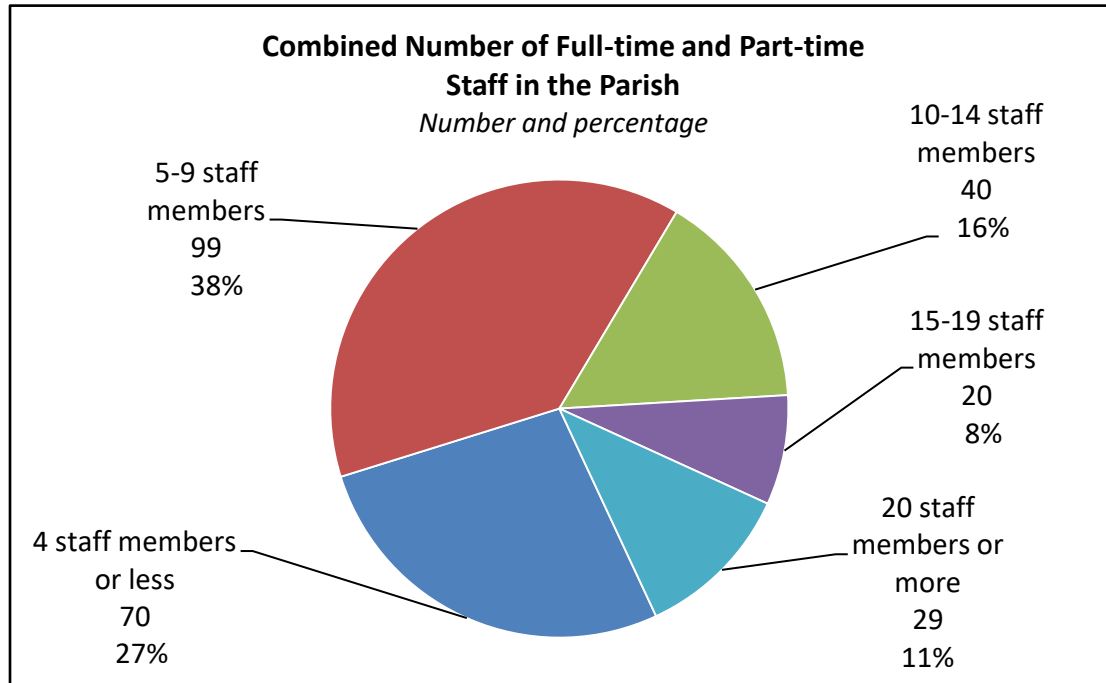
Differences by Location Type

Suburban parish personnel report having the largest average number of part-time staff members at their parishes.



Combined Number of Full-time and Part-time Staff

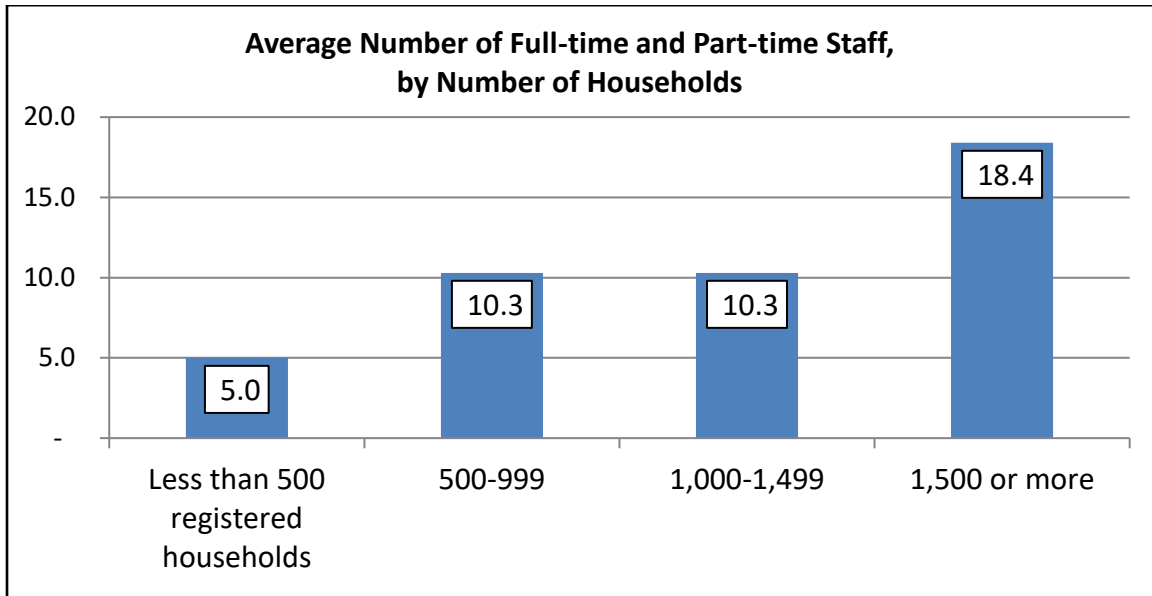
The figure below shows the combined number of full-time and part-time staff members. Almost two in three parishes have less than ten staff members (65%).⁸



⁸ Twenty-seven percent did not respond to this question.

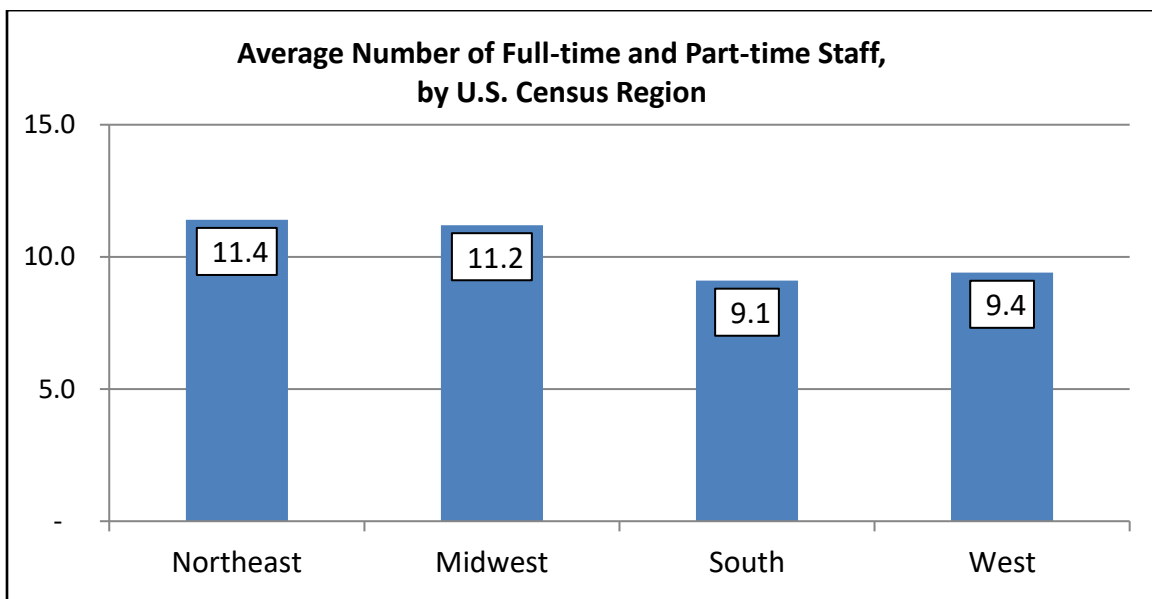
Differences by Number of Households in the Parish

Parishes with 1,500 or more registered households have an average of 18 staff members, compared to five among parishes with less than 500 registered households.



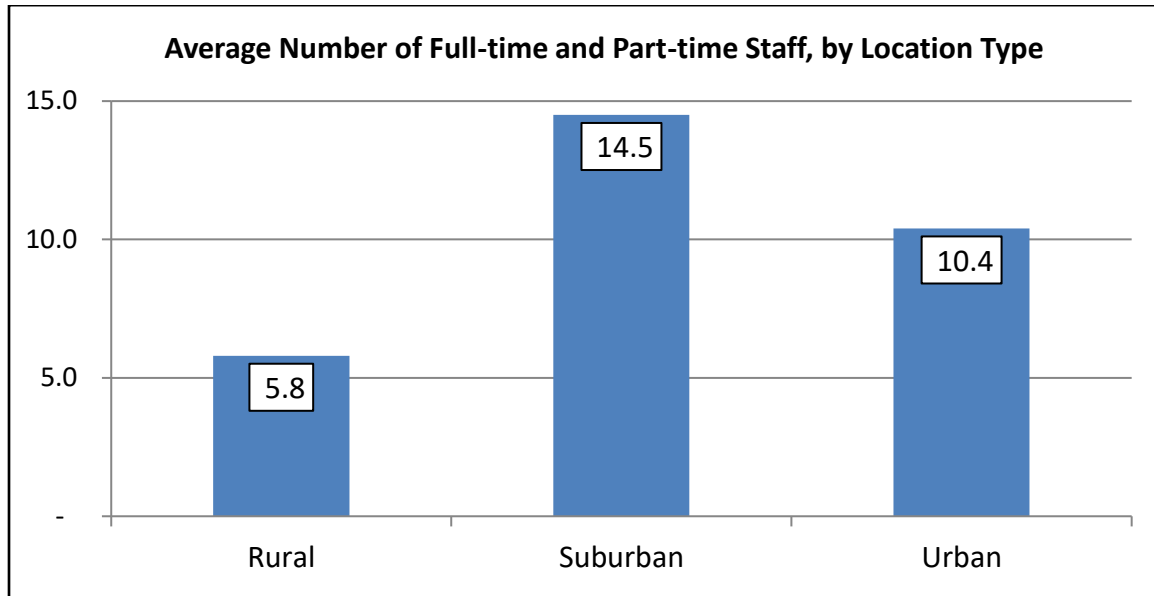
Differences by U.S. Census Regions

Northeast and Midwest Census Region parishes have the largest average number staff members at their parishes.



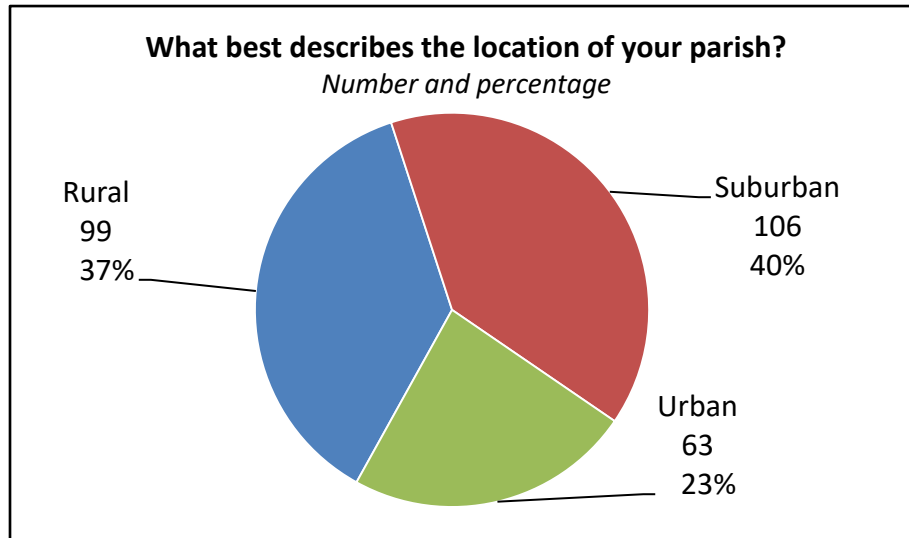
Differences by Location Type

Suburban parish personnel report having the largest average number of part-time staff members at their parishes, with rural parishes having the *least*.



Location of the Parish

Respondents were asked to describe the location type of their parish, with the results presented in the figure below. About two in five parishes are located in suburban (40%) or rural (37%) areas.⁹

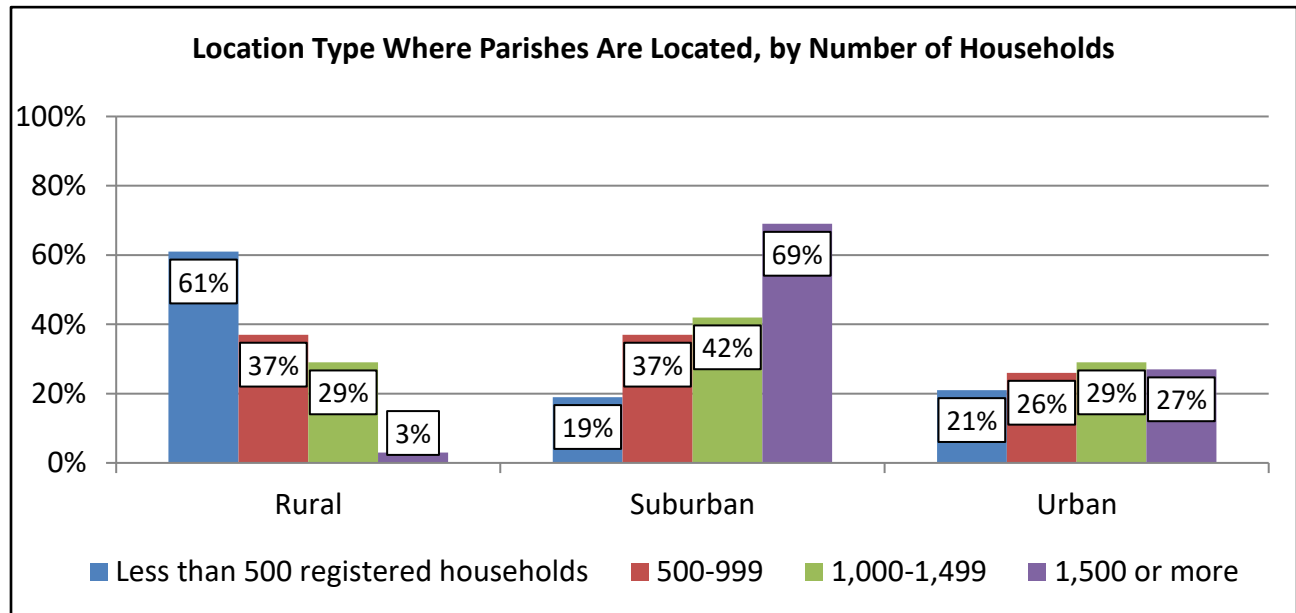


Where appropriate throughout the remainder of the report, comparisons are presented for the findings among the three kinds of locations when the differences are statistically significant.

⁹ Twenty-four percent did not respond to this question.

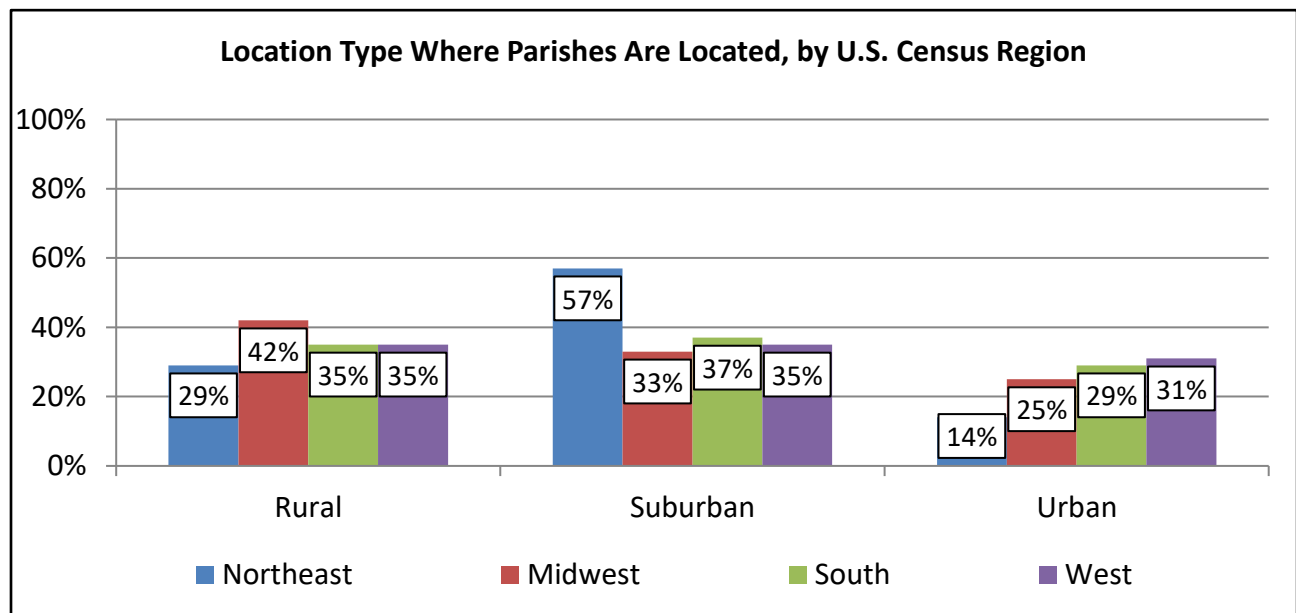
Differences by Number of Households at the Parish

Parishes in rural areas are most likely to have less than 500 registered households (61%), with suburban parishes most likely to have 1,500 or more households (69%).



Differences by U.S. Census Regions

Responding Northeast Census Region parishes are particularly likely to be suburban parishes (57%).



Section II: Incidence of Persons with Disabilities at Parishes

This section describes the parish respondents' assessment of how many persons at the parish have disabilities and how many participate in parish life in various ways.

Number of Persons at the Parishes Living with Disabilities

Parish personnel were invited to say how many persons in their parish have the disabilities shown in the table below. They could choose among these three options to respond: None, 1 to 9, and 10 or more.¹⁰

To the best of your knowledge, estimate the numbers of persons from your parish living with the following
Percentage responding

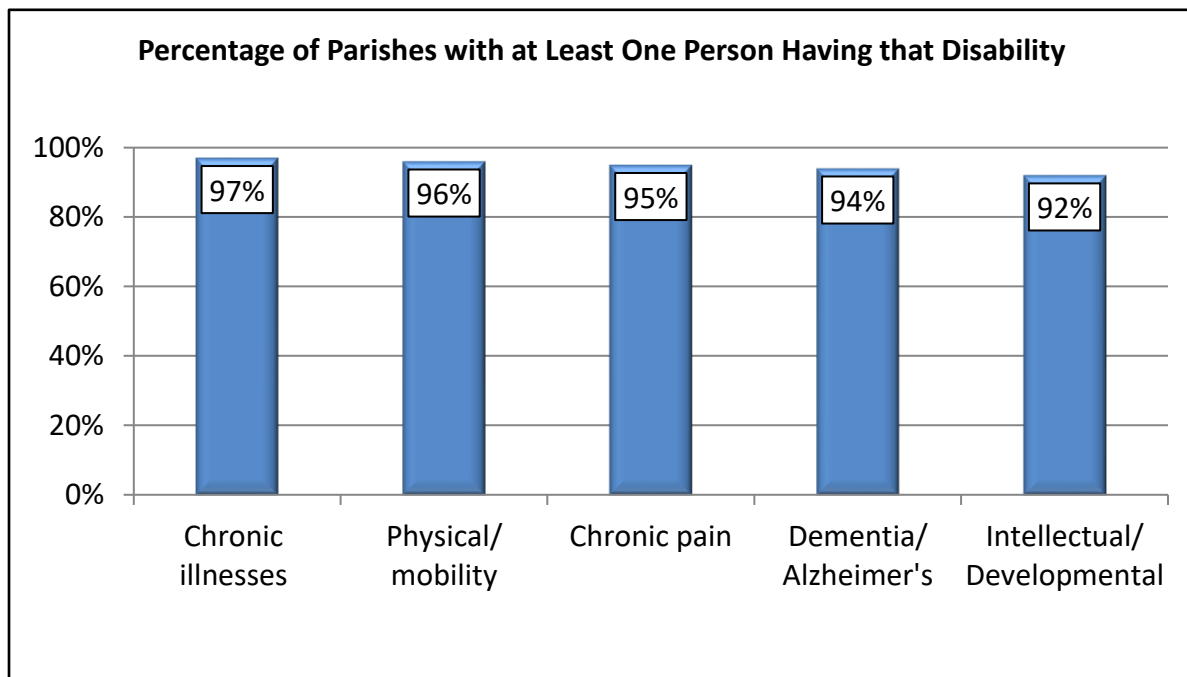
	None	1-9	10 or more
	%	%	%
Chronic illnesses - diabetes, heart disease, autoimmune, lupus	2	22	75
Chronic pain - severe arthritis, fibromyalgia, Lyme disease, nerve damage, back/neck pain	5	35	60
Addictions – alcohol, drugs, gambling, pornography, sex, food, smoking, shopping	11	35	54
Physical/mobility – malformed or missing limbs, muscle/joint pain, paralysis, osteoporosis, cerebral palsy	5	44	52
Mental health –Moderate to severe anxiety, bipolar/depression, eating disorders, suicidal ideations, prolonged grief, paranoid personality, obsessive compulsive, conduct/antisocial	10	40	51
Dementia/Alzheimer's	6	55	39
Cognitive processing difficulties – auditory, visual, speech, language	10	55	35
Intellectual/developmental – Down syndrome, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), learning differences	8	59	33
Autism Spectrum Disorder	11	57	32
Significant hearing 23impairment (uses spoken language)	17	52	31
Post-traumatic stress disorder	18	51	31
Blindness or significant vision impairment	31	62	8
Genetic - Fragile X syndrome, cystic fibrosis, sickle cell	60	35	5
Traumatic brain injury	45	51	4
Deafness (uses sign language)	57	39	4

¹⁰ As was discussed in the Introduction, the complete record of each response, including the percentages not responding to each question, are presented in Appendix I. For this series of questions, non-response rates range from 3% to 11%.

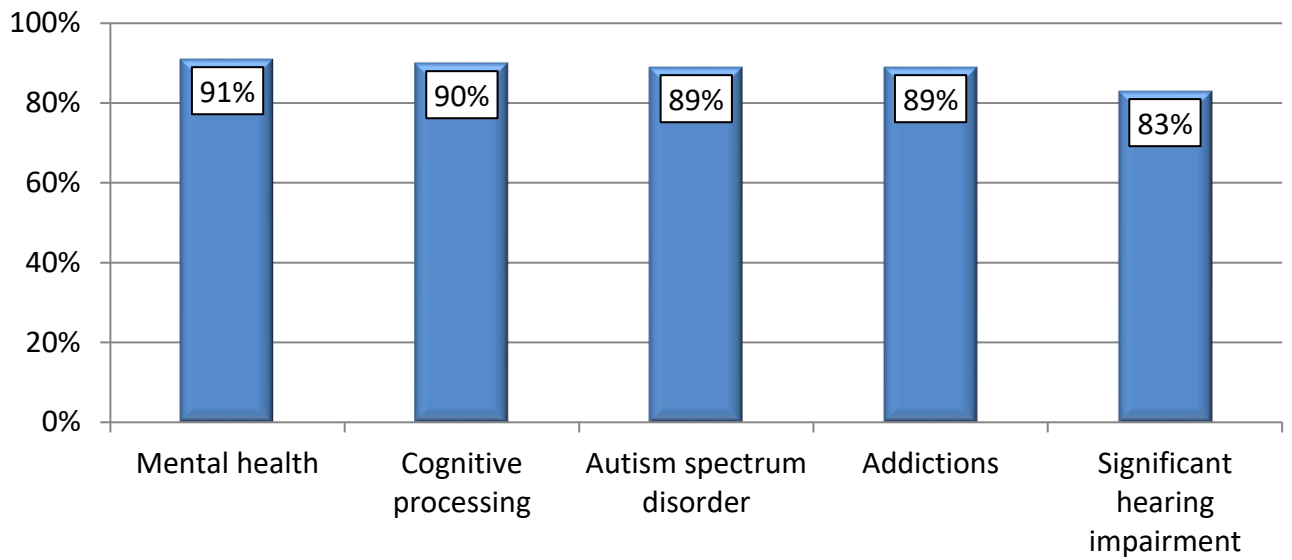
The disabilities most likely to appear in parishes are those where parishes estimate that ten or more of their parishioners have that disability:

- Chronic illnesses – diabetes, heart disease, autoimmune, lupus – 75%
- Chronic pain – severe arthritis, fibromyalgia, Lyme disease, nerve damage, back/neck pain – 60%
- Addictions – alcohol, drugs, gambling, pornography, sex, food, smoking, shopping – 54%
- Physical/mobility – malformed or missing limbs, muscle/joint pain, paralysis, osteoporosis, cerebral palsy – 52%
- Mental health – moderate to severe anxiety, bipolar/depression, eating disorders, suicidal ideations, prolonged grief, paranoid personality, obsessive compulsive, conduct/antisocial – 51%

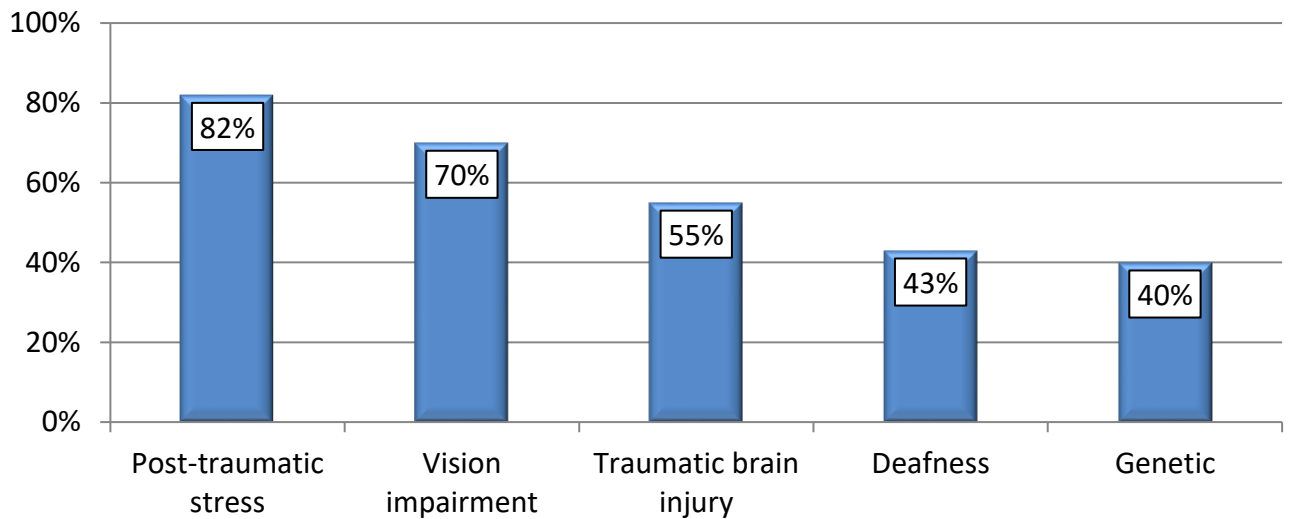
Examining the same findings through a different lens, the percentage of parishes saying they have at least one person at the parish with a particular disability is shown in the figures below. Among all responding parishes, as can be seen in the three figures below, at least 40% of parishes say at least one of their parishioners has each of the disabilities asked about.



Percentage of Parishes with at Least One Person Having that Disability

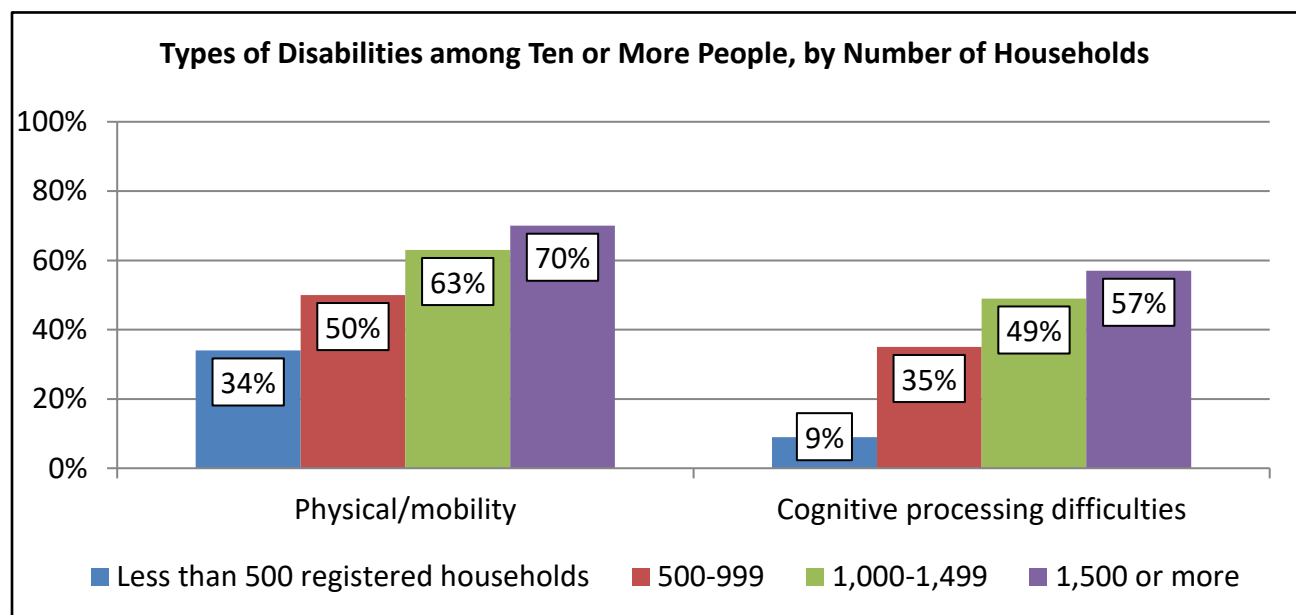
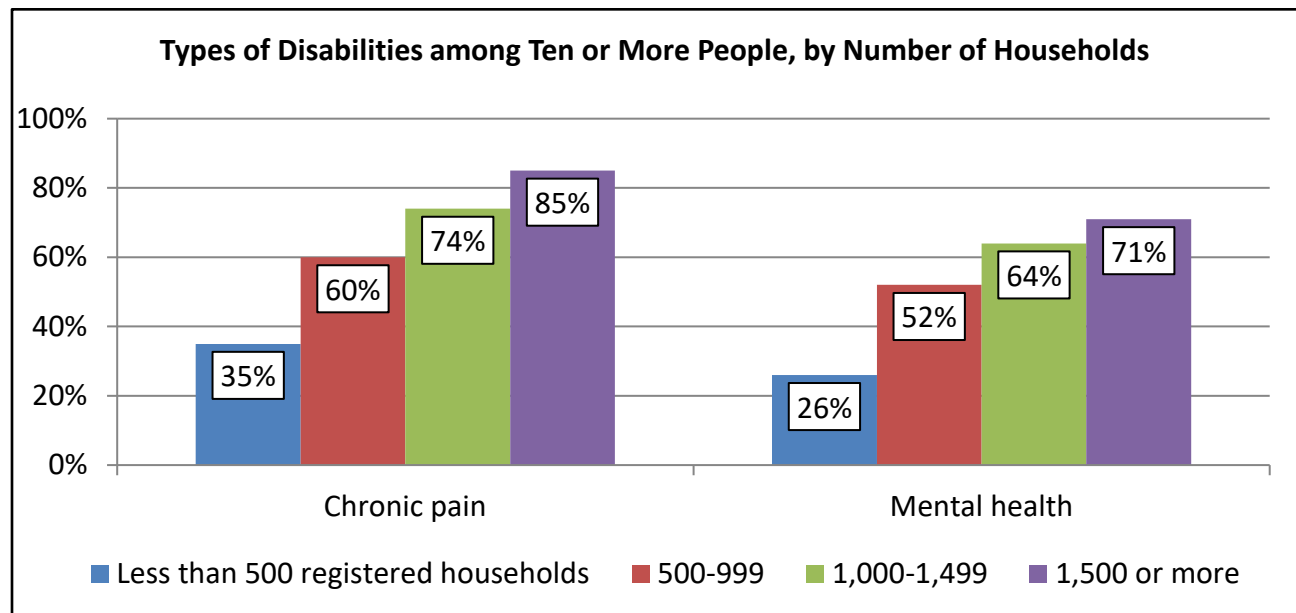


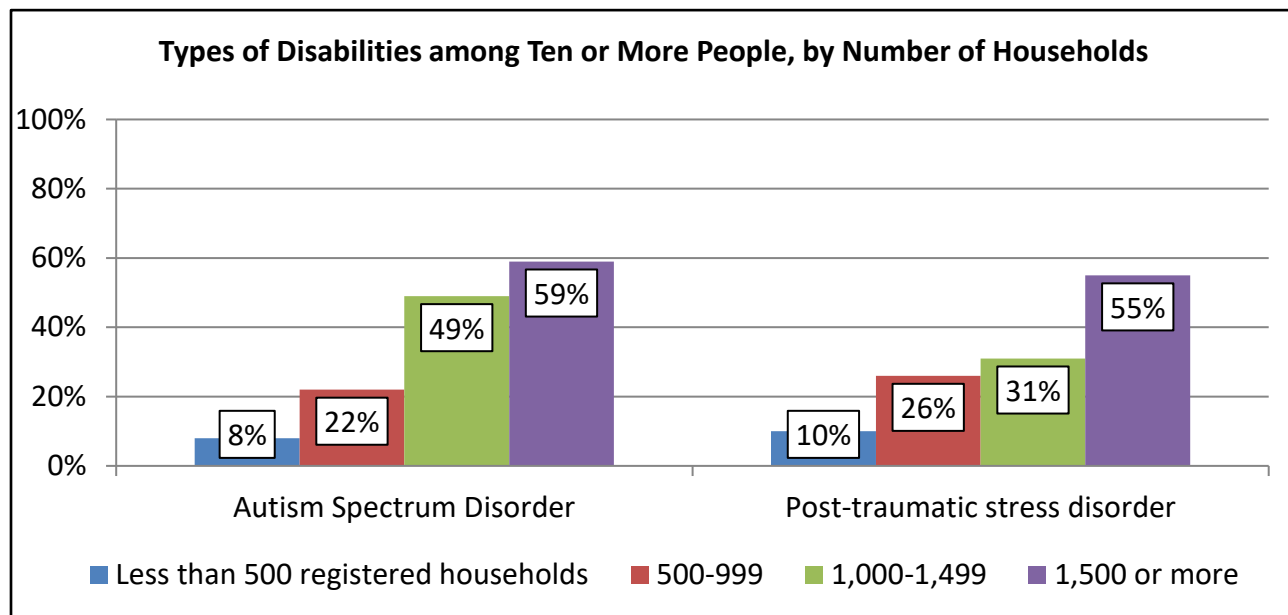
Percentage of Parishes with at Least One Person Having that Disability



Differences by Number of Households at the Parish

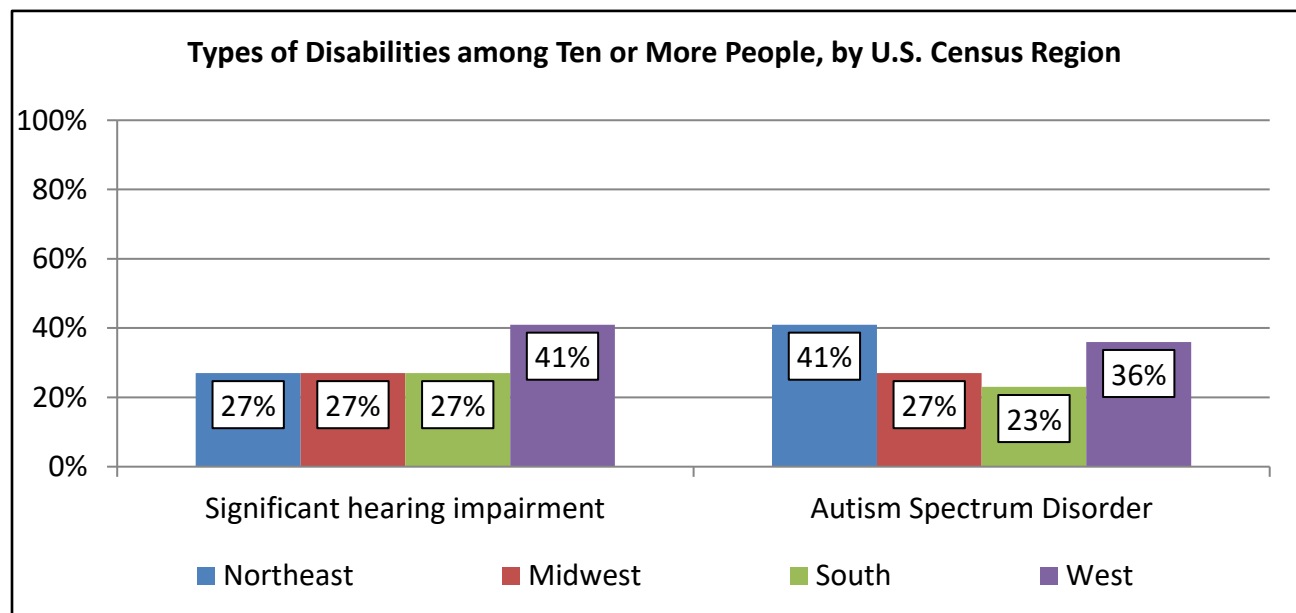
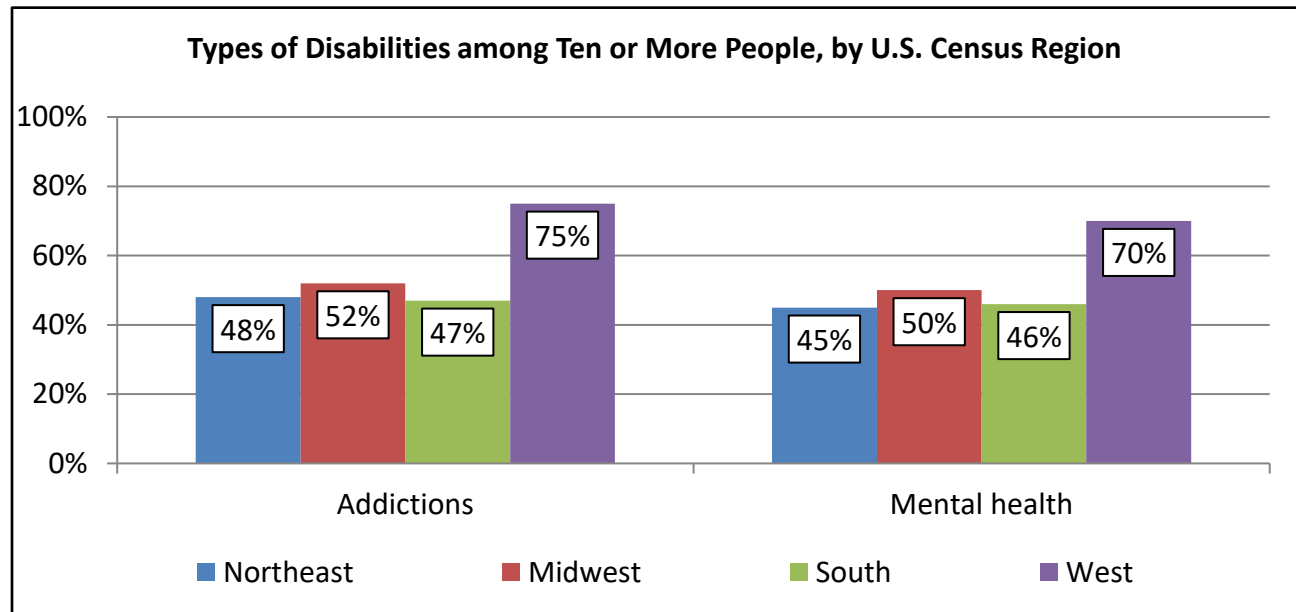
For the six types of disabilities presented in the three figures below, the larger the number of registered households at parishes, the more likely they are to have ten or more people from their parish living with the type of disability.





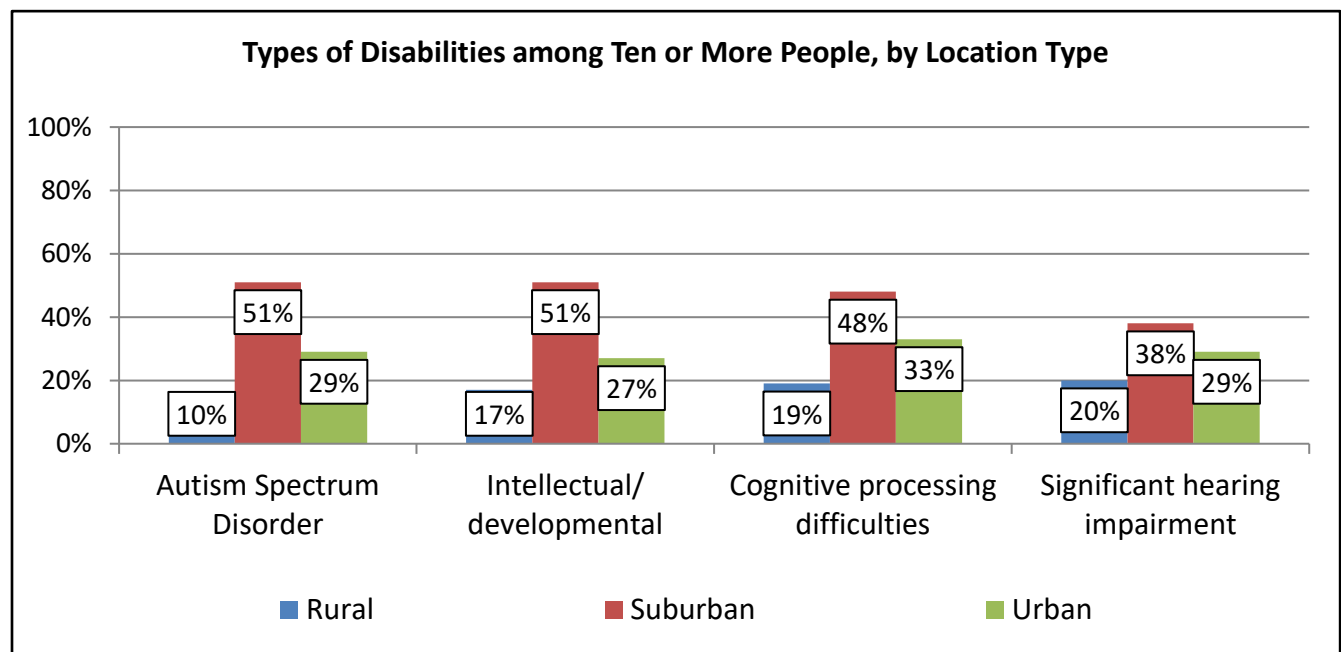
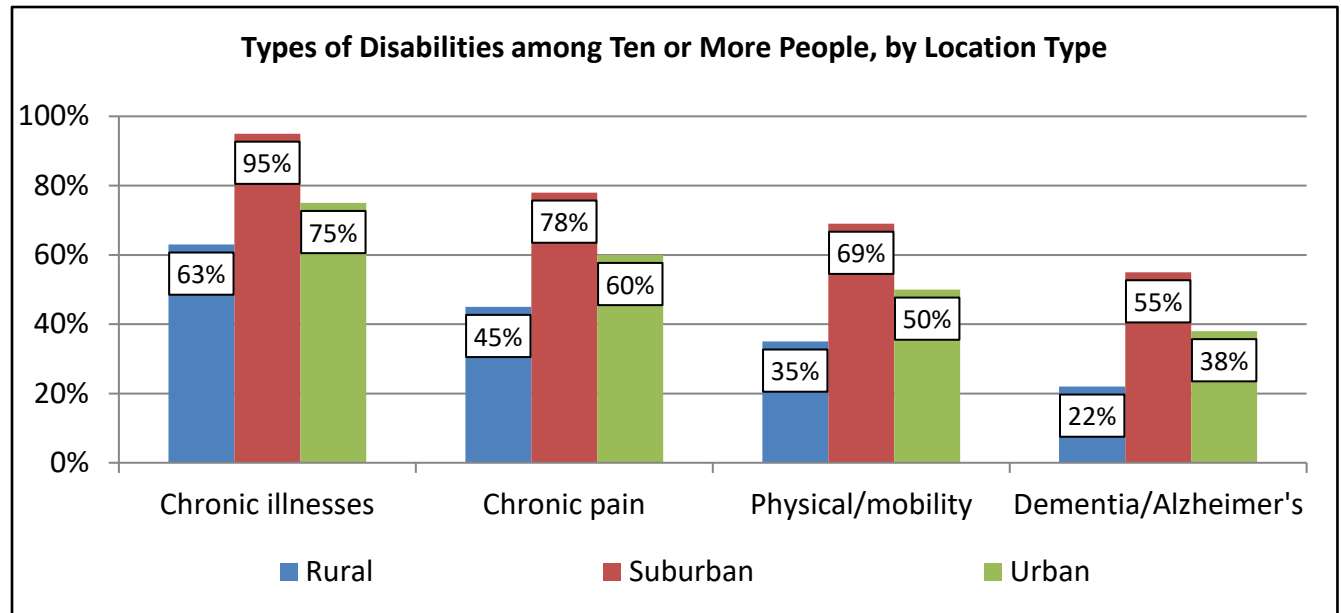
Differences by U.S. Census Regions

West Region parishes are particularly likely to report having ten or more people from their parish living with addictions, mental health issues, and significant hearing impairments. Parishes from the Northeast and West Regions are most likely to report having ten or more persons with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

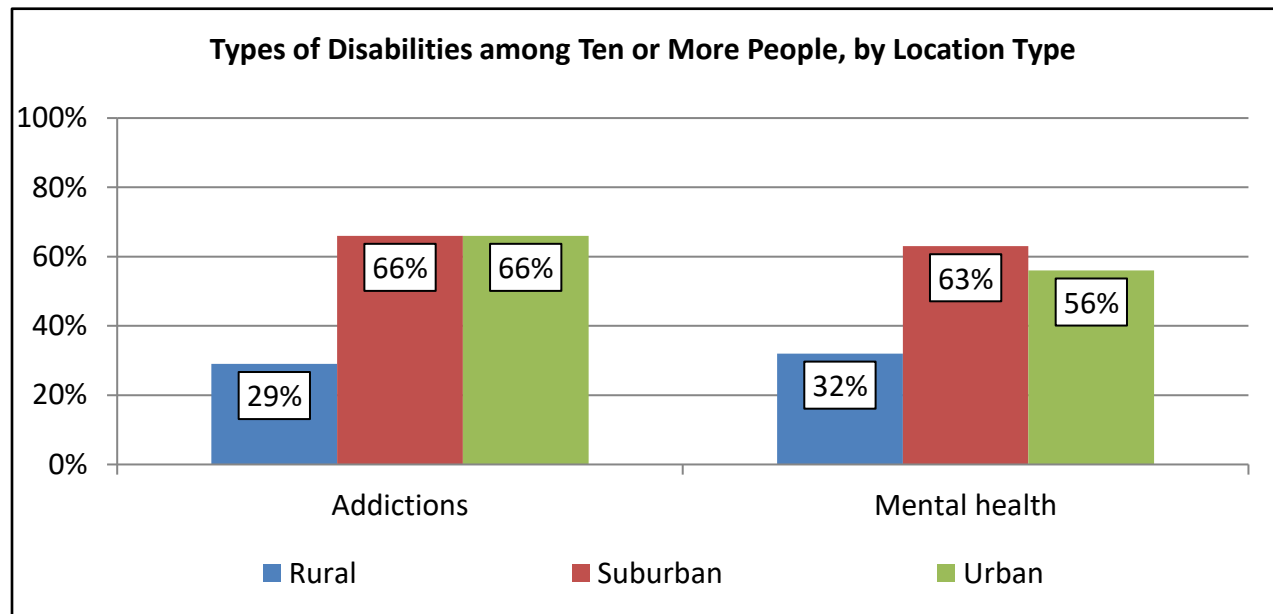


Differences by Location Type

Suburban parishes are most likely to have ten or more people with eight of the disabilities, which are presented in the figures below.



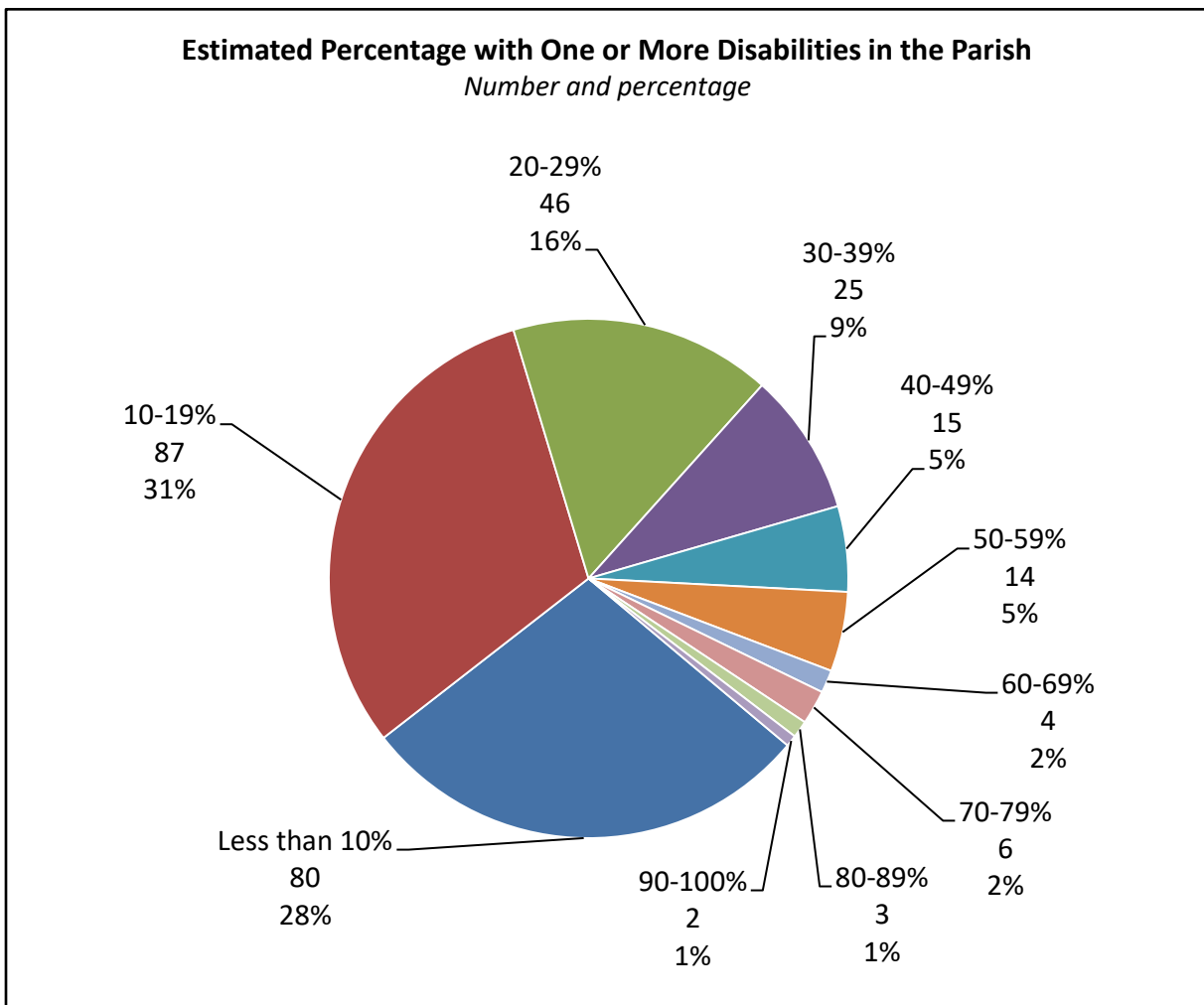
Parishes in rural areas are *least* likely to have ten or more people with addictions or mental health issues.



Estimated Percentages of Persons with Disabilities and Ages 65 and Over

Respondents were asked to estimate the percentage of persons in their parishes that have one or more of the disabilities described in the previous section, and to estimate the percentage of their parishioners who are ages 65 and older. The findings are presented in the two figures below.^{11 12 13}

On average, parish personnel estimate that 20% of those in their parish communities have one or more of the disabilities asked about on the survey. As seen in the figure below, a combined six in ten say that less than 20% of their parishioners have one or more disability (59%).

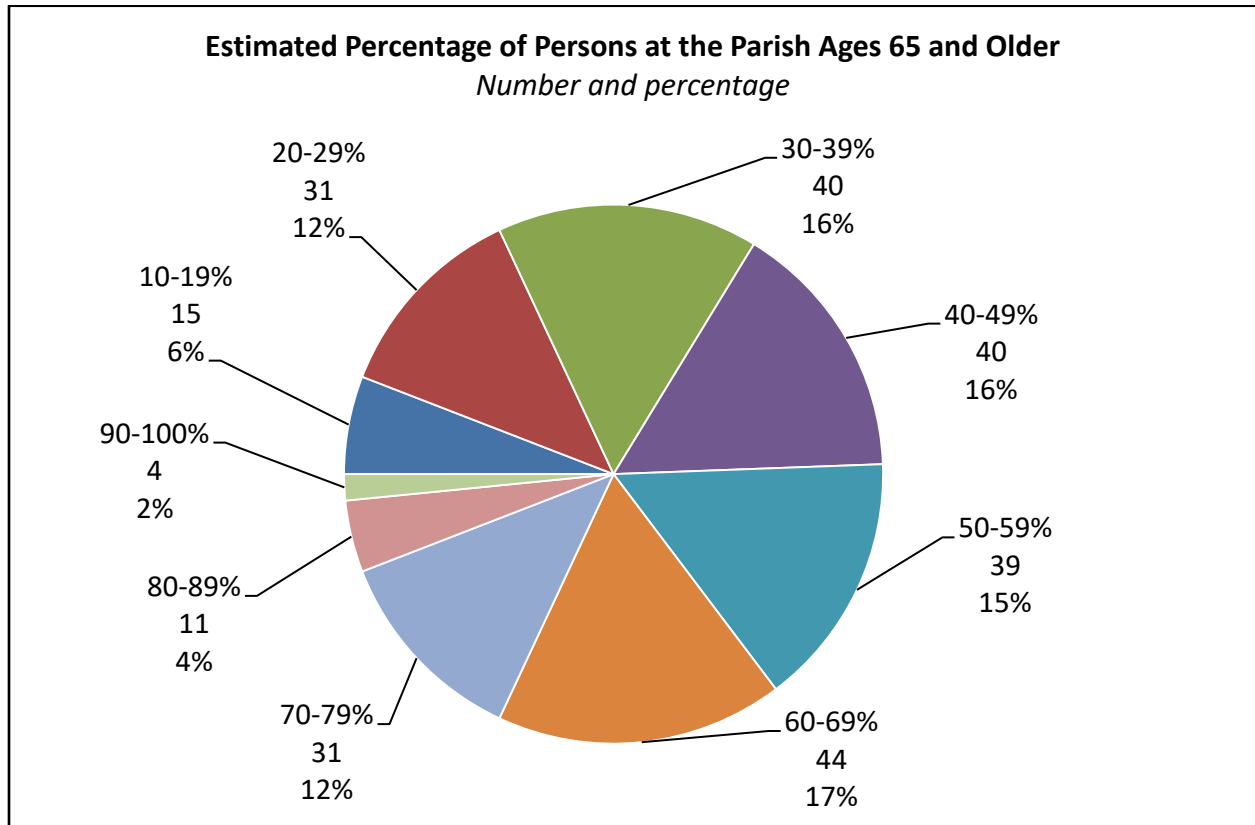


¹¹ There are not great differences among the parishes with different numbers of registered households, ranging from 16% to 23%.

¹² There are not great differences among the U.S. Census Regions, ranging from 16% to 23%.

¹³ There are not great differences among the types of location, ranging from 16% to 24%.

Parishes report an average of 48% of persons at their parishes are ages 65 and older.^{14 15}
¹⁶ In the figure below, 50% of parishes report a percentage of less than half (10% to 49%) of their parishioners are ages 65 and older, and 50% report a percentage of half or more (50% to 100%).



¹⁴ There are not great differences among the parishes with different numbers of registered households, ranging from 42% to 52%.

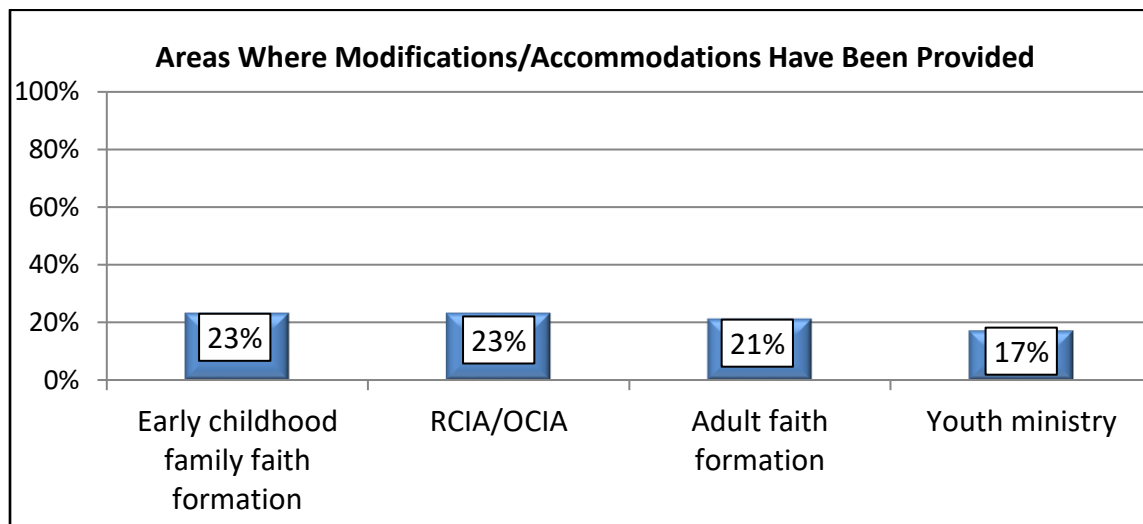
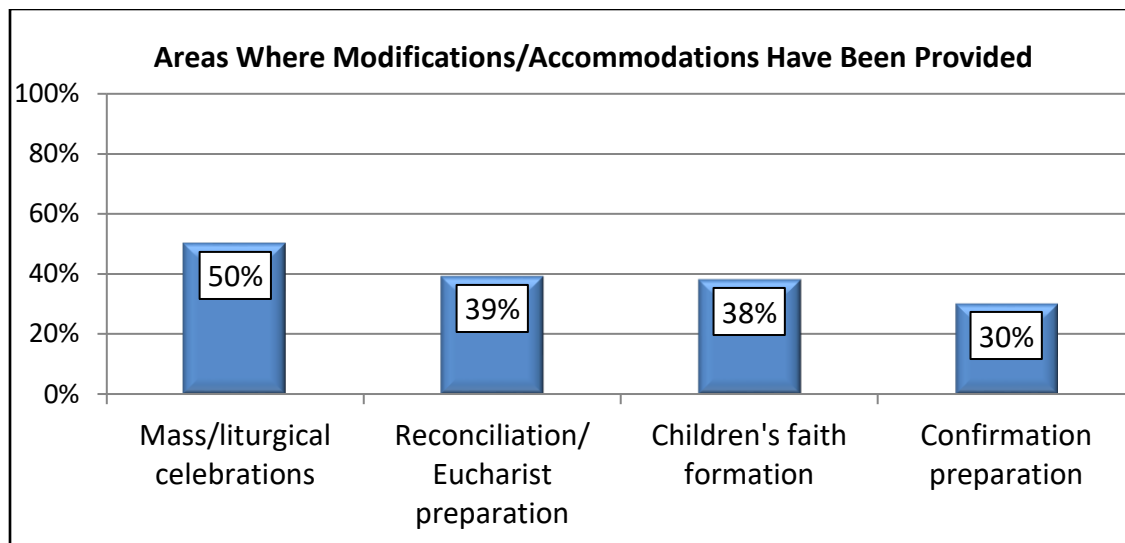
¹⁵ There are not great differences among the U.S. Census Regions, ranging from 42% to 53%.

¹⁶ There are not great differences among the location types, ranging from 44% to 52%.

Areas Where Modifications or Accommodations Have Been Provided

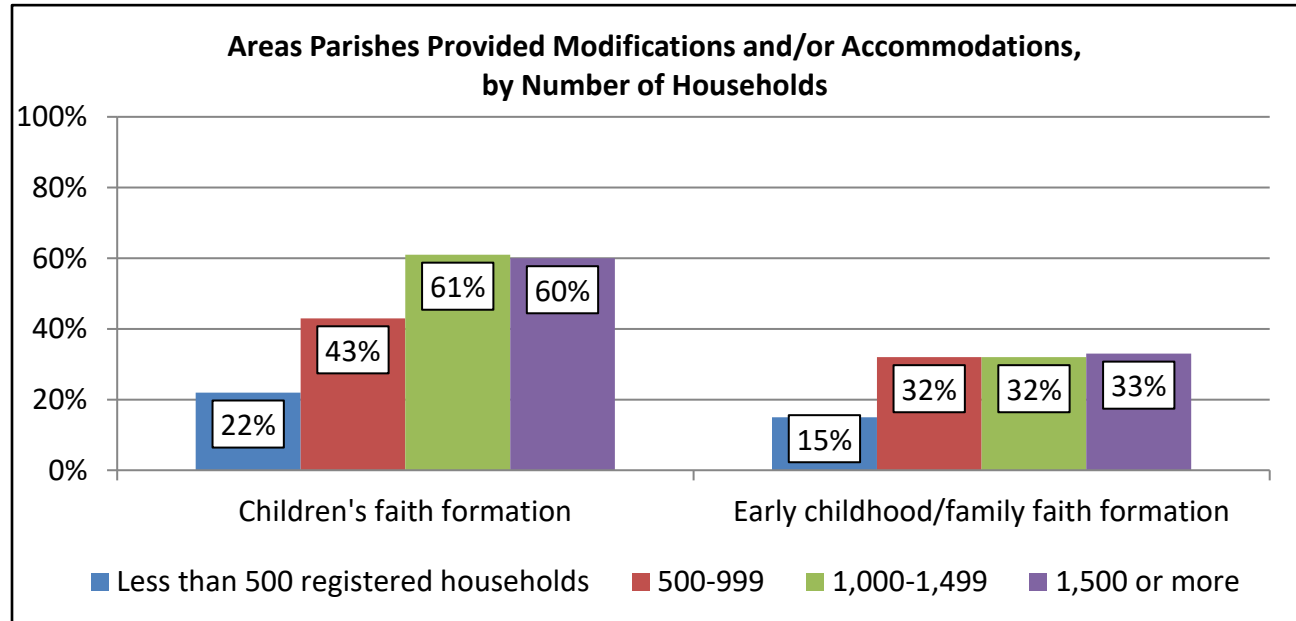
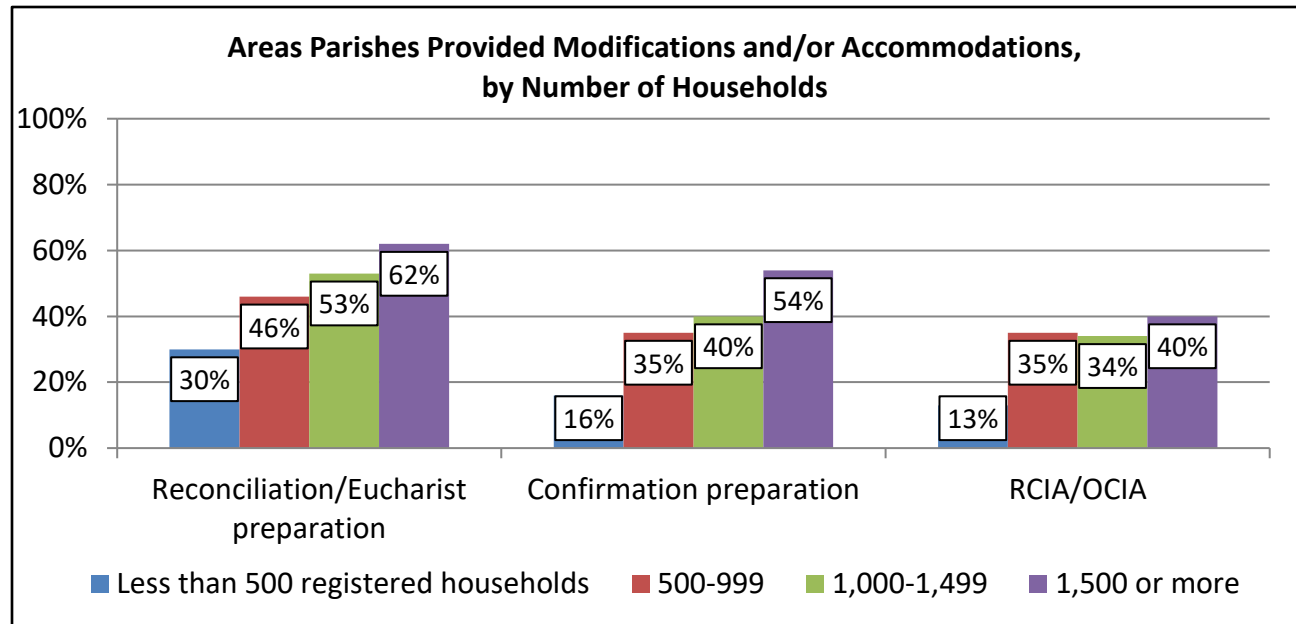
Parishes were asked in which of the following areas have they provided modifications and/or accommodations in their parish. They were instructed to select all that apply. The findings are presented in the two figures below.

Between three-tenths to half of responding parishes report that these are areas where modifications or accommodations have been made or provided in their parishes: Mass / liturgical celebrations (50%), Reconciliation / Eucharist preparation (39%), children's faith formation (38%) and confirmation preparation (30%). About two in ten (17% to 23%) say modifications or accommodations have been made in the other four areas, shown in the second figure below.



Differences by Number of Households at the Parish

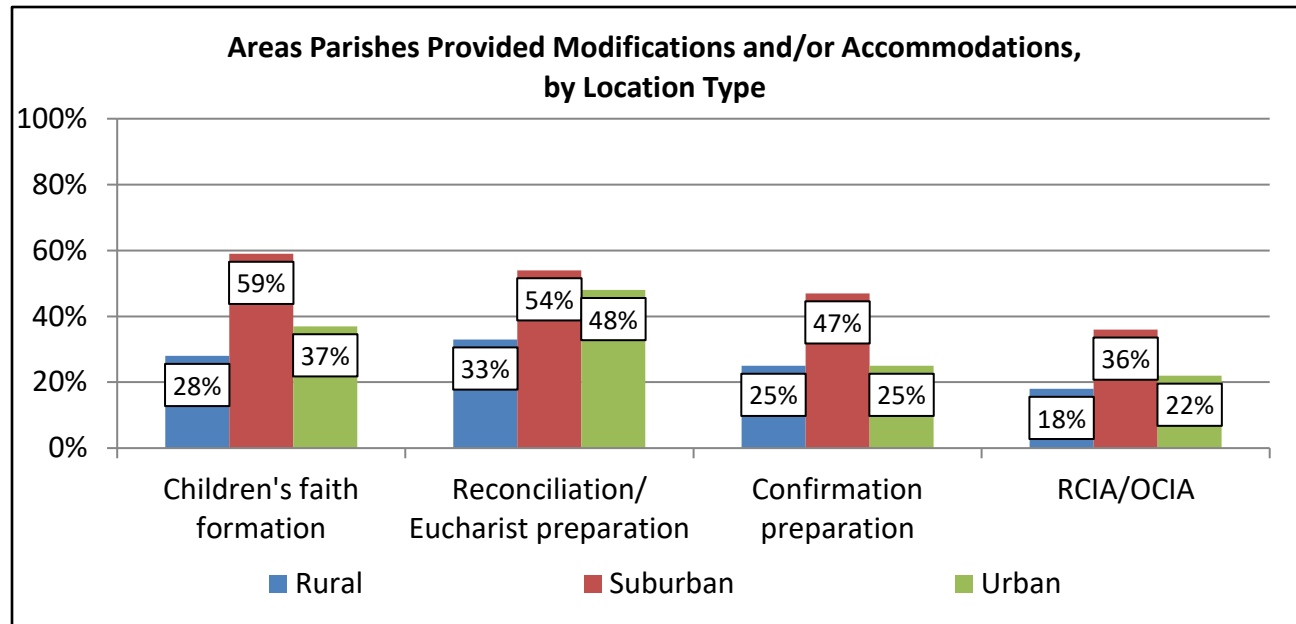
The smallest group of parishes are *least* likely to have provided modifications and/or accommodations in the five areas presented in the two figures below.¹⁷



¹⁷ In this section, due to the difficulty of assessing statistically significant differences for check-all-that-apply items, only differences of 15 percentage points or more among the subgroups are treated as meaningful differences.

Differences by Location Type

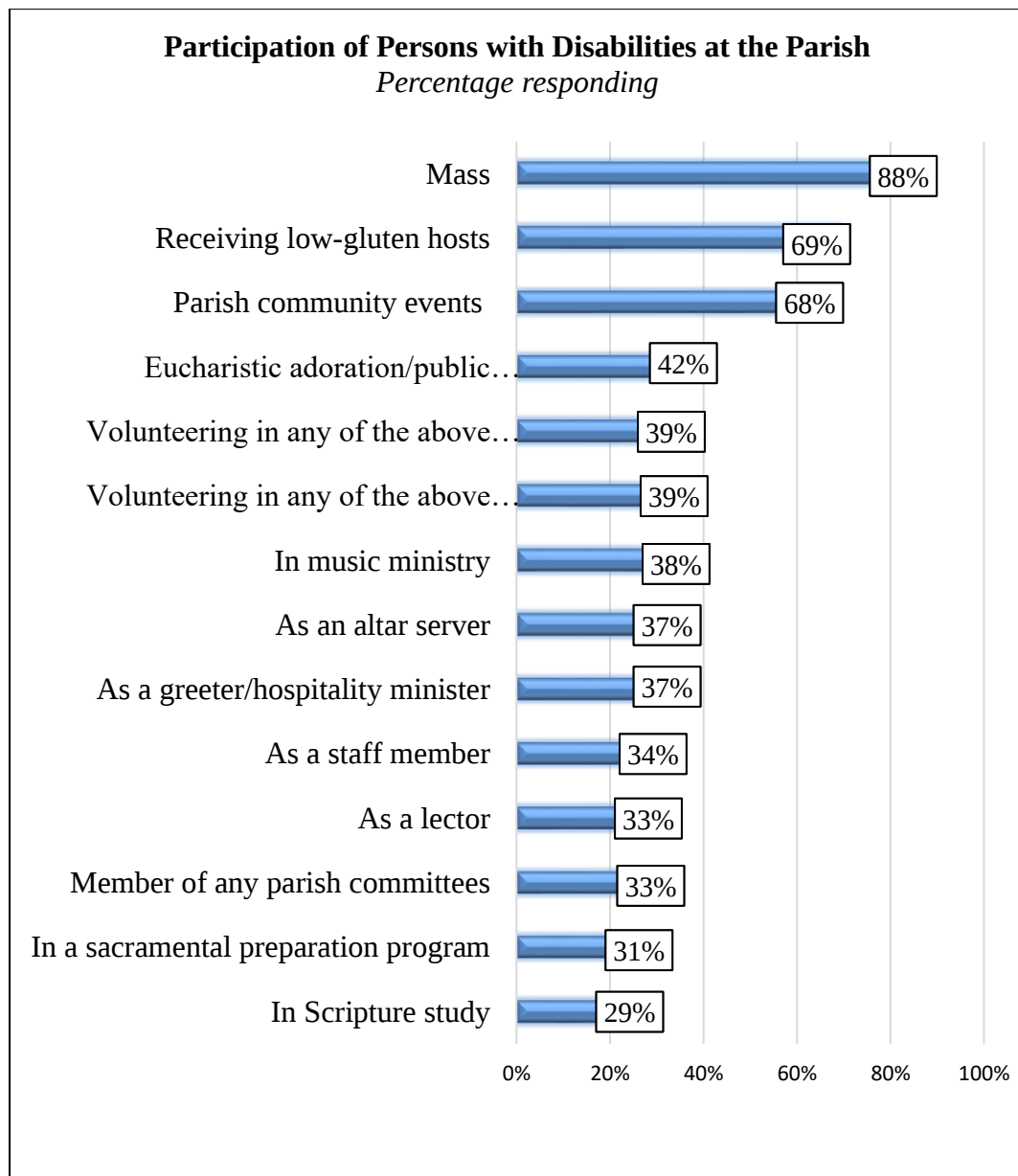
Parishes in suburban areas are most likely to say their parishes have provided the modifications and accommodations in the areas shown in the figure below.



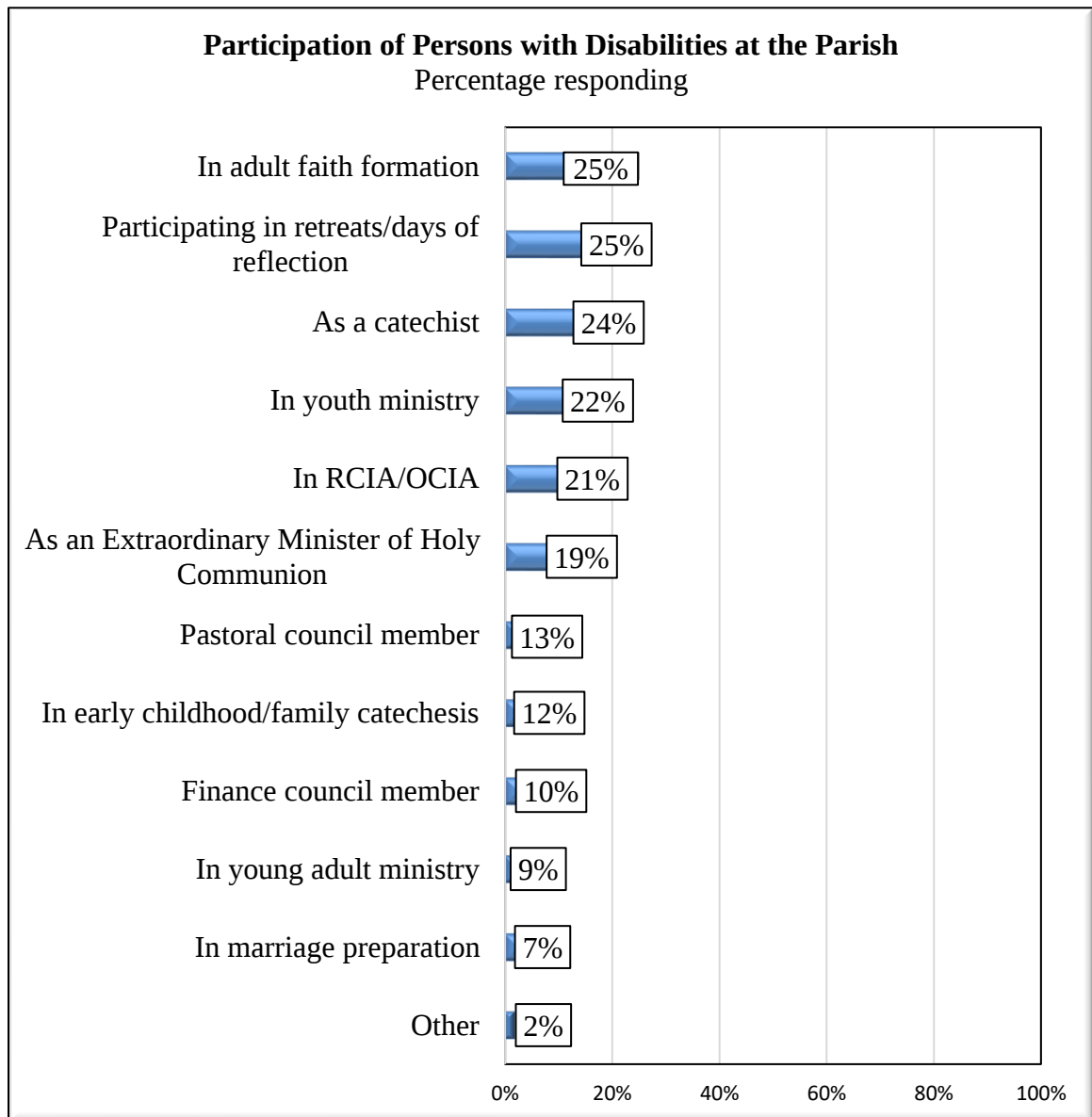
Participation in Parish Life

Parish personnel were asked to select all of the parish functions that they have had persons with disabilities participate in during the past three years, among a list of 26 parish functions. The percentage reporting that someone with a disability participated are presented in the two figures below, ordered from most to least.

More than half say they have had persons with disabilities participate in their Masses (88%), receiving low-gluten hosts (69%), and parish community events (68%). About three-tenths to four-tenths of parishes say they have had persons with disabilities participate in the other functions presented in the figure below.



Between 2% and 25% say they have had persons with disabilities participate in each of the parish functions and programs presented in the figure below.

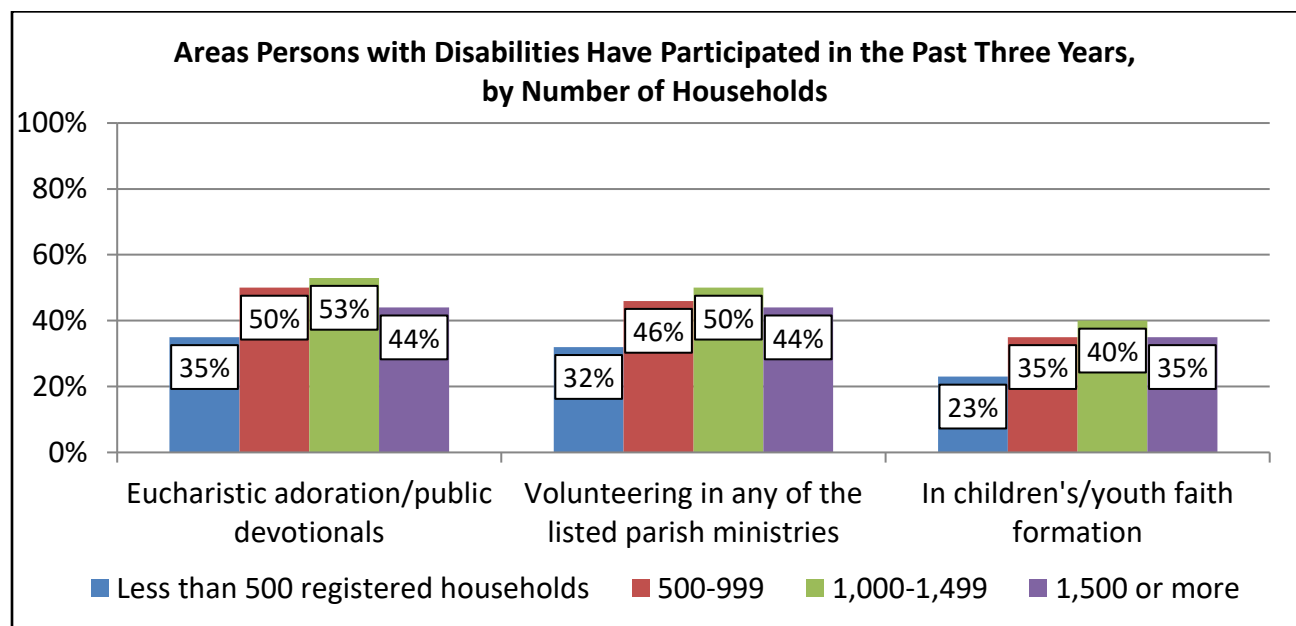
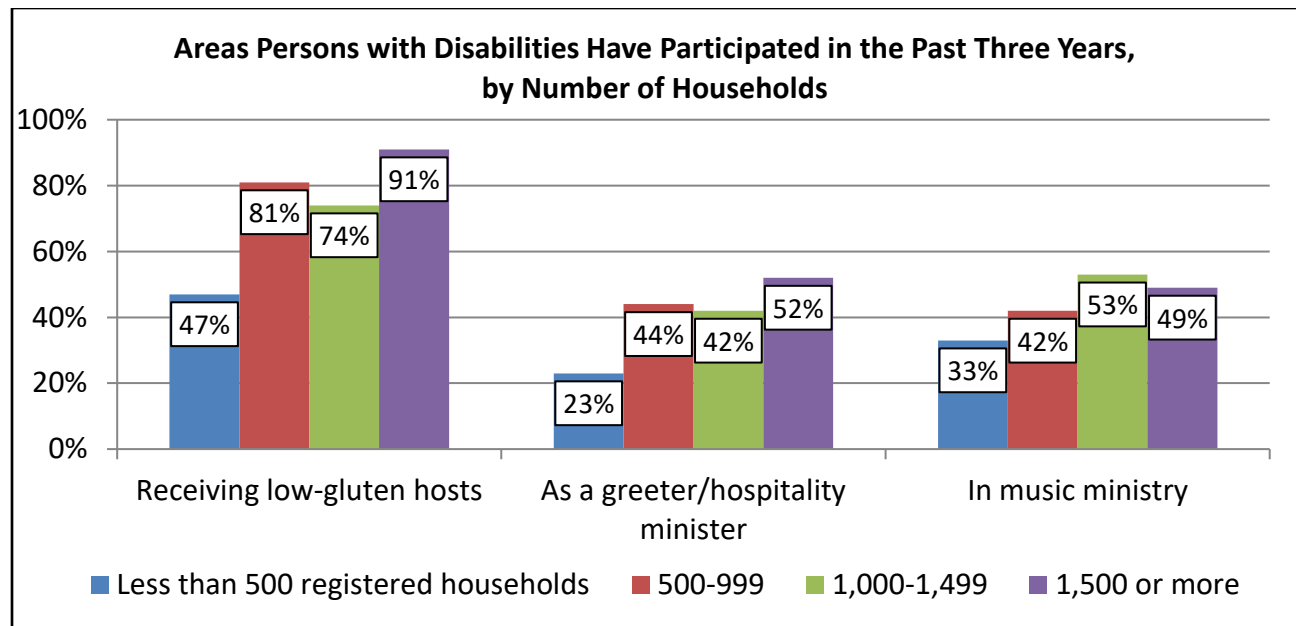


Among those 2% indicating an “other” parish function that they have had persons with disabilities participate in, five wrote in these responses:

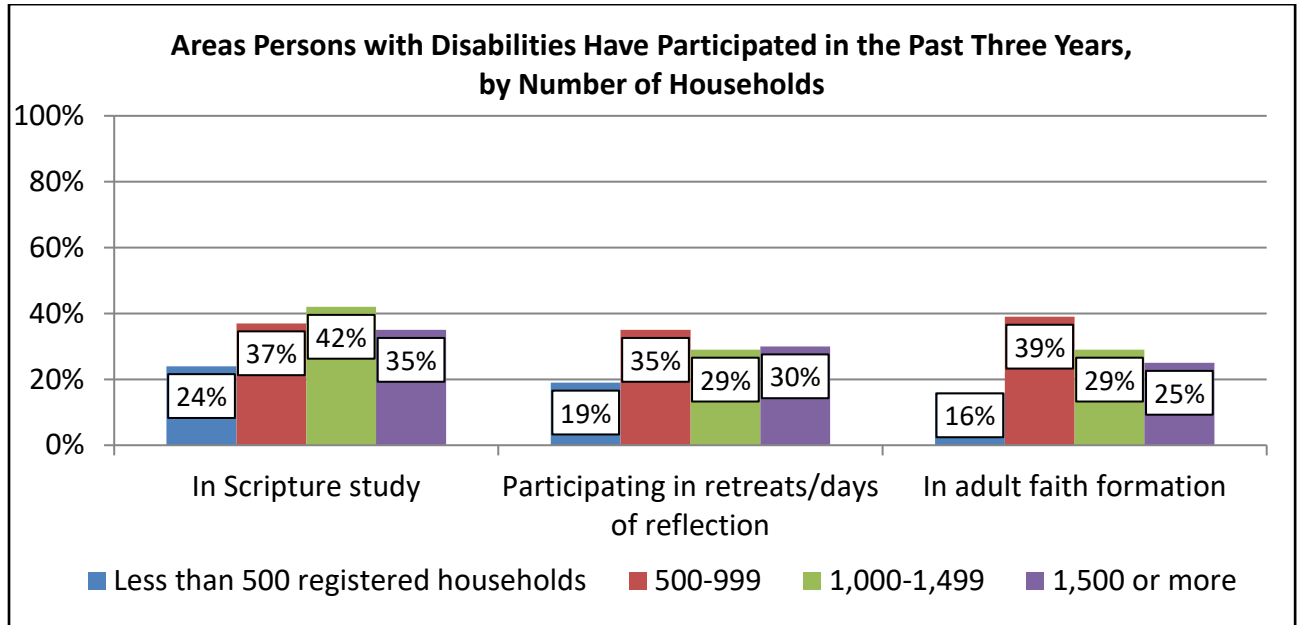
- Cross Bearer
- Deacon
- Free lunch and garage sales helpers
- Knights of Columbus and CCW
- Tai Chi (arthritis exercise program)

Differences by Number of Households at the Parish

In nine of the areas, the smallest group of parishes are *least* likely to have had persons with disabilities participate in that area at their parish in the past three years.¹⁸

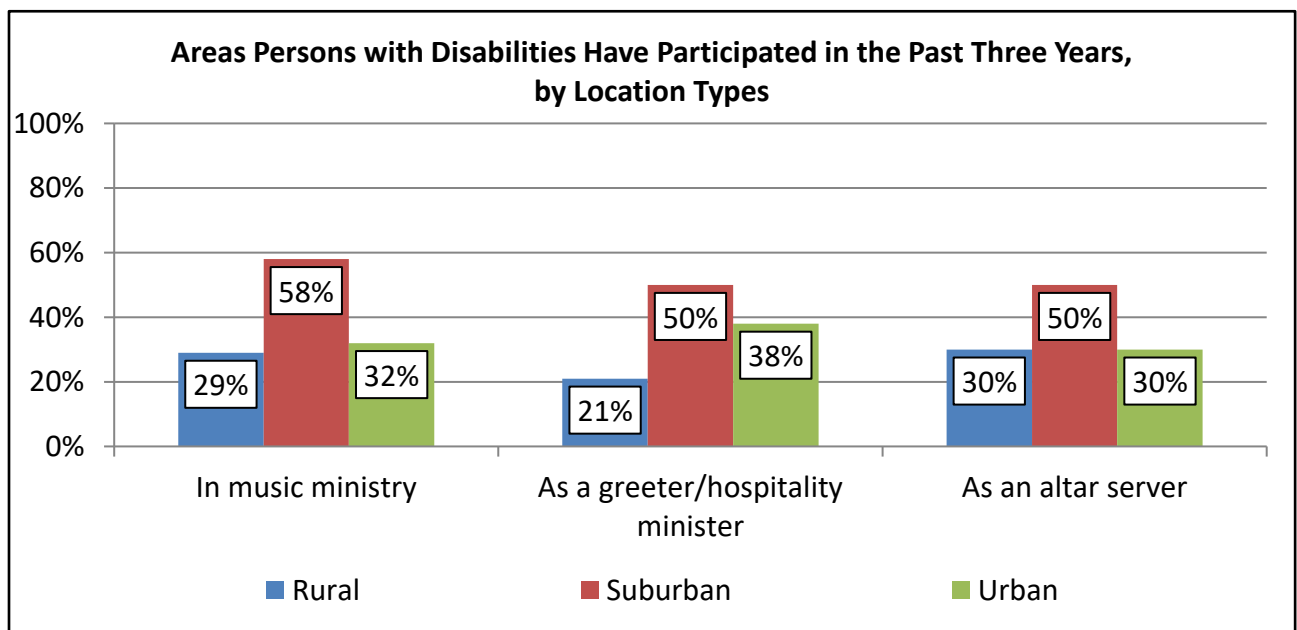


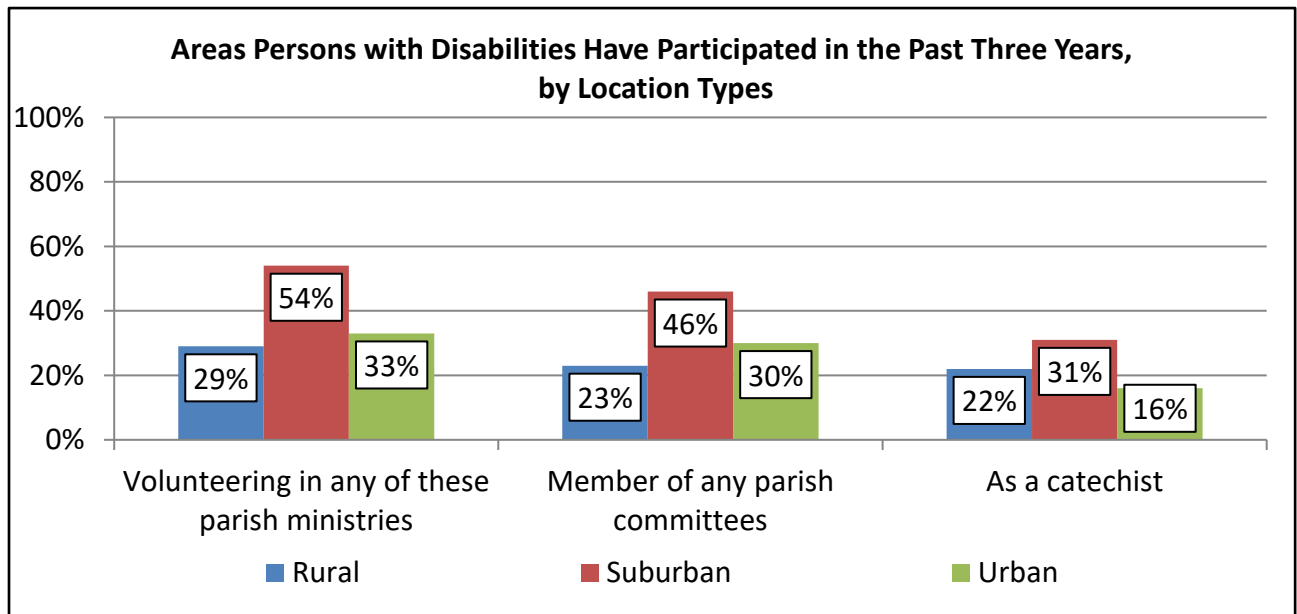
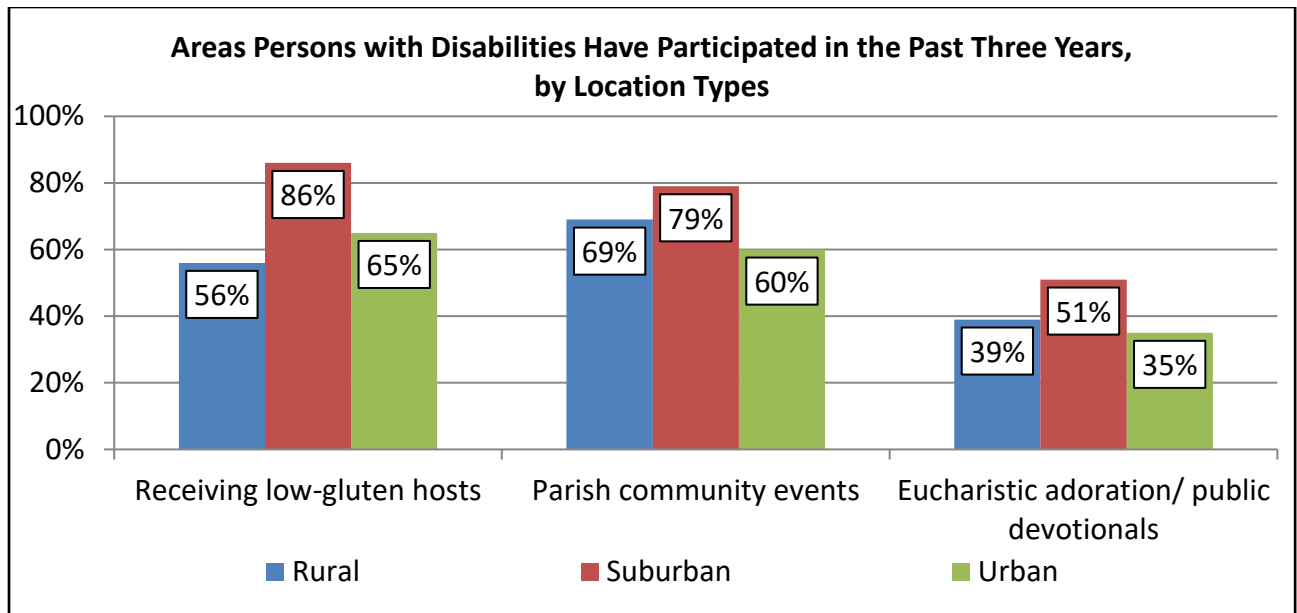
¹⁸ In this section, due to the difficulty of assessing statistically significant differences for check-all-that-apply items, only differences of 15 percentage points or more among the subgroups are treated as meaningful differences.

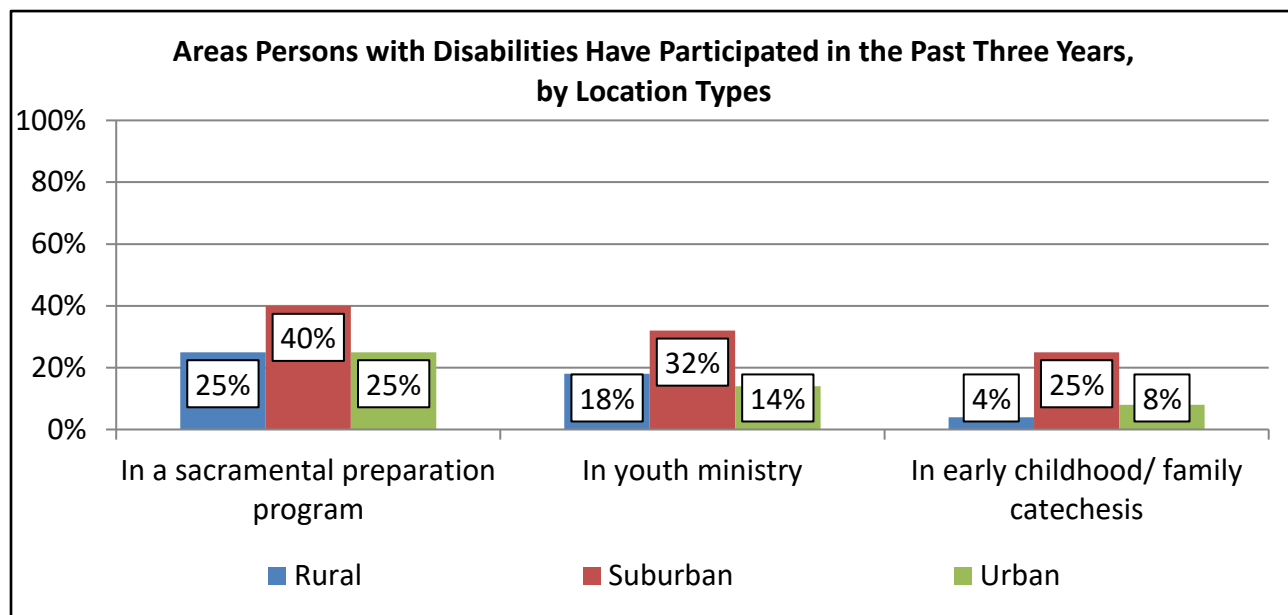


Differences by Location Types

Suburban parishes are particularly likely to report having a person with a disability participate in the 12 programs presented in the four figures below.

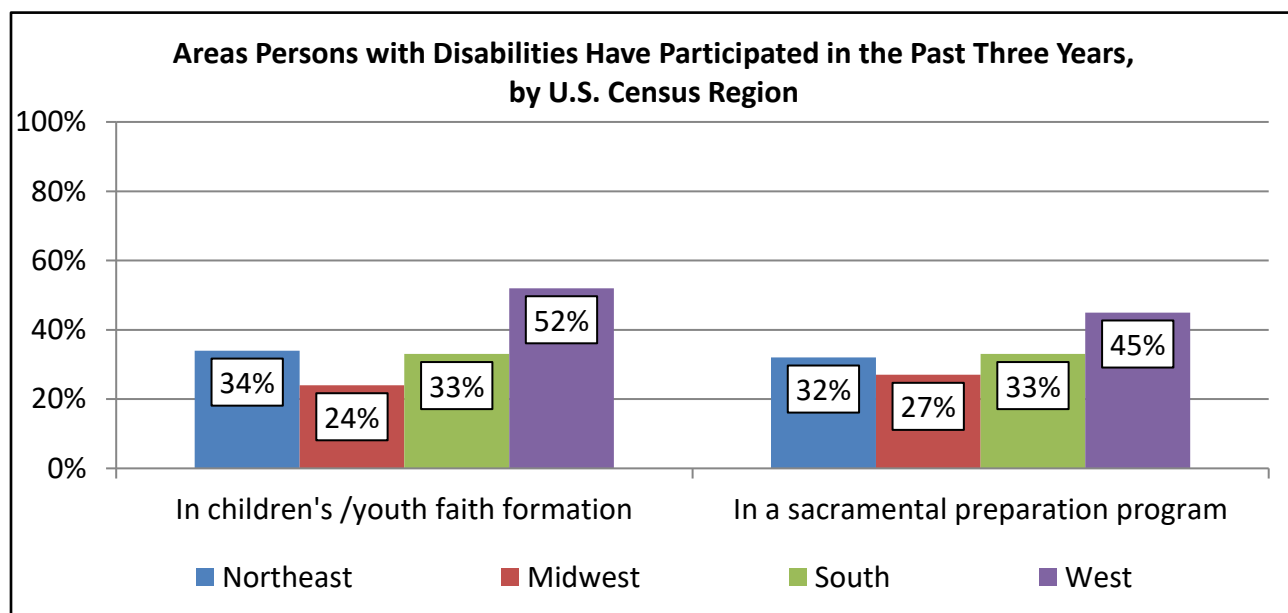




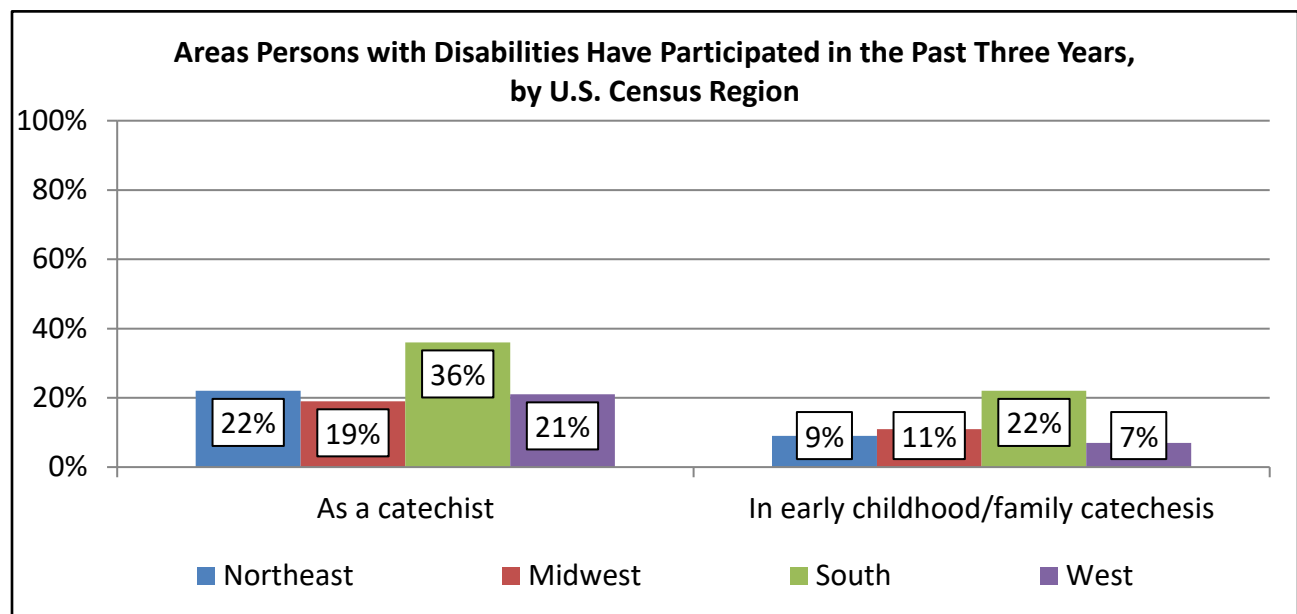


Differences by U.S. Census Regions

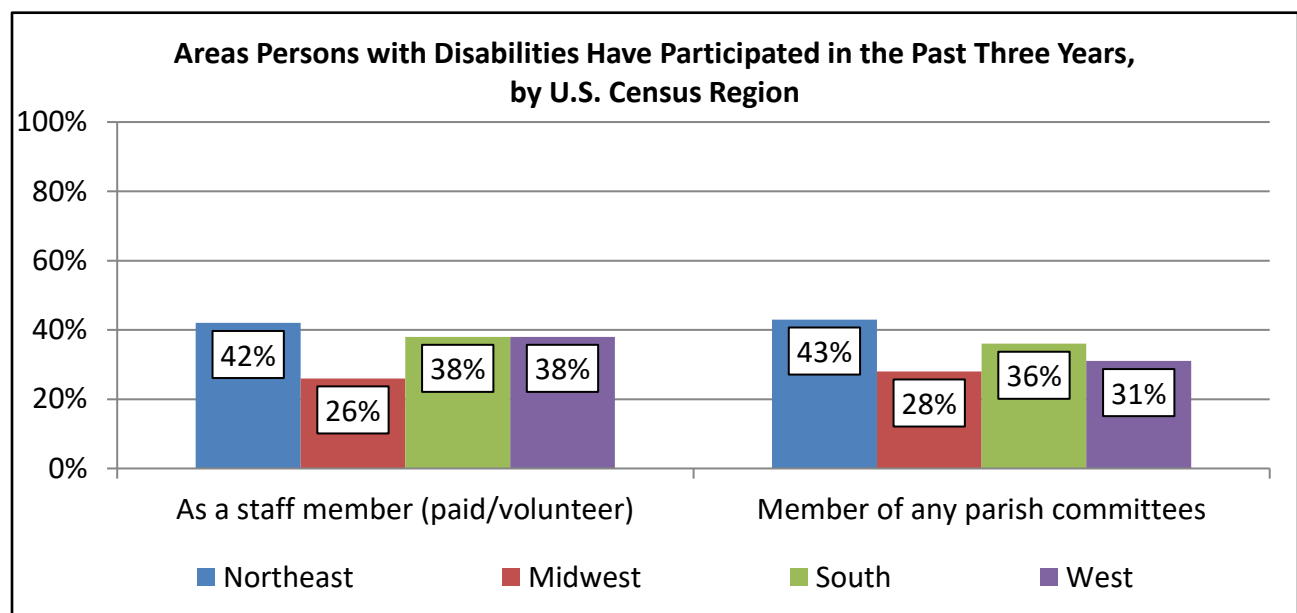
West Region parishes are particularly likely to report having a person with a disability participate in the two programs presented in the figure below.



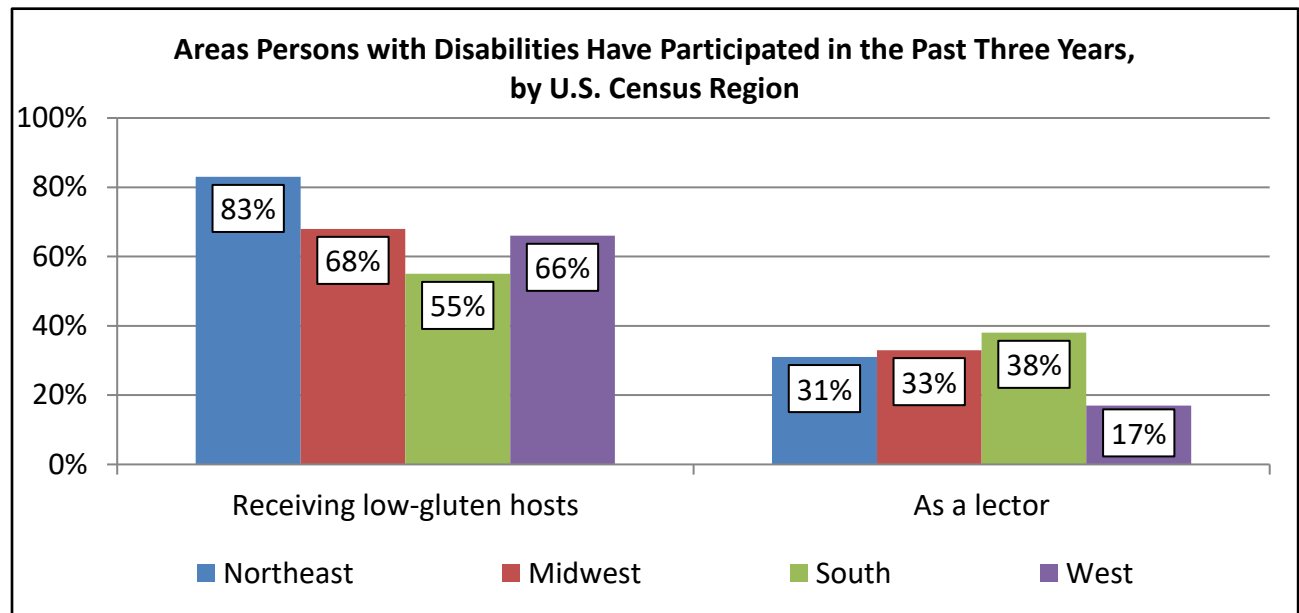
South Region parishes are particularly likely to report having a person with a disability participate in the two programs presented in the figure below.



Midwest Region parishes are *least* likely to report having a person with a disability participate in the two programs presented in the figure below.



Northeast Region parishes are most likely to report having a person with a disability receive low-gluten hosts, with those of the West Region *least* likely to have had someone participate as a lector.



Section III: Accommodations and Modifications at Parishes

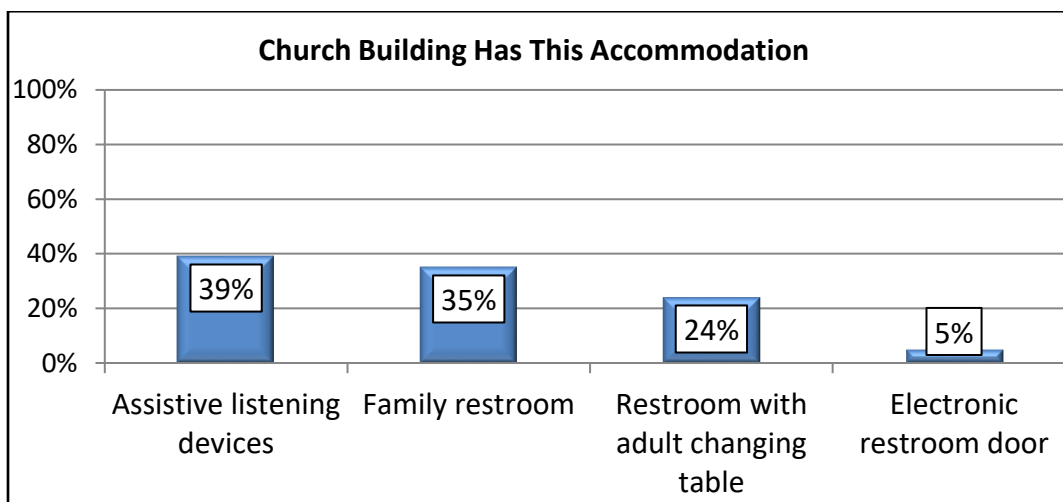
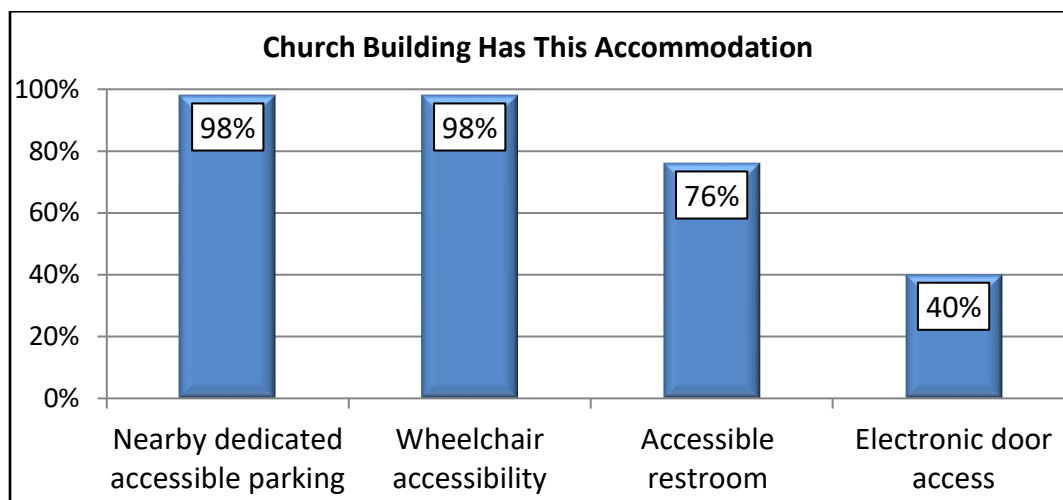
In this section, we examine the extent to which parish facilities accommodate persons with disabilities, the program accommodations they have provided for them, and the services offered to support them.

Accommodations in Facilities

Respondents were asked to identify whether their facilities had certain features to accommodate persons with disabilities. The subsections below present the findings.

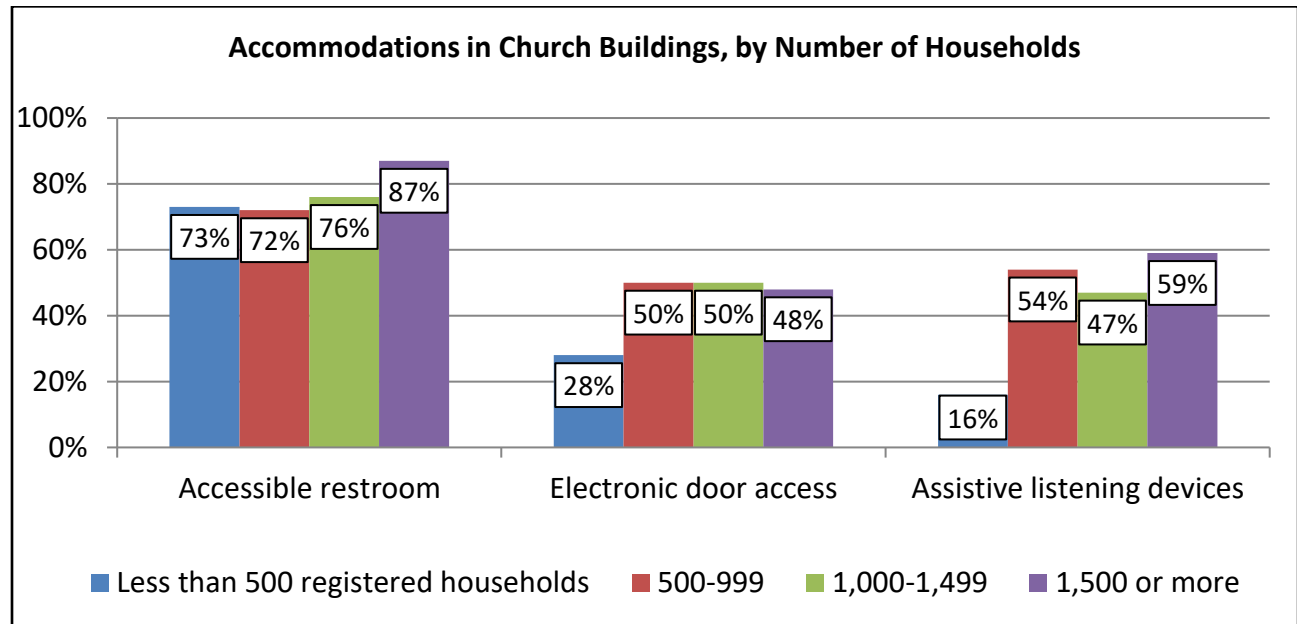
Church Buildings

For the church buildings, respondents are particularly likely to say it has nearby dedicated accessible parking (98%), wheelchair accessibility (98%) and accessible restrooms (76%). All of the accommodations asked about are shown in the figures below.



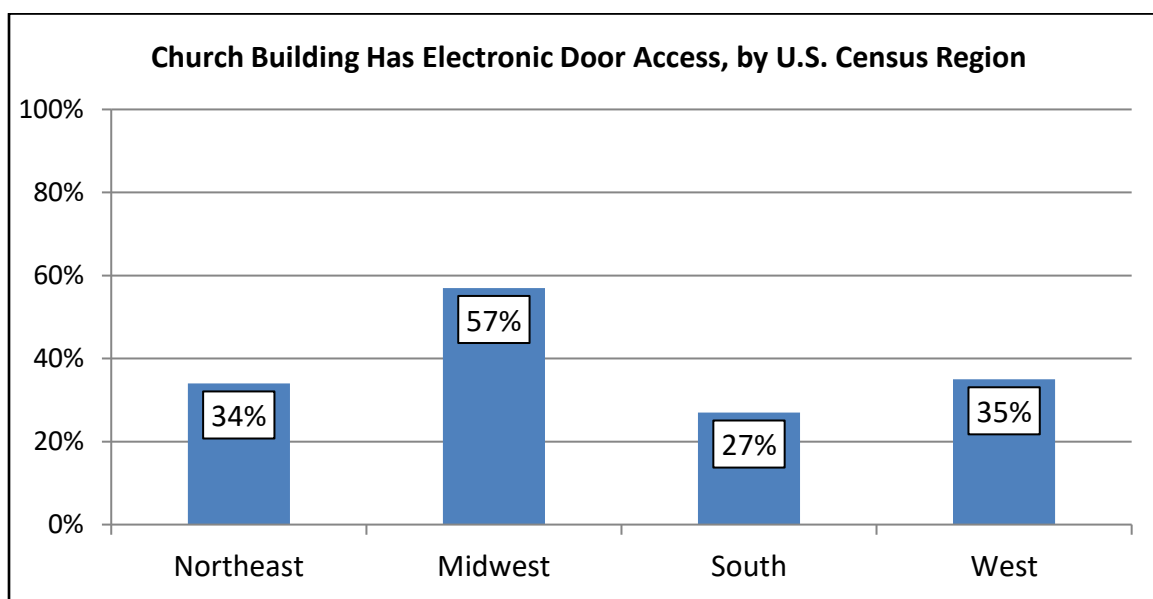
Differences by Number of Households at the Parish

The group of parishes with the largest number of registered households are most likely to have accessible restrooms in their church buildings. The group of smallest parishes are *least* likely to have electronic door access and assistive listening devices.



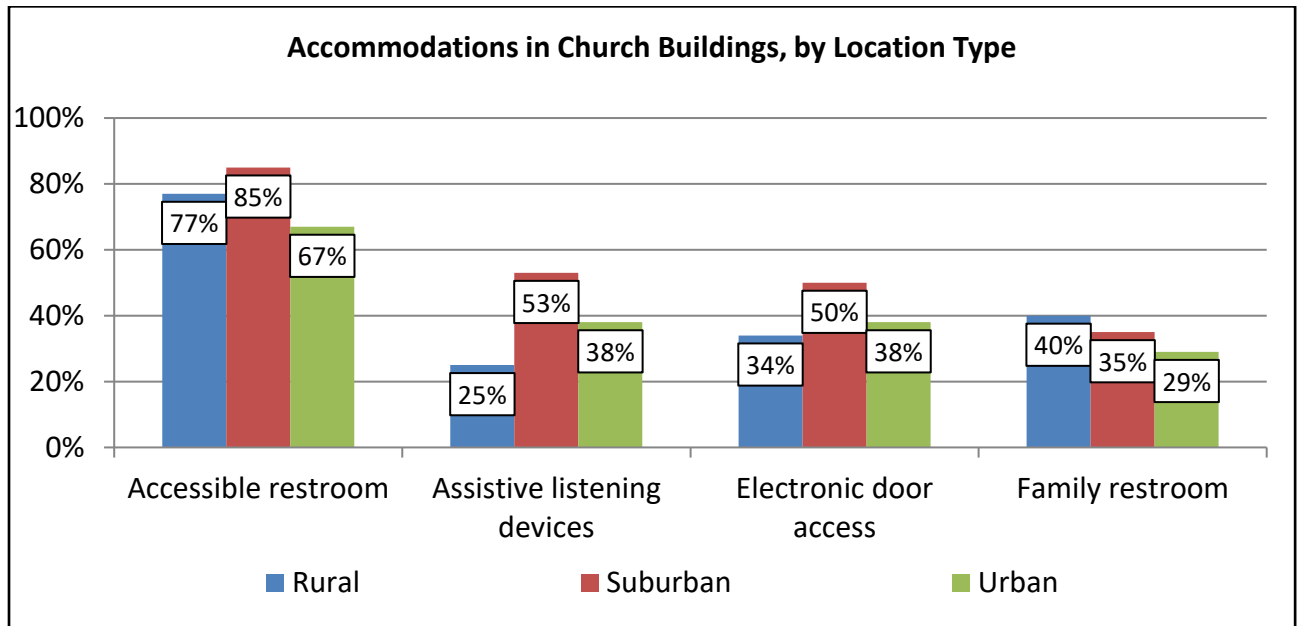
Differences by U.S. Census Regions

Midwest Region parishes are most likely to report that their church buildings have electronic door access, with those in the South Region *least* likely to do so.



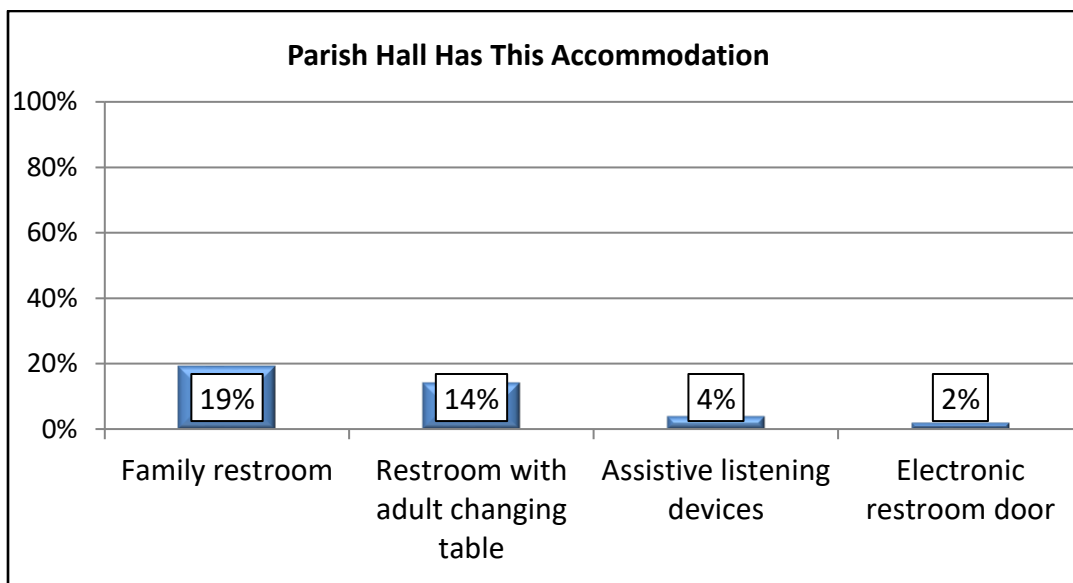
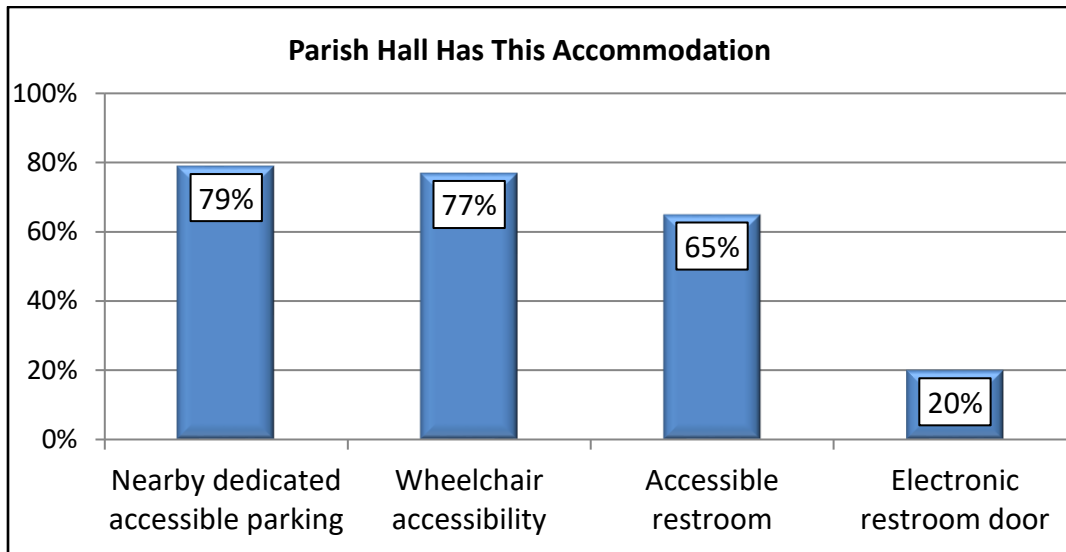
Differences by Location Type

Suburban parishes are most likely to report that their church buildings have accessible restrooms, assistive listening devices, and electronic door access. Those in urban areas are *least* likely to say they have family restrooms.



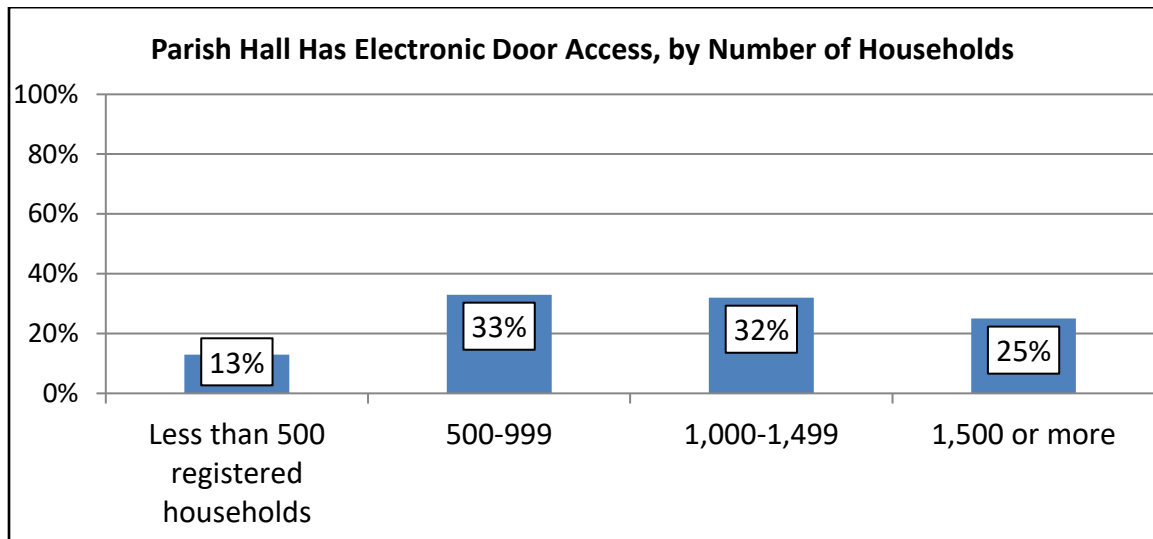
Parish Halls

More than half of responding parishes report that their parish halls do have nearby dedicated accessible parking (79%), wheelchair accessibility (77%), and accessible restrooms (65%).



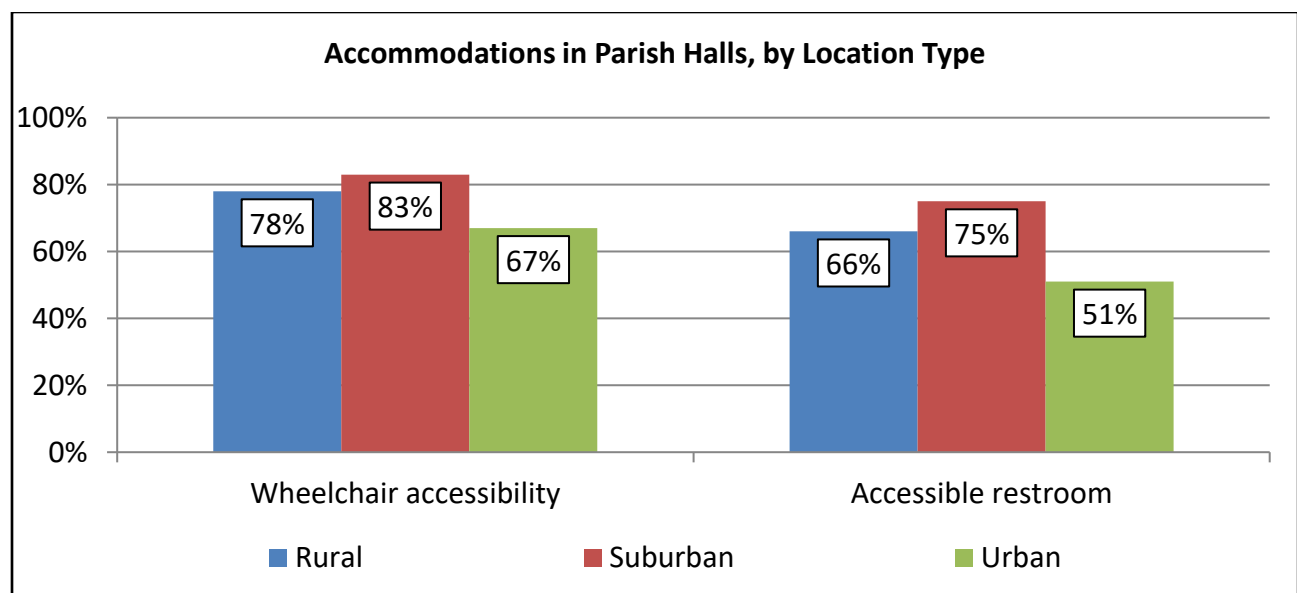
Differences by Number of Households at the Parish

Parishes with less than 500 registered households are *least* likely to have parish halls with electronic door access.¹⁹



Differences by Location Type

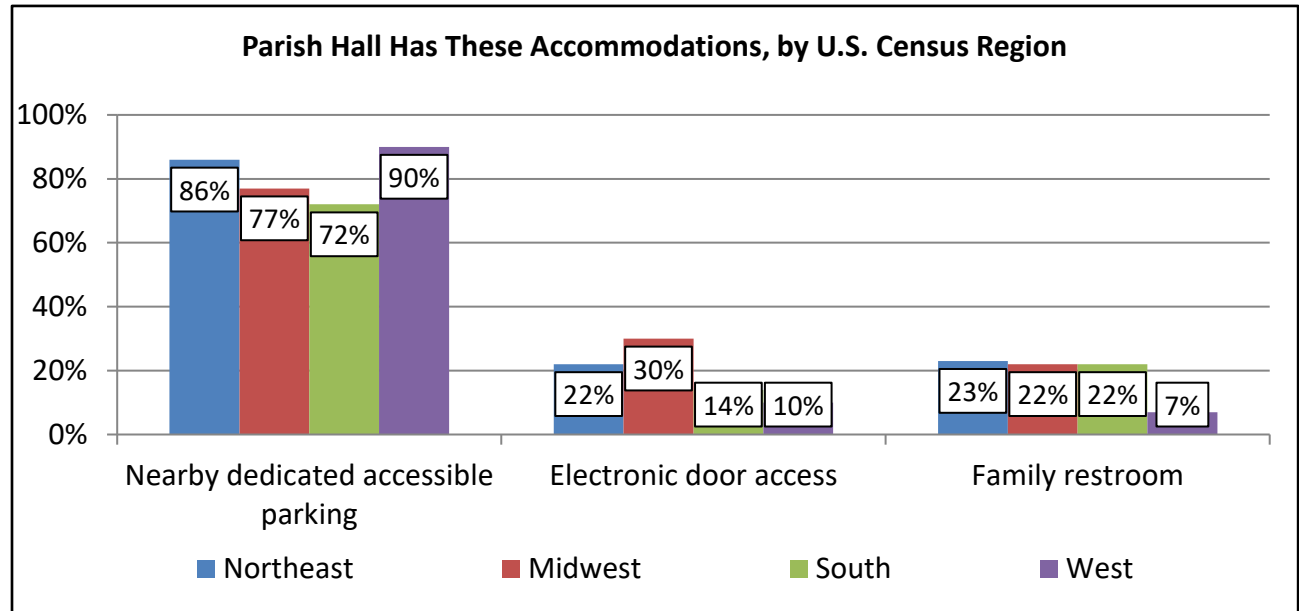
Those parishes in urban areas are *least* likely to say their parish halls have wheelchair accessibility and accessible restrooms.



¹⁹ In this section, due to the difficulty of assessing statistically significant differences for check-all-that-apply items, only differences of 15 percentage points or more among the subgroups are treated as meaningful differences.

Differences by U.S. Census Regions

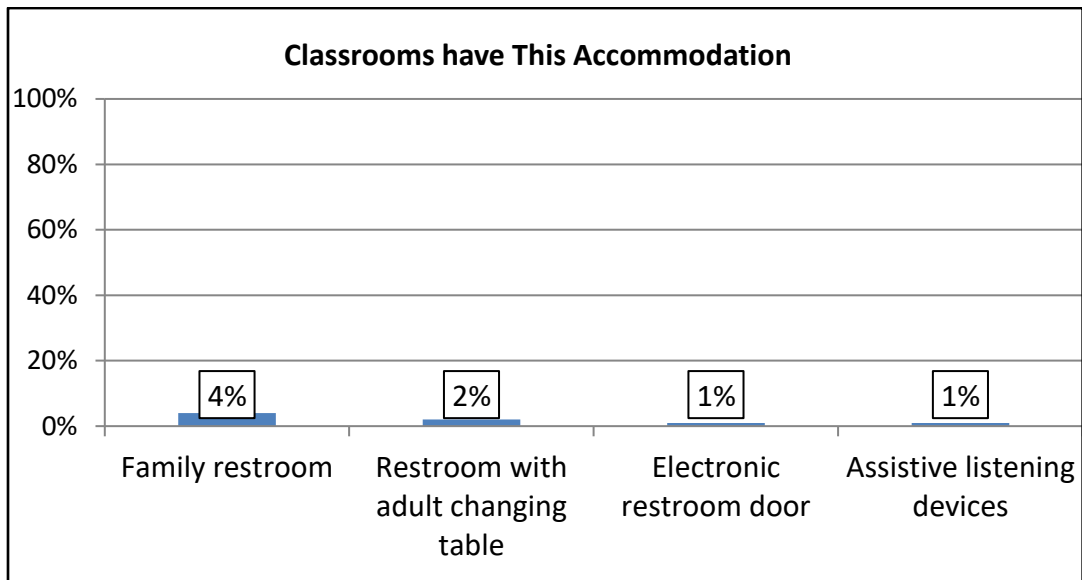
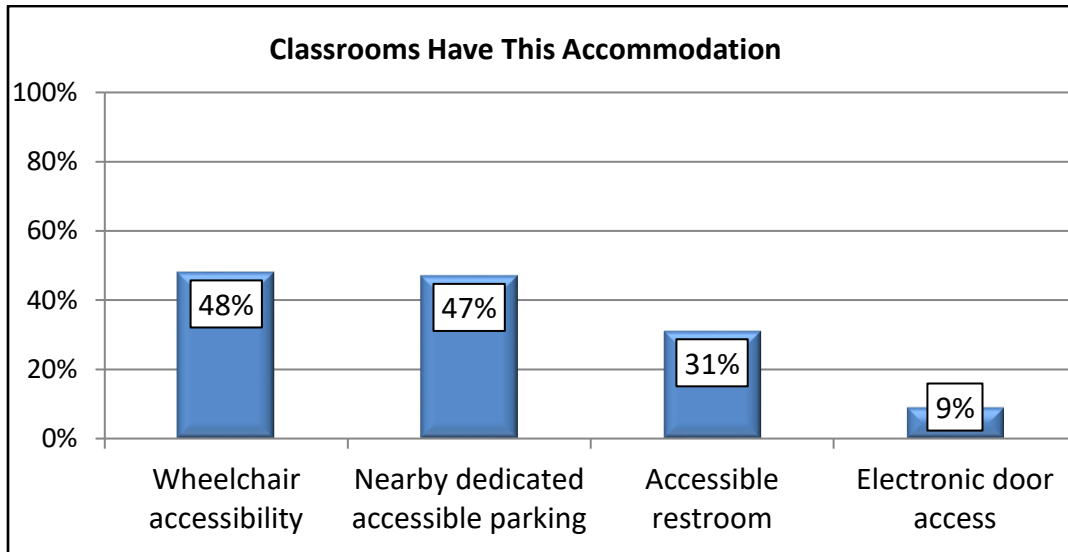
South Region parishes are *least* likely to report having parish halls with nearby dedicated accessible parking.



- Midwest Region parishes are most likely to report that their parish halls have electronic door access.
- West Region parishes are *least* likely to say their parish halls have a family restroom.

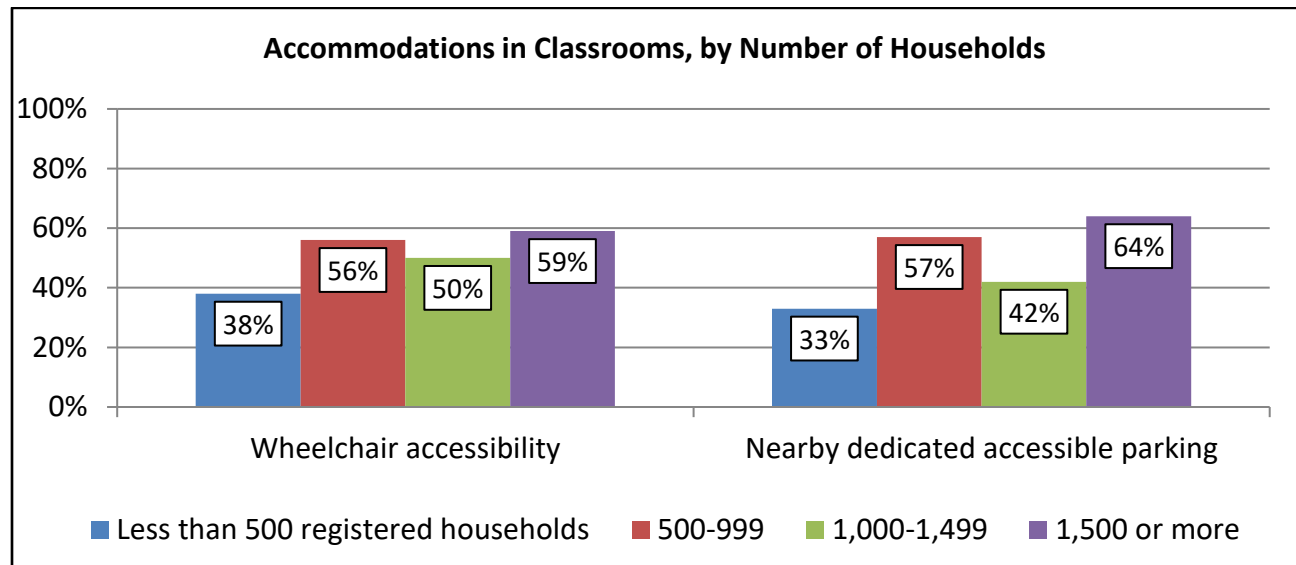
Classrooms

At least three-tenths say their parish classrooms have wheelchair accessibility (48%), nearby dedicated accessible parking (47%), and an accessible restroom (31%).



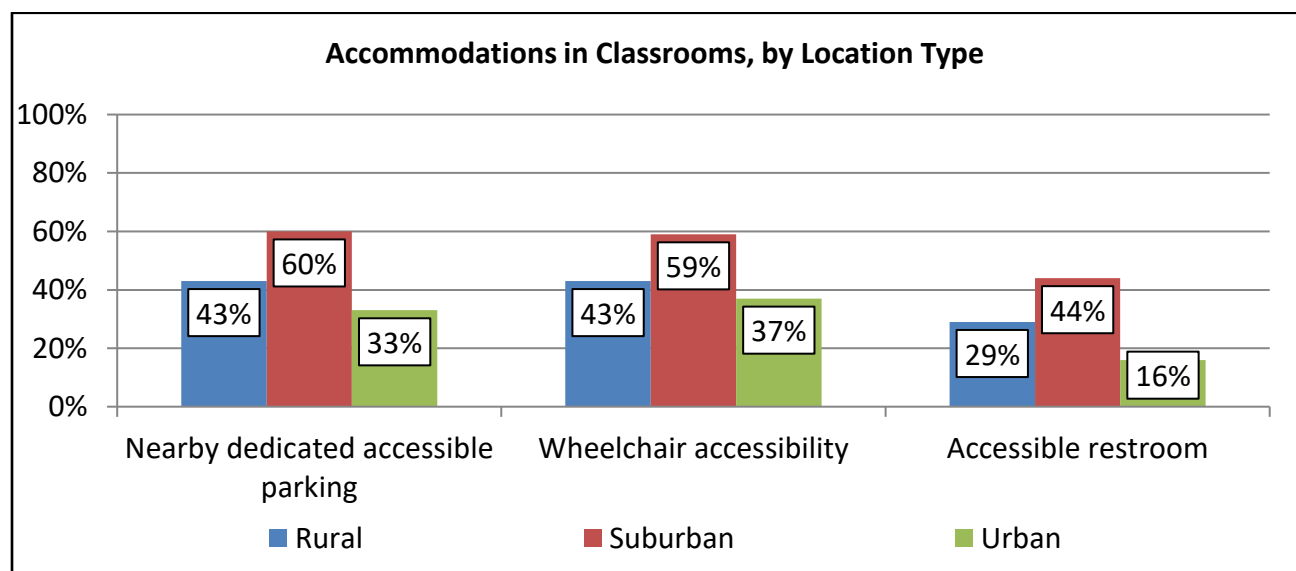
Differences by Number of Households at the Parish

The group of parishes with the smallest number of registered households are *least* likely to have classrooms with wheelchair accessibility and nearby dedicated accessible parking.²⁰



Differences by Location Type

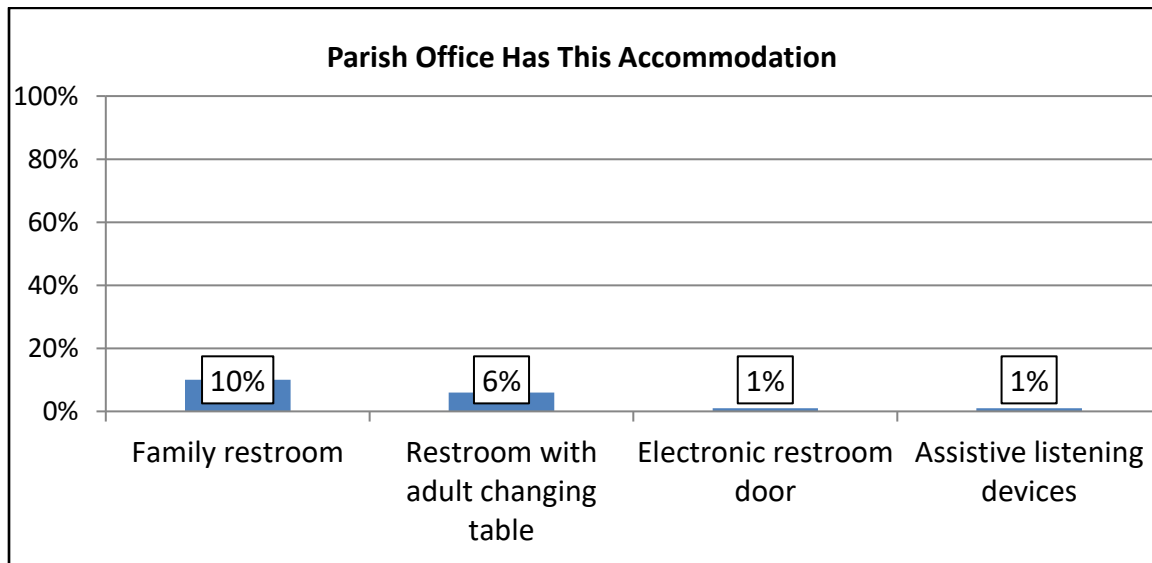
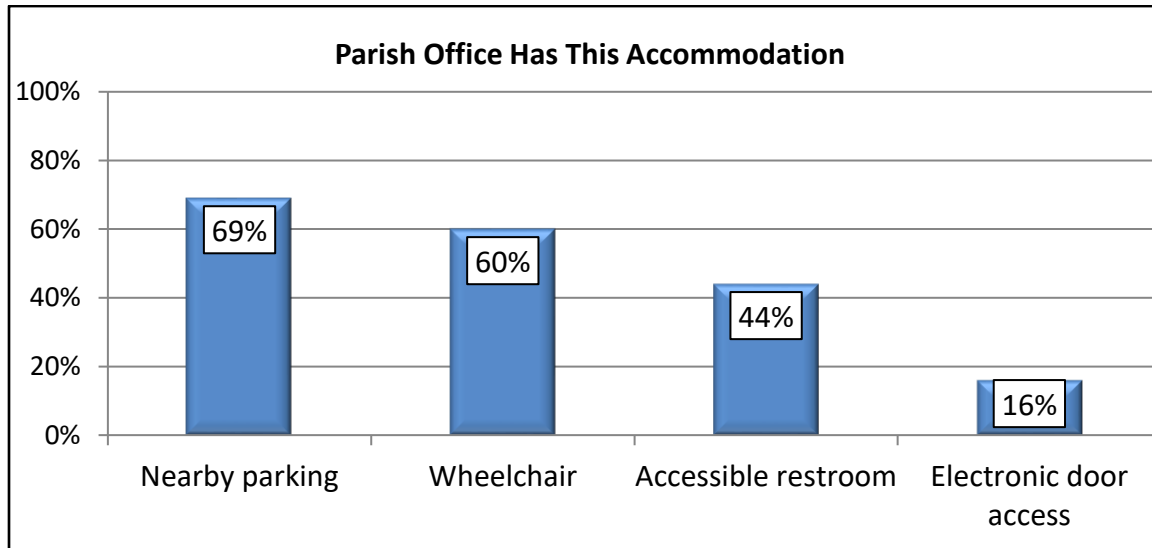
Suburban parishes are most likely to say their classrooms have the three accommodations presented in the figure below, with those in urban areas *least* likely to say they have them.



²⁰ In this section, due to the difficulty of assessing statistically significant differences for check-all-that-apply items, only differences of 15 percentage points or more among the subgroups are treated as meaningful differences.

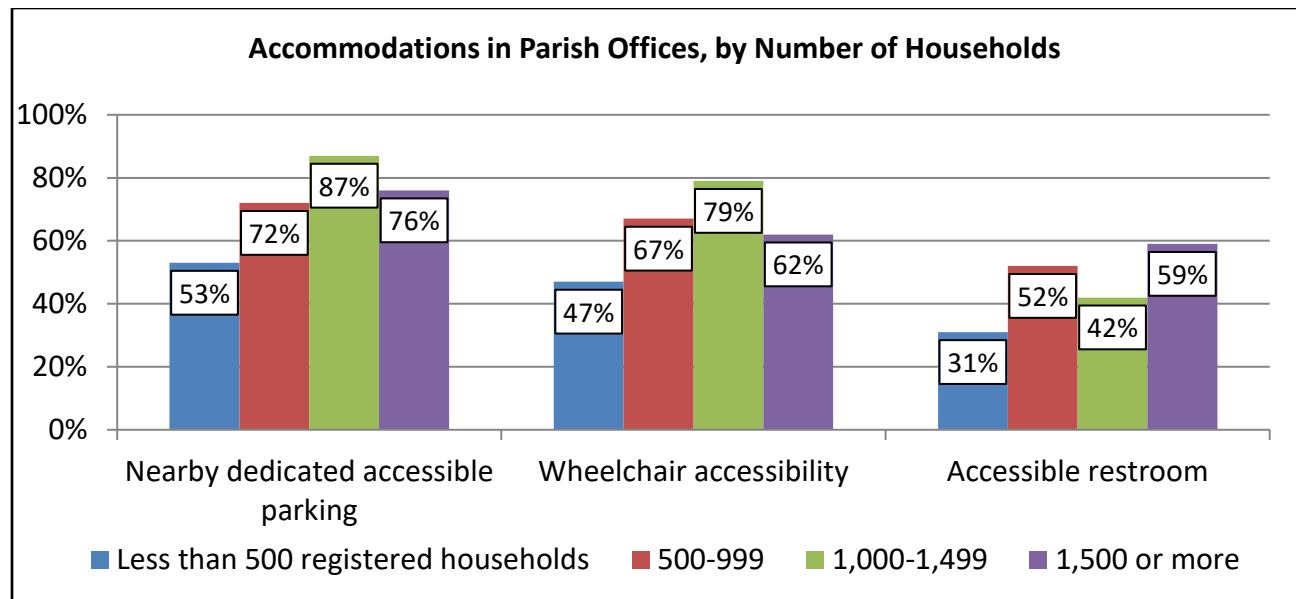
Parish Offices

At least two in five responding parishes have nearby dedicated accessible parking (69%), wheelchair access (60%), and an accessible restroom (44%).



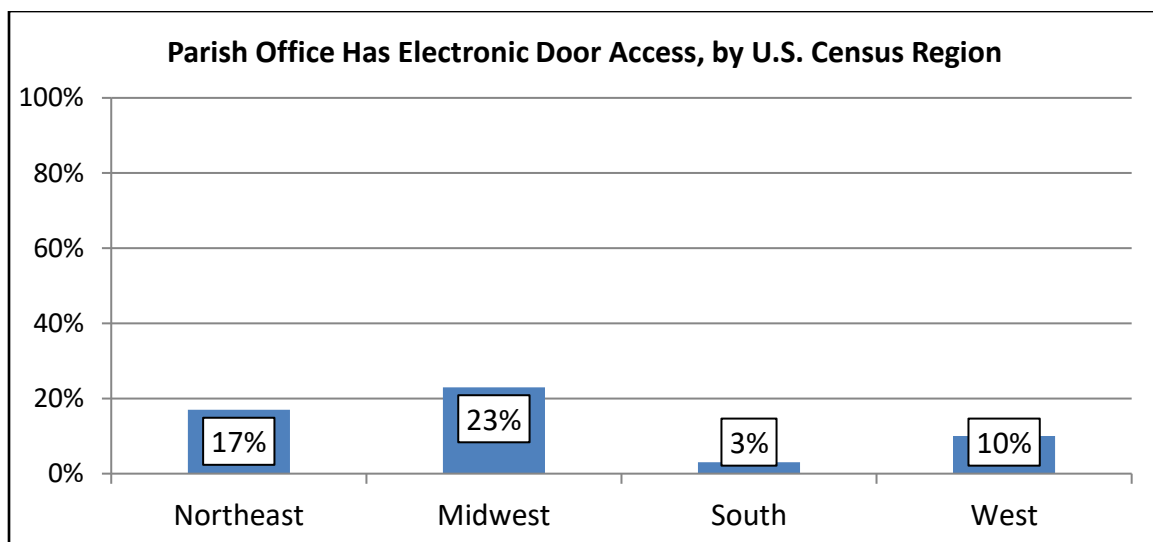
Differences by Number of Households at the Parish

Parishes with the smallest number of registered households are *least* likely to have the accommodations presented in the figure below.²¹



Differences by U.S. Census Regions

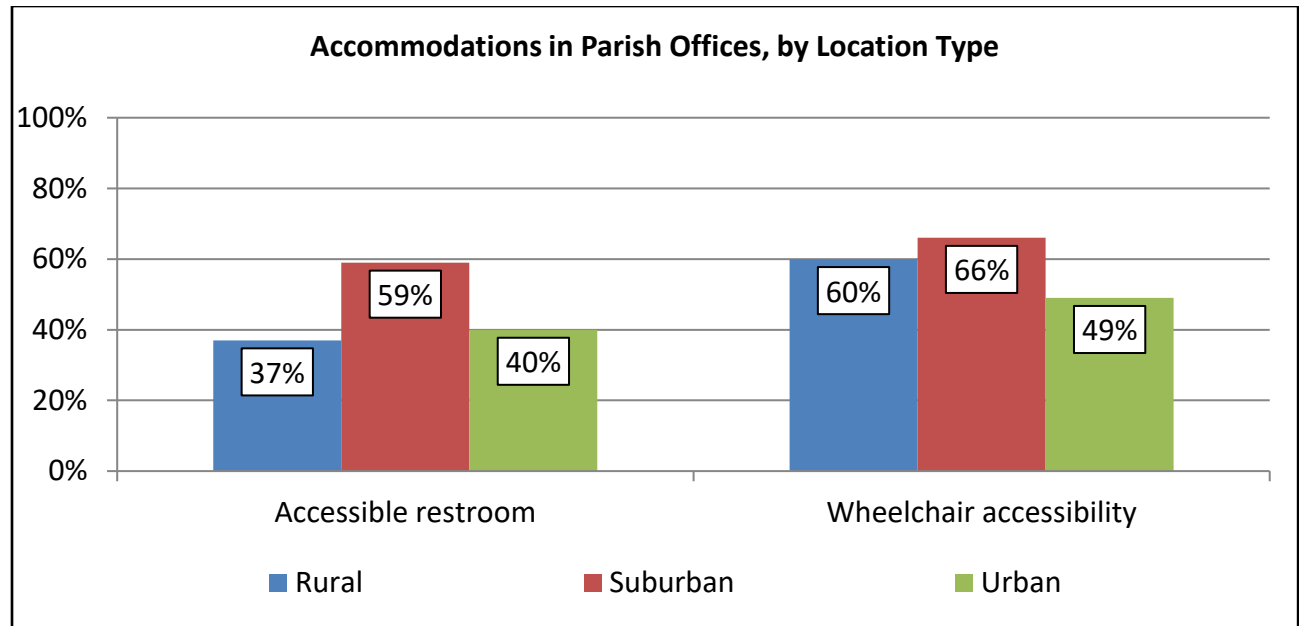
Midwest Census Region parishes are most likely to report that their parish offices have electronic door access, with those in the South Region *least* likely to do so.



²¹ In this section, due to the difficulty of assessing statistically significant differences for check-all-that-apply items, only differences of 15 percentage points or more among the subgroups are treated as meaningful differences.

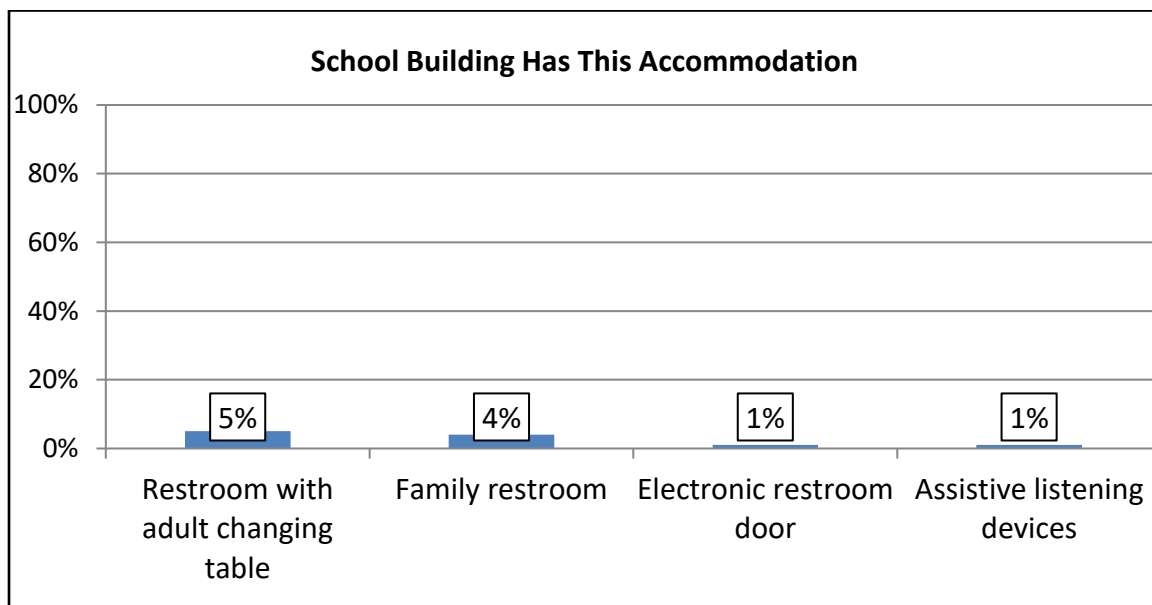
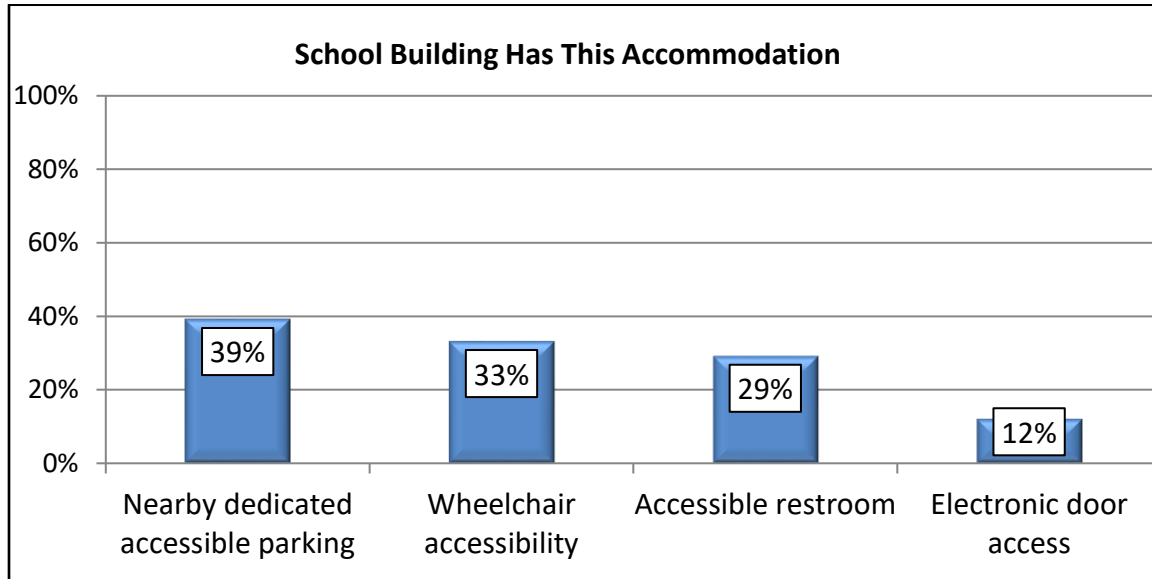
Differences by Location Type

Parishes in urban areas are *least* likely to say their parish offices have wheelchair accessibility and accessible restrooms.



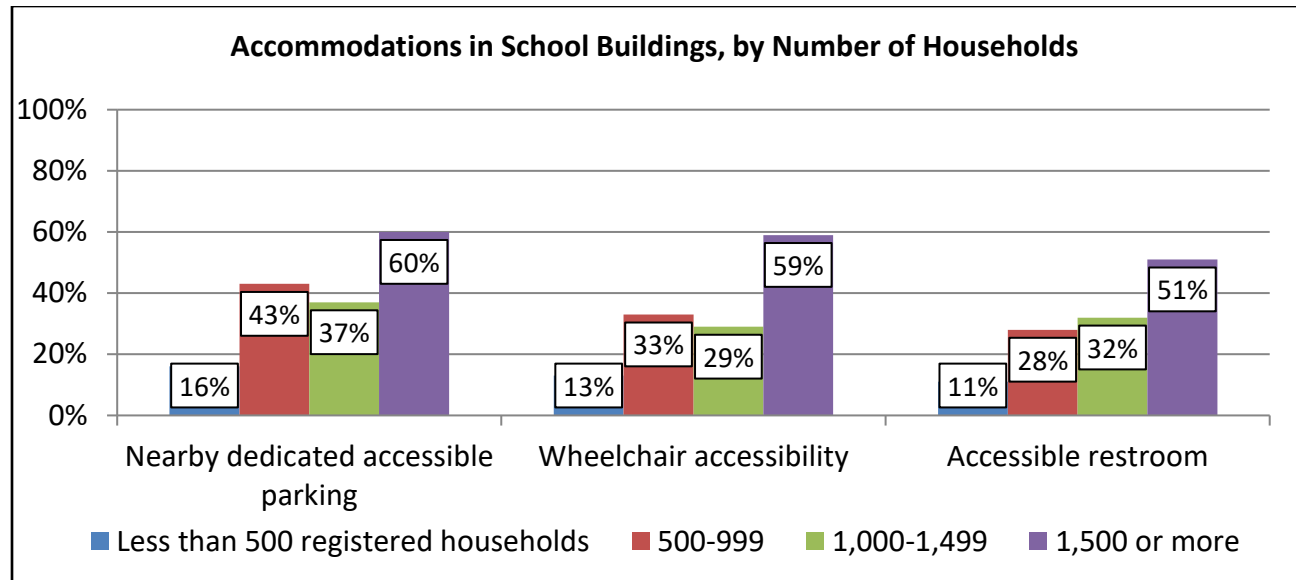
Parish School Buildings

At least a quarter of parishes say their school buildings have nearby dedicated accessible parking (39%), wheelchair accessibility (33%), and accessible restrooms (29%).



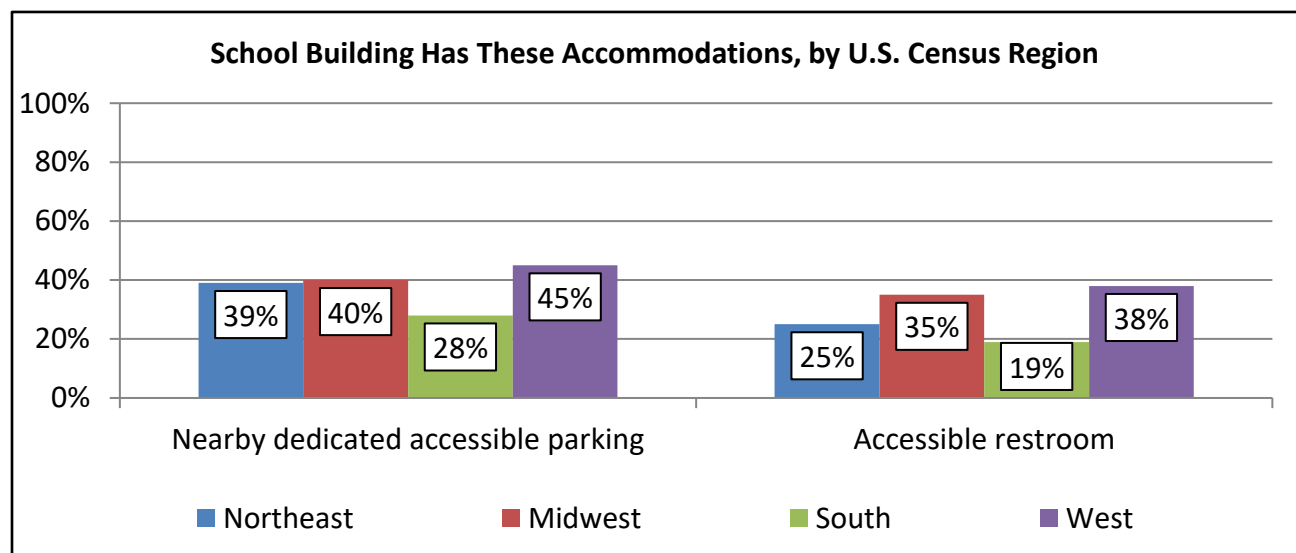
Differences by Number of Households at the Parish

Parishes with the largest number of households are most likely to have parish offices with nearby dedicated accessible parking, wheelchair accessibility, and accessible restrooms.²²



Differences by U.S. Census Regions

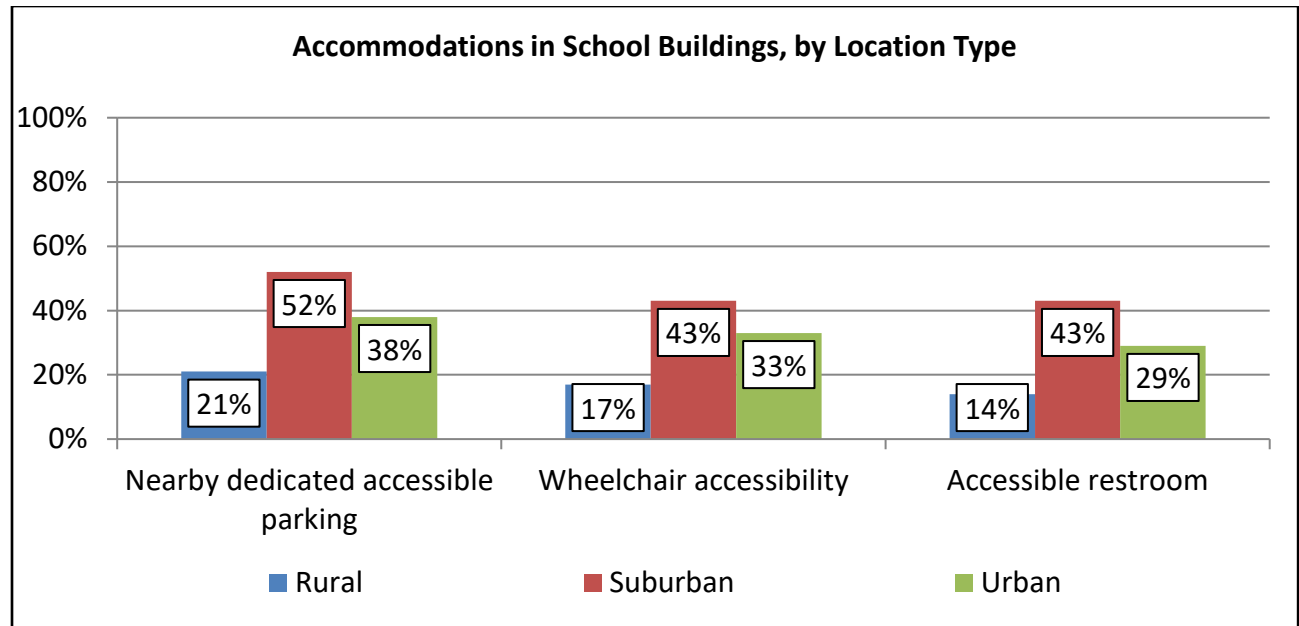
South Region parishes are *least* likely to report having parish school buildings with nearby dedicated accessible parking or accessible restrooms.



²² In this section, due to the difficulty of assessing statistically significant differences for check-all-that-apply items, only differences of 15 percentage points or more among the subgroups are treated as meaningful differences.

Differences by Location Type

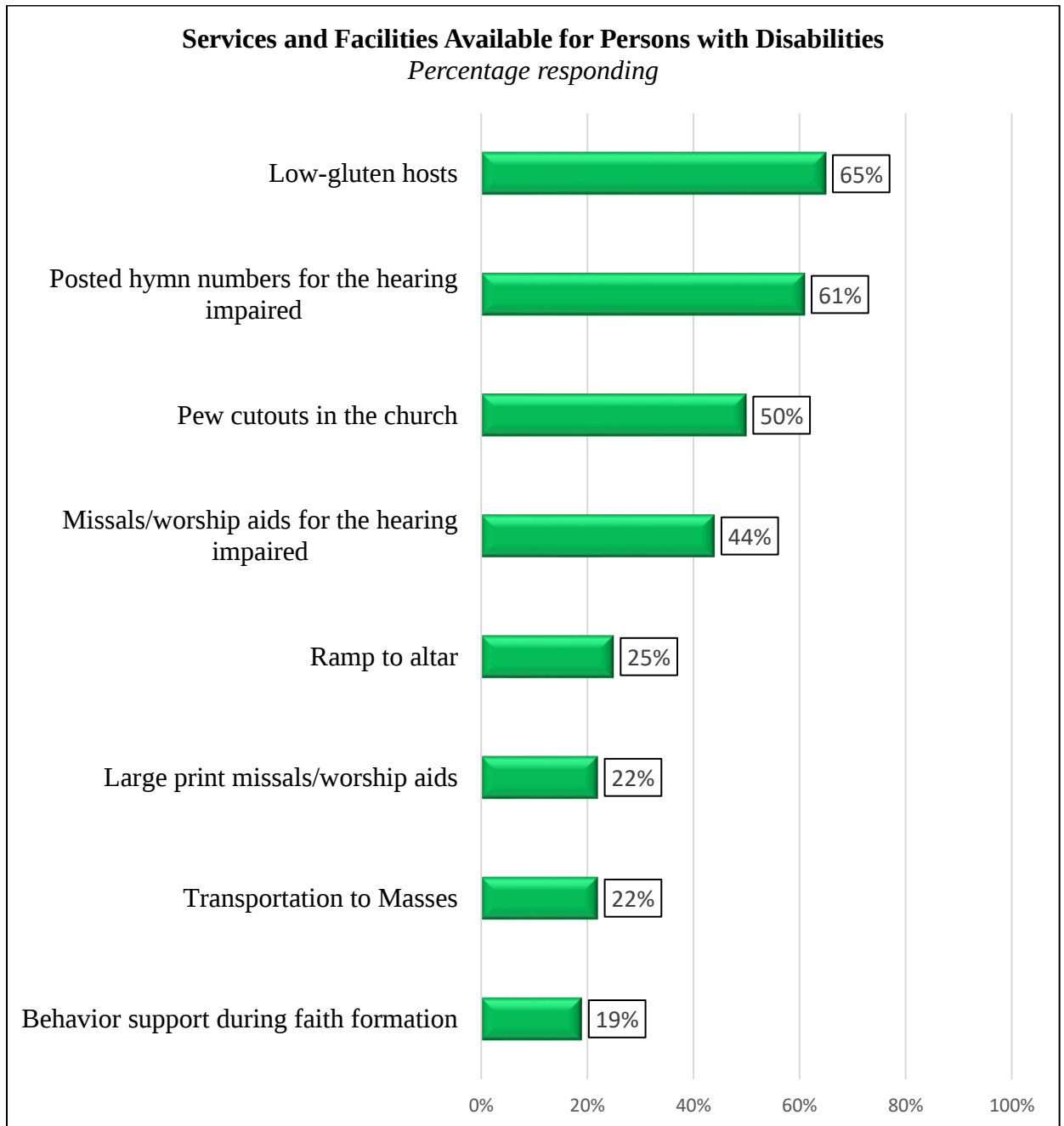
Those parishes in urban areas are *least* likely to say their school buildings have nearby dedicated accessible parking, wheelchair accessibility and accessible restrooms.



Services and Facilities Available for Persons with Disabilities

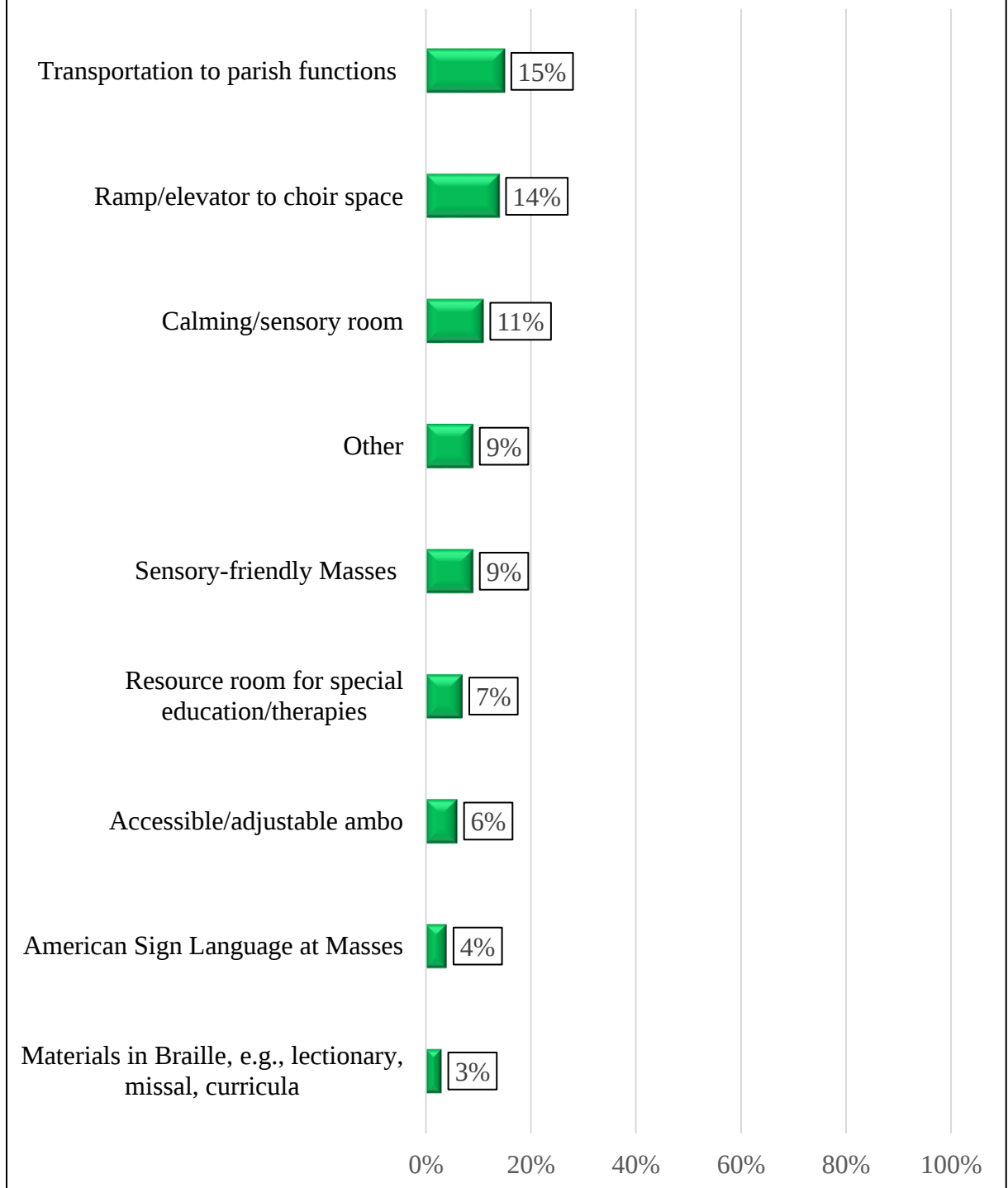
Parishioners were asked to mention the percentage of the services and facilities made available for the persons with disabilities under different categories. The two figures below display the findings.

The services and facilities most commonly provided by parishes are low-gluten hosts (65%), posted hymn numbers for the hearing impaired (61%), pew cutouts in the church (50%), and missals/worship aids for the hearing impaired (44%).



Services and Facilities Available for Persons with Disabilities

Percentage responding



Among the 9% responding “other,” nine mentioned hearing-related accommodations, six mentioned elevators or lifts, three mentioned that their liturgies are projected on to screens, and three mentioned outside ramps. Two each mentioned accommodations to their bathrooms, seating accommodations, the parish providing wheelchairs and walkers as needed/requested, and hand railings. The others were mentioned by one responding parish each. Their responses are provided below.

Accessibility is only in the back of the church not in the front

Accessible bathroom

ADA entry doors, under sink knee guards for wheelchairs in bathrooms

All of our Music is projected

Deaf Church- all in ASL with Spanish/English voice over

Designated seating area

Elevator

Elevator in building. All areas accessible.

Elevator to access the Church

Elevator to basement classrooms

Elevator, wheelchairs, walkers and other assisted devices available on need basis, headphones for hearing challenged, also have one scooter for use if needed

FM Hearing Devices

Hand Railings

Headsets for those losing hearing

Hearing aid device

Hearing devices

Hearing devices for church

Homebound Ministry - livestreaming of Masses, taking Communion to home

Large Screens in Church

Lift/elevator to altar

Outside ramps

Parishioners always willing to do anything to help someone in need

Precious blood only

Ramp to church

Ramp to church entrance

Readings & words of songs projected on Large screen behind the Altar

The Diocese of [Name] offers Sensory Friendly Masses, Catechetical training for those children with special needs. We have worked with those who are hearing impaired individually when they come forward to assist with WiFi for their hearing apps. We do have a railing for the one step to the altar. We do have a ramp if needed to altar, but it has not been used in years. It is no longer in the Sanctuary.

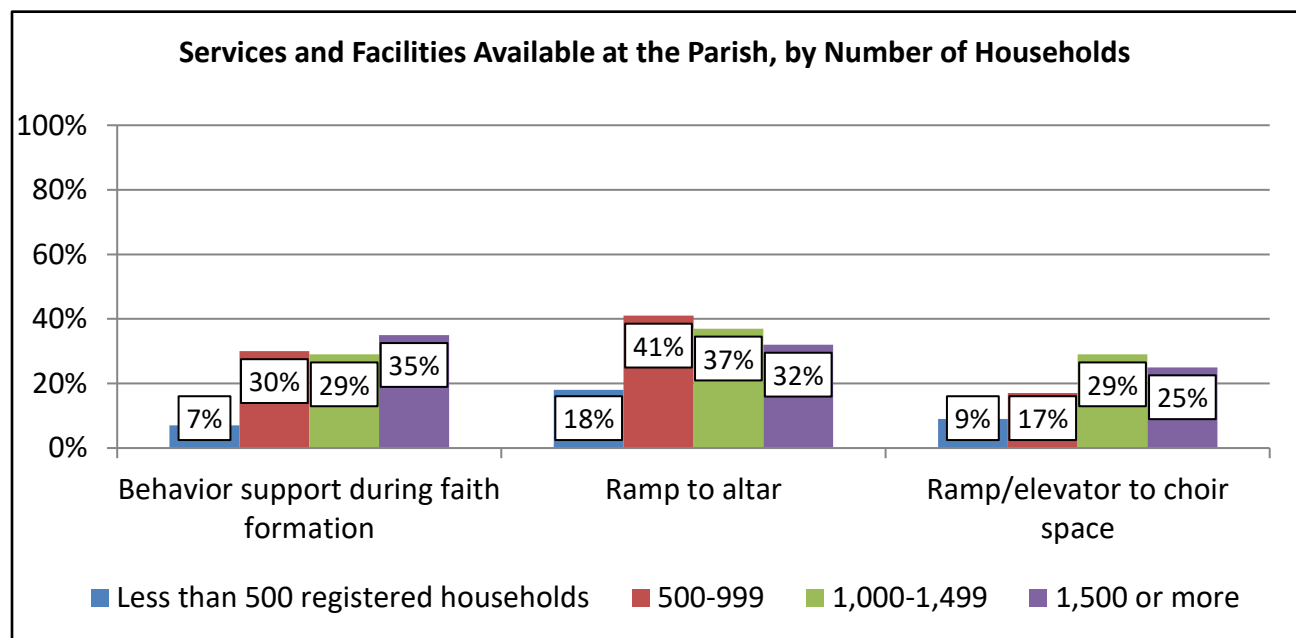
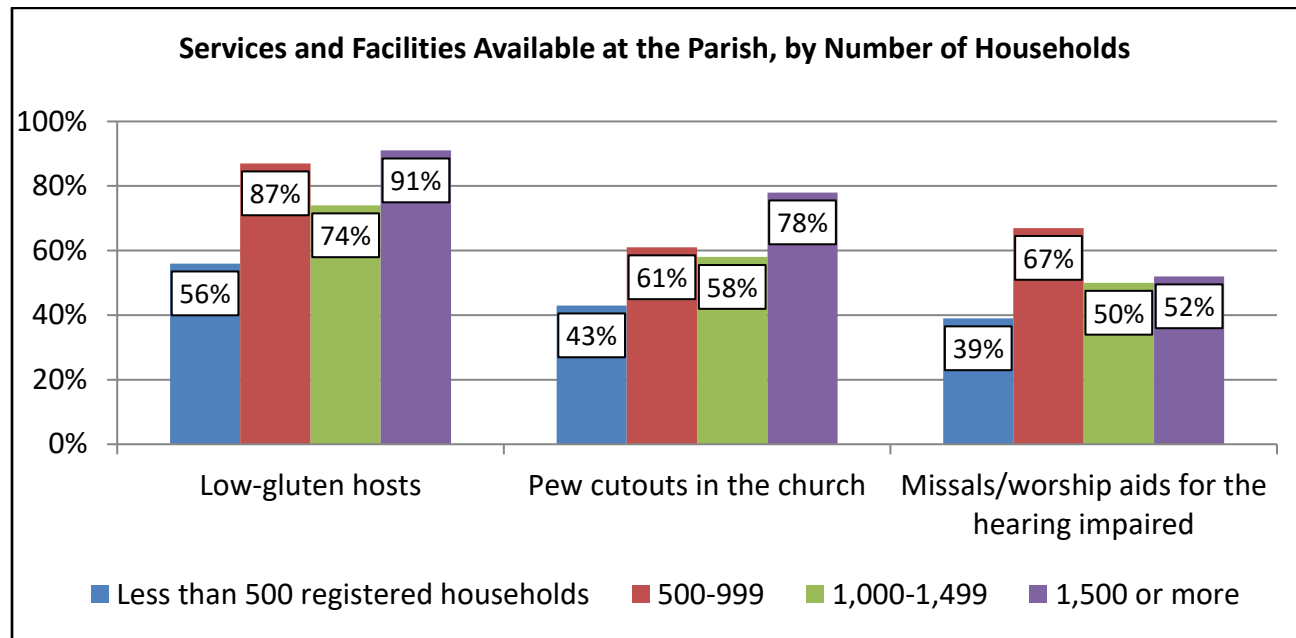
The Loop hearing assist

We don't have pews - chairs that can be and are moved to accommodate persons in wheelchairs.

Wheelchairs available

Differences by Number of Households at the Parish

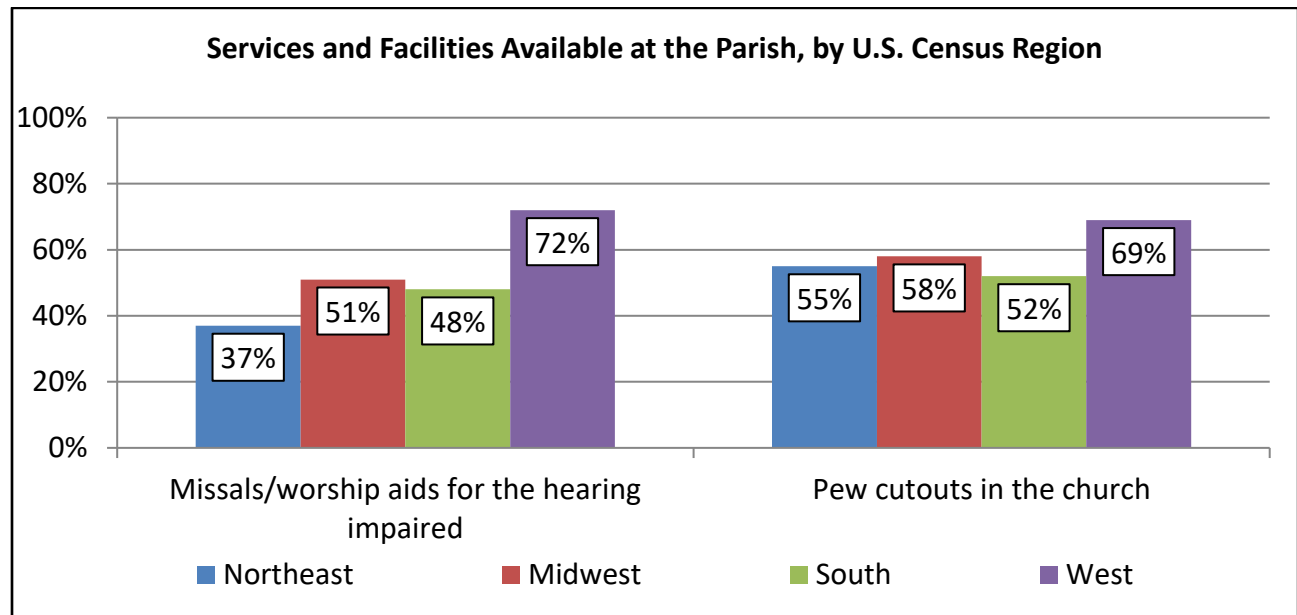
Parishes with the smallest number of registered households are *least* likely to report having the six services and facilities shown in the two figures below.²³



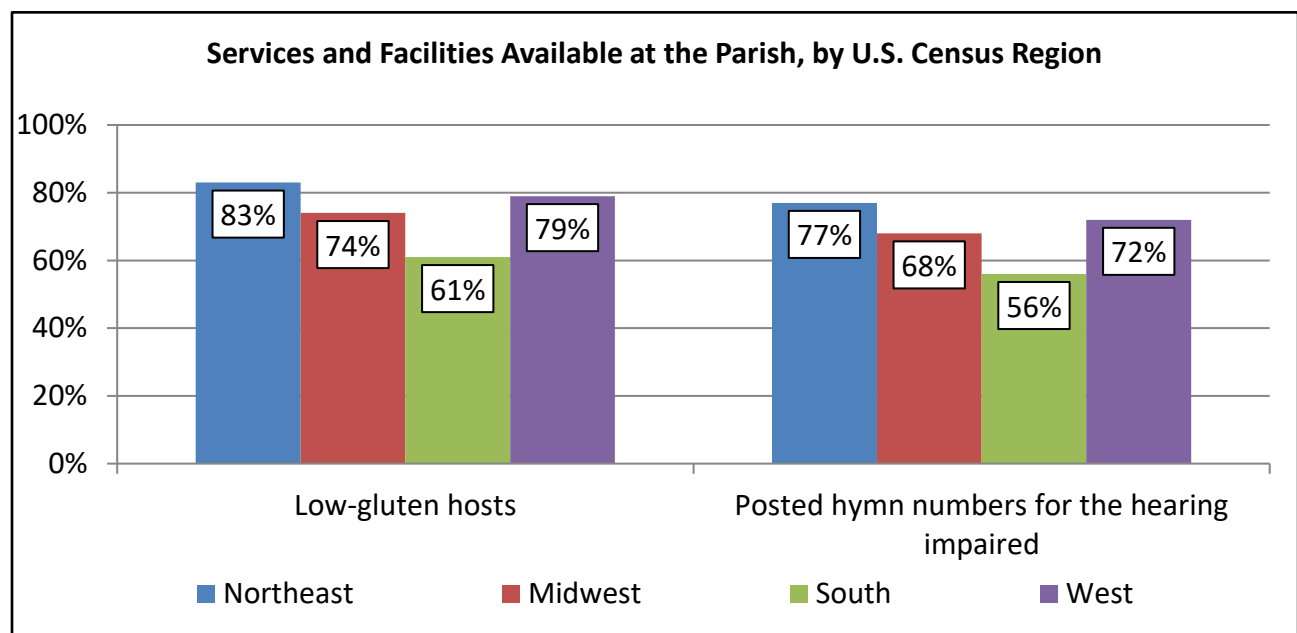
²³ In this section, due to the difficulty of assessing statistically significant differences for check-all-that-apply items, only differences of 15 percentage points or more among the subgroups are treated as meaningful differences.

Differences by U.S. Census Regions

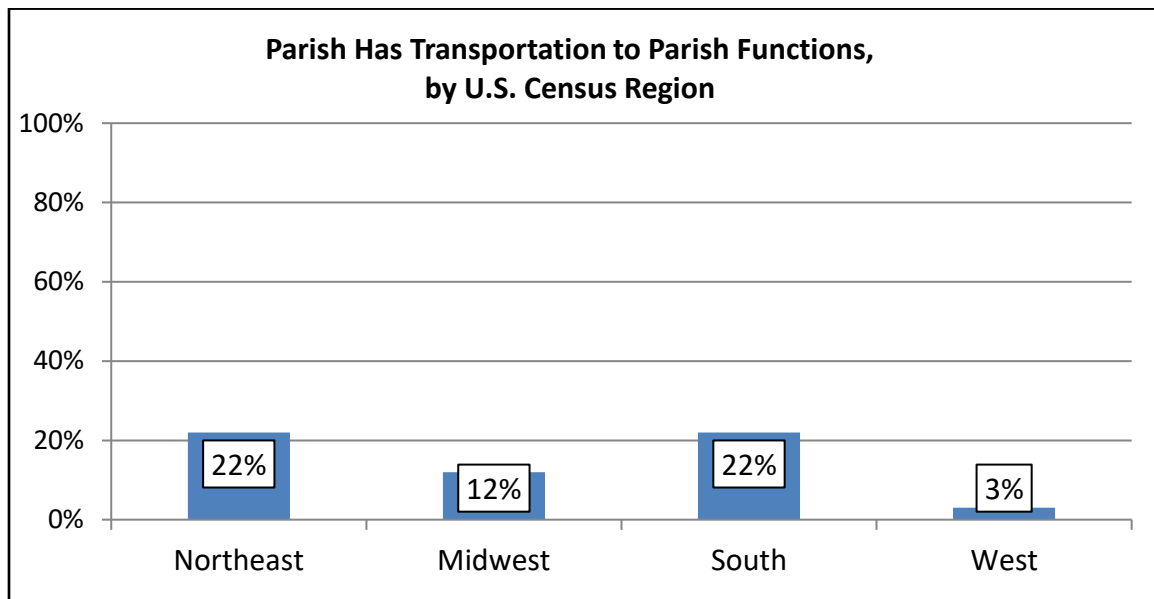
West Region parishes are most likely to report having missals/worship aids for the hearing impaired and pew cutouts in their churches.



South Region parishes are *least* likely to report having low-gluten hosts and posted hymn numbers for the hearing impaired.

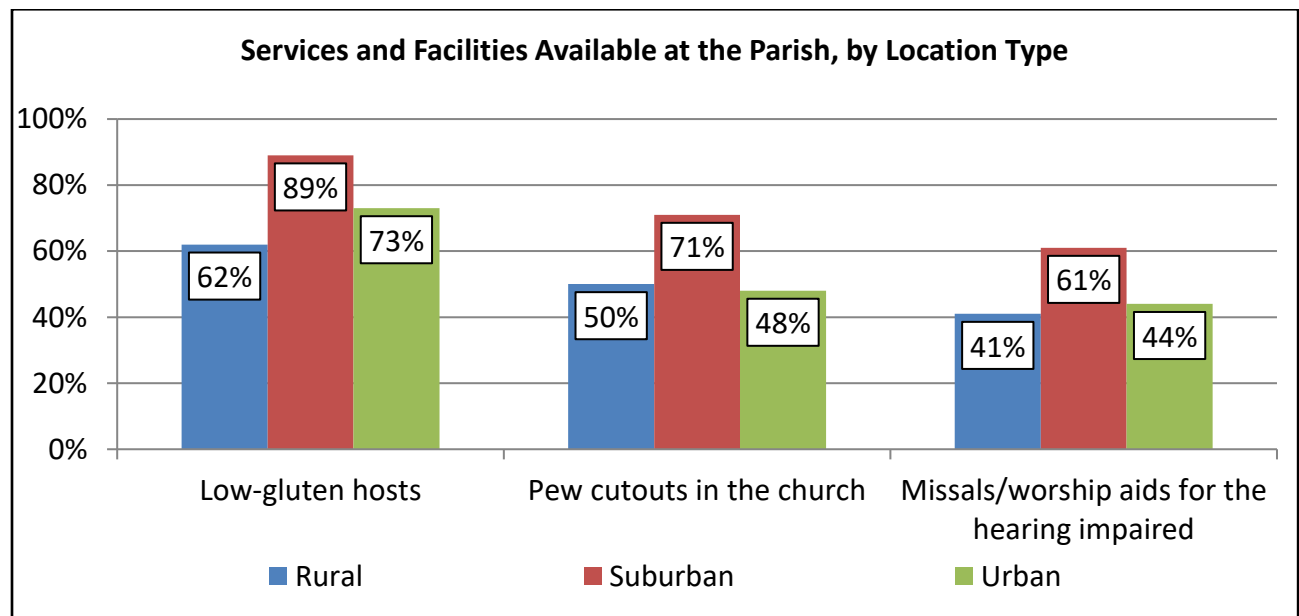


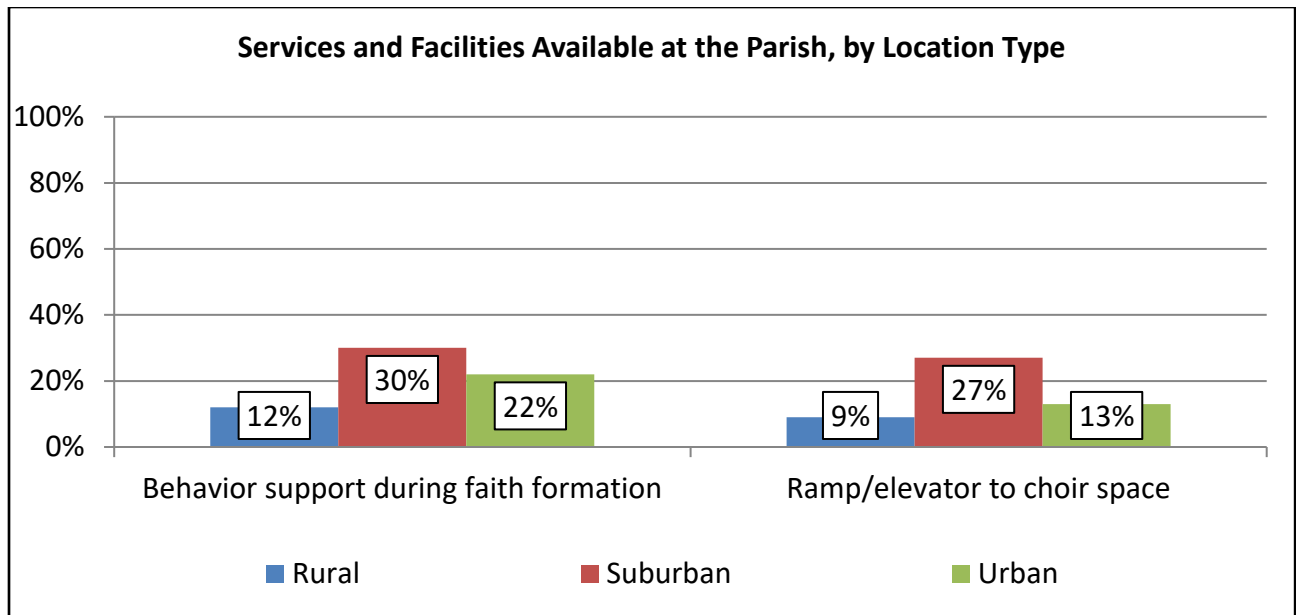
West Region parishes are *least* likely to report that their parishes provide transportation to parish functions.



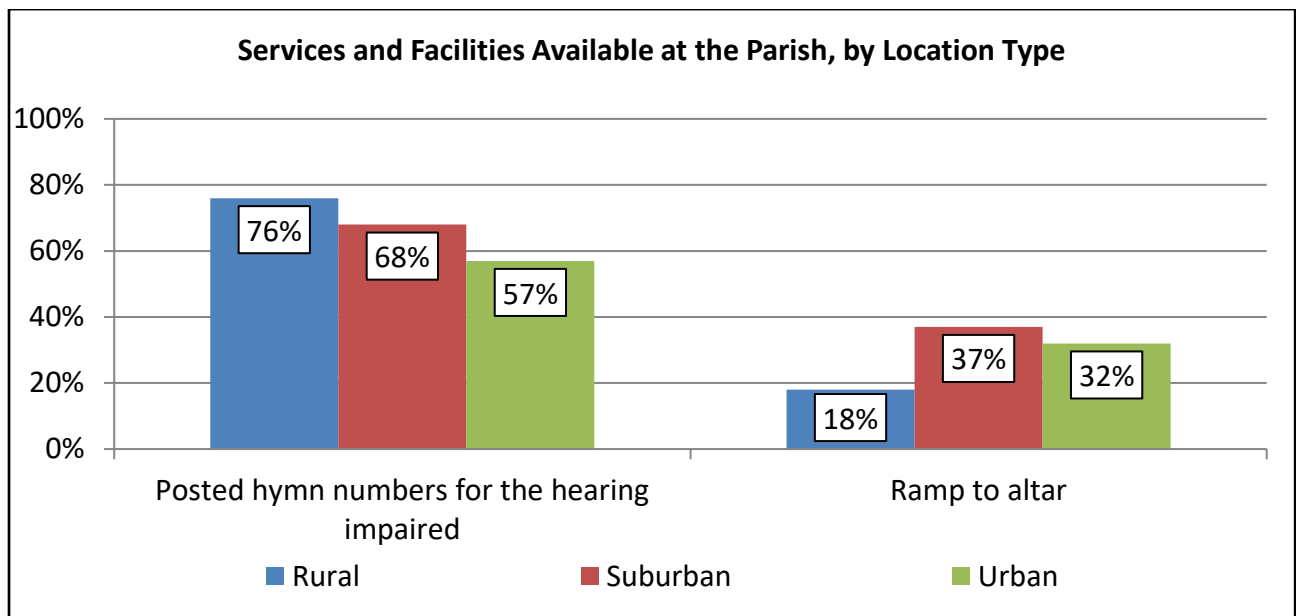
Differences by Location Type

Suburban parishes are most likely to report having the five services and facilities presented in the two figures below.



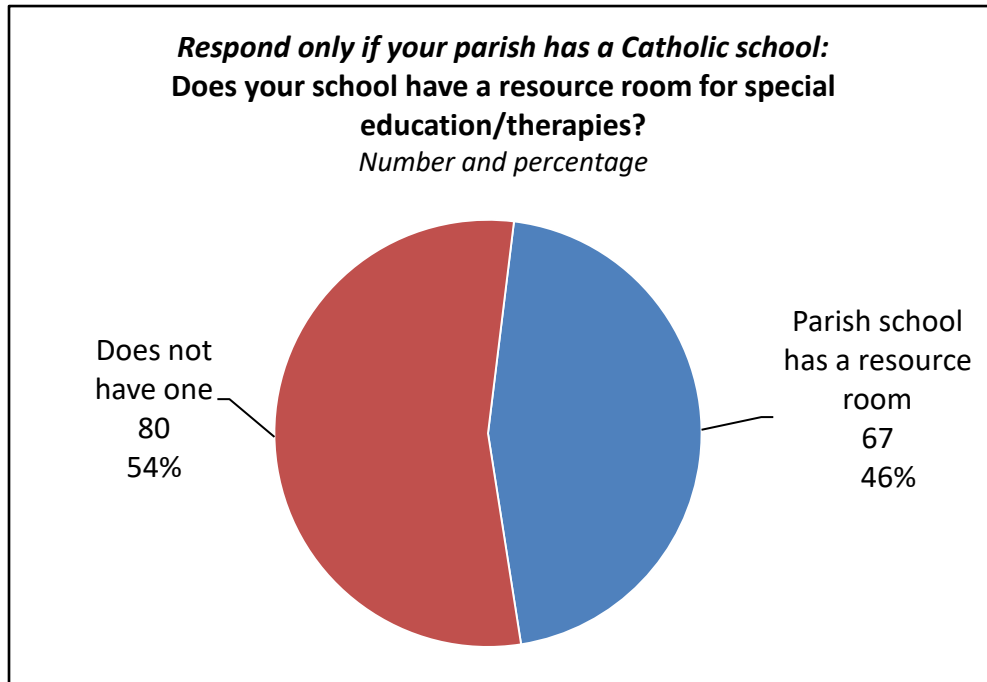


Rural parishes are most likely to report having posted hymn numbers for the hearing impaired but are *least* likely to have a ramp to the altar.



Presence of a Resource Room in Parish Schools

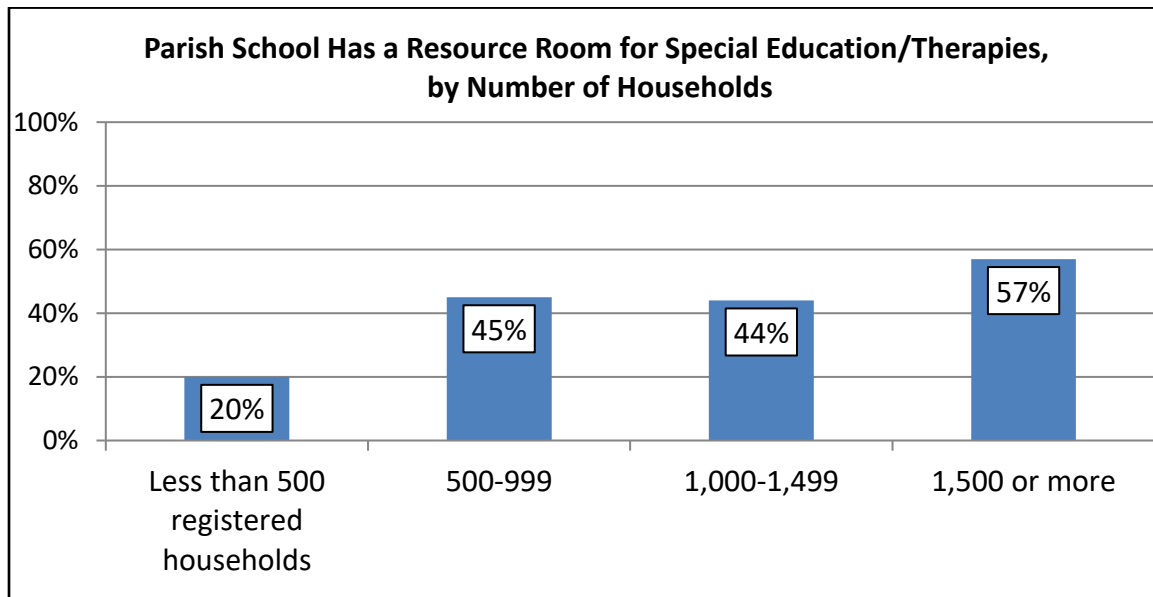
Parish personnel who have a parish Catholic school were asked if their school has a resource room for special education/therapies. Nearly half say their school does have one (46%).²⁴



²⁴ Fifty-eight percent did not respond to this question.

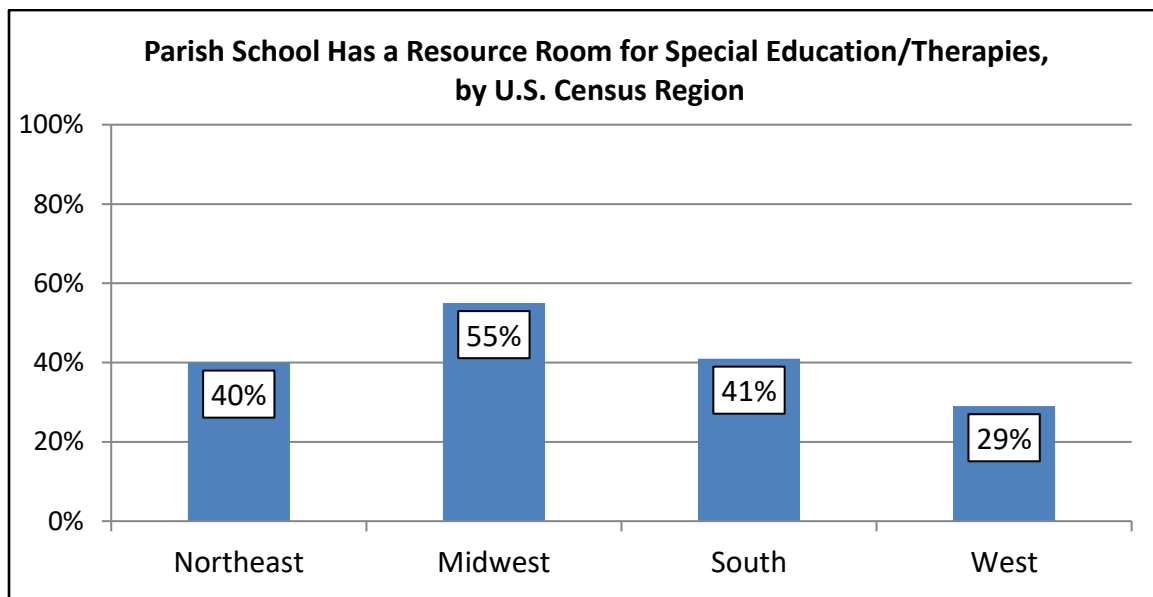
Differences by Number of Households at the Parish

Parishes with 1,500 or more registered households are most likely to report that their parish schools have resource rooms.



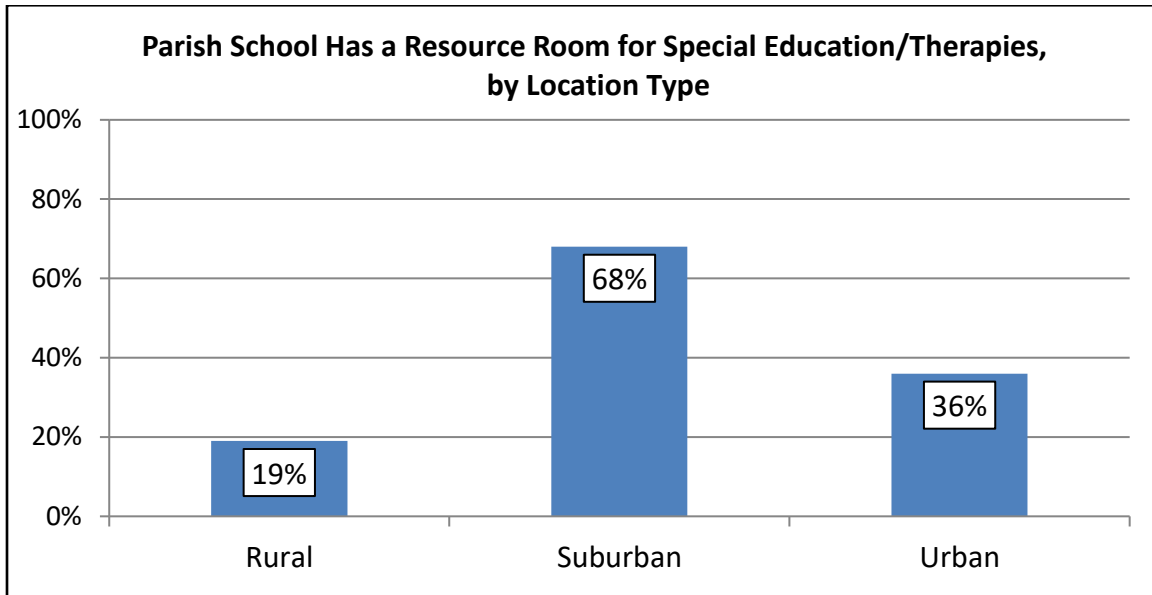
Differences by U.S. Census Region

Midwest Region parishes are most likely to report that their parish schools have resource rooms, with those in the West Region *least* likely.



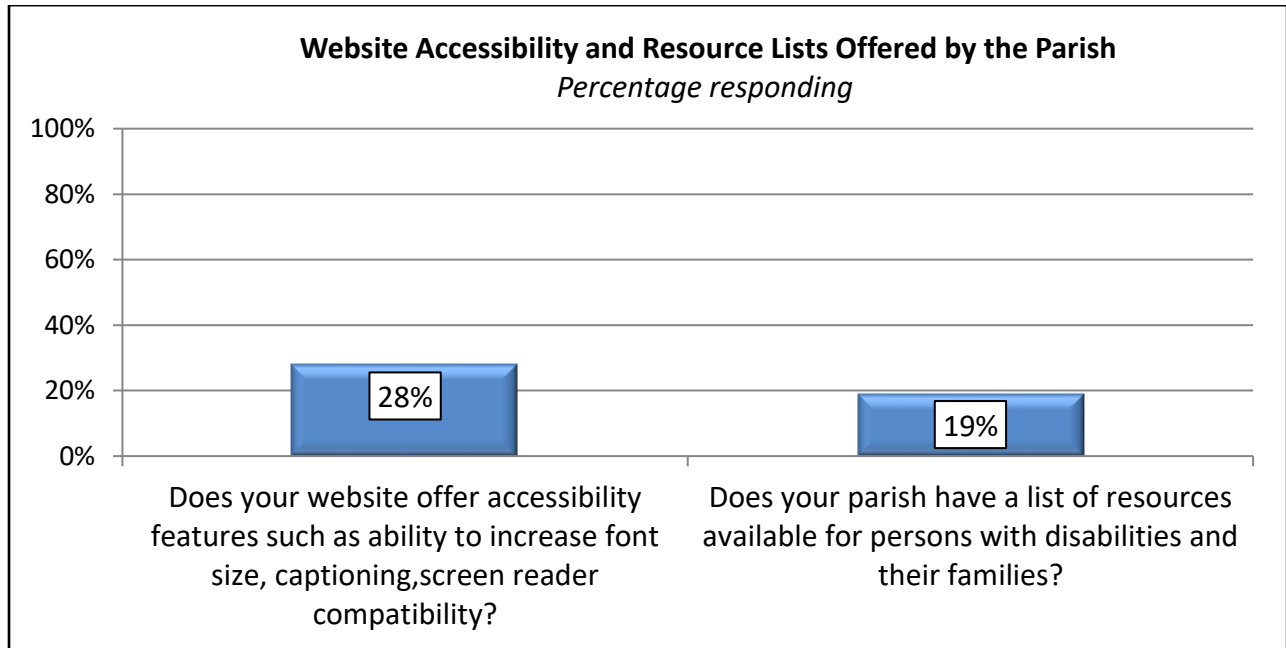
Differences by Location Type

Suburban parishes are most likely to report that their parish schools have resource rooms.



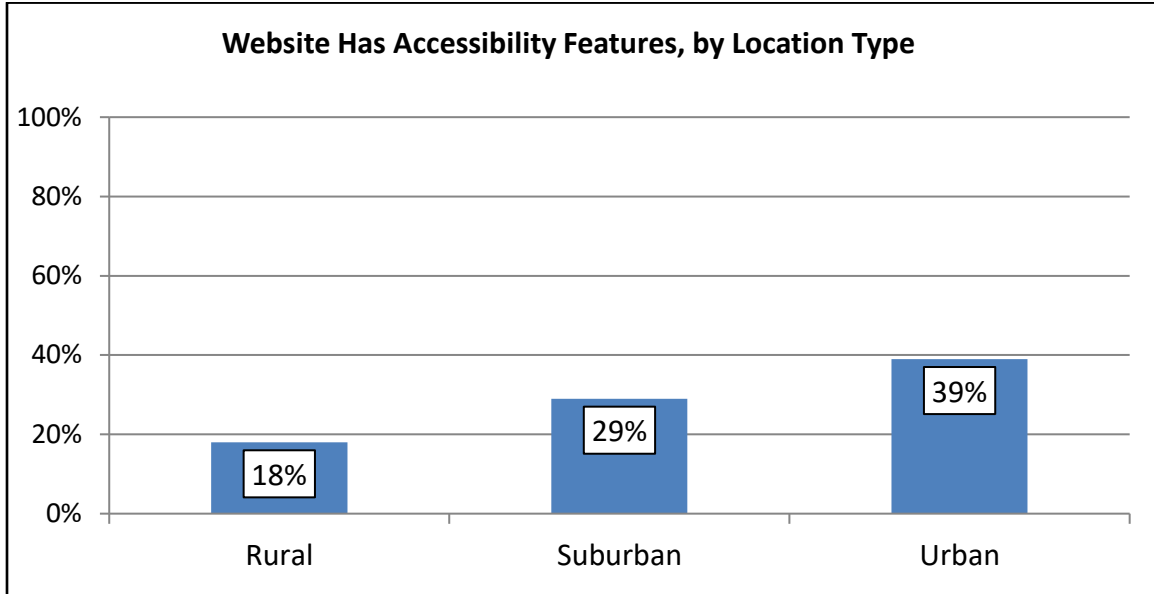
Website Accessibility Features and Resource Lists

Parishes were asked whether their website offered accessibility features and if their parish has a list of resources available for persons with disabilities and their families. Nearly three in ten have the website features asked about (28%) and two in ten have lists of resources (19%).



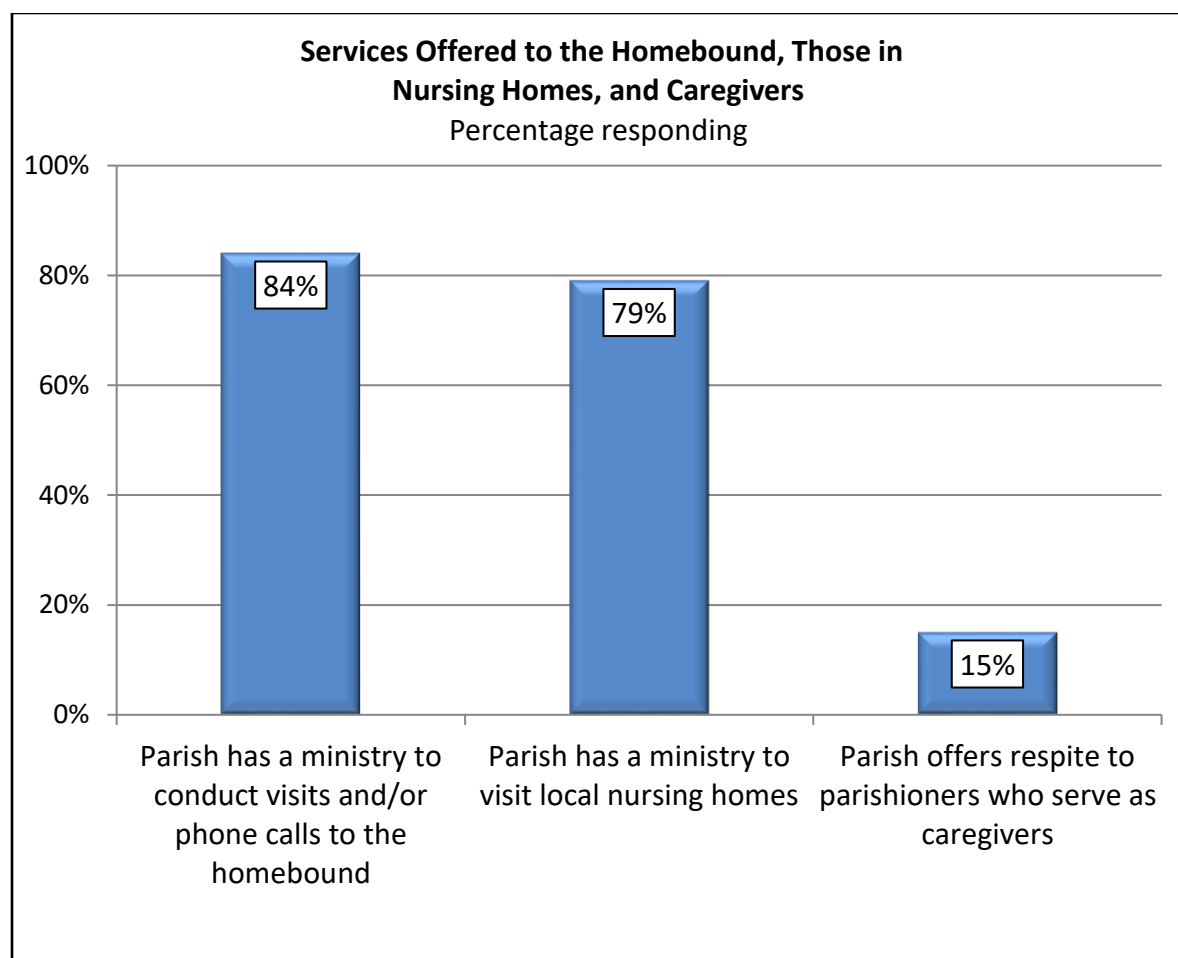
Differences by Location Type

Parishes in urban areas are most likely to report that their parish schools have resource rooms.



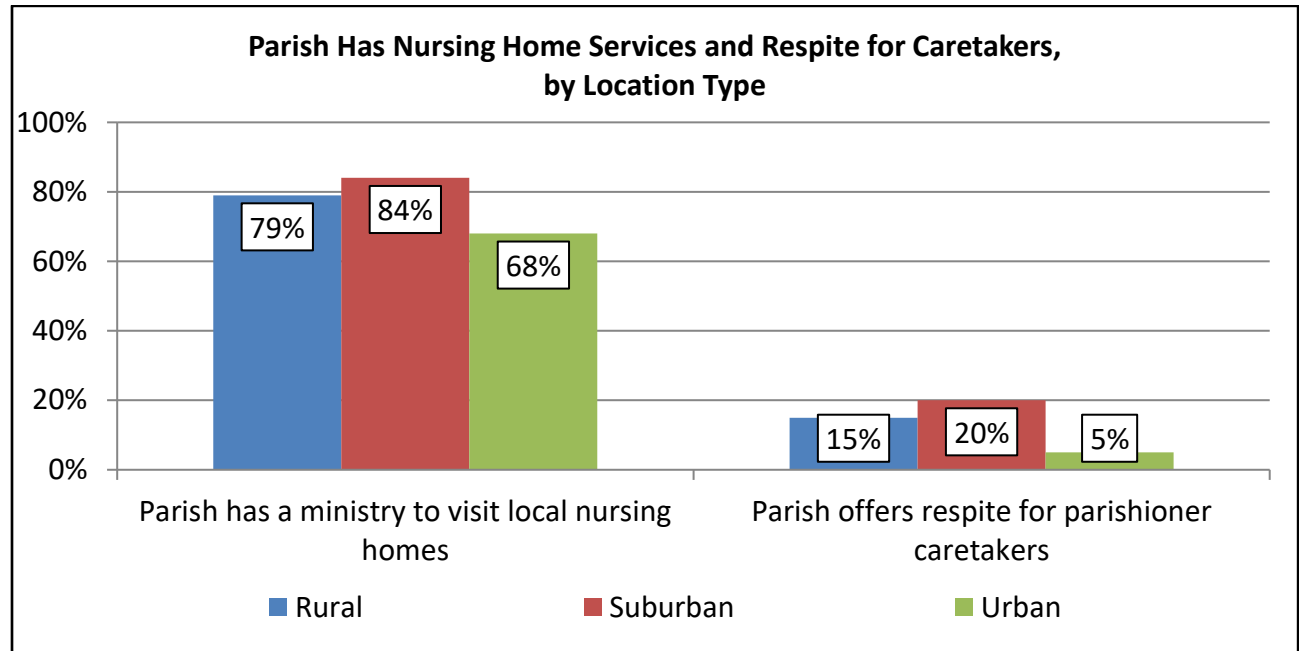
Visits to the Homebound, Ministry to Nursing Homes, and Respite for Caretakers

Parishes were asked whether they offer different services for the homebound, those in nursing homes, and caregivers. About four in five parishes have ministries to conduct visits and/or phone calls to the homebound (84%) and ministries to visit local nursing homes (79%). One in seven offers respite for parishioners who serve as caregivers (15%).



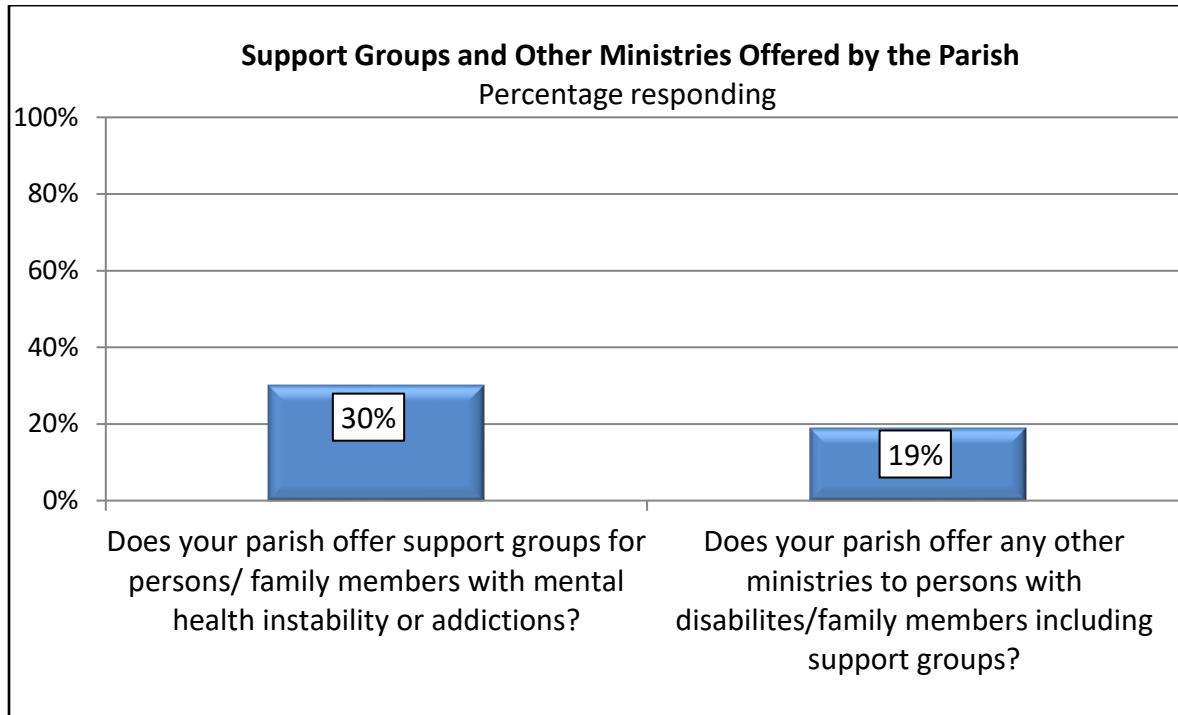
Differences by Location Type

Parishes in urban areas are *least* likely to report having ministries to visit local nursing homes and to offer respite for parishioner caretakers.



Support Groups Offered at Parishes

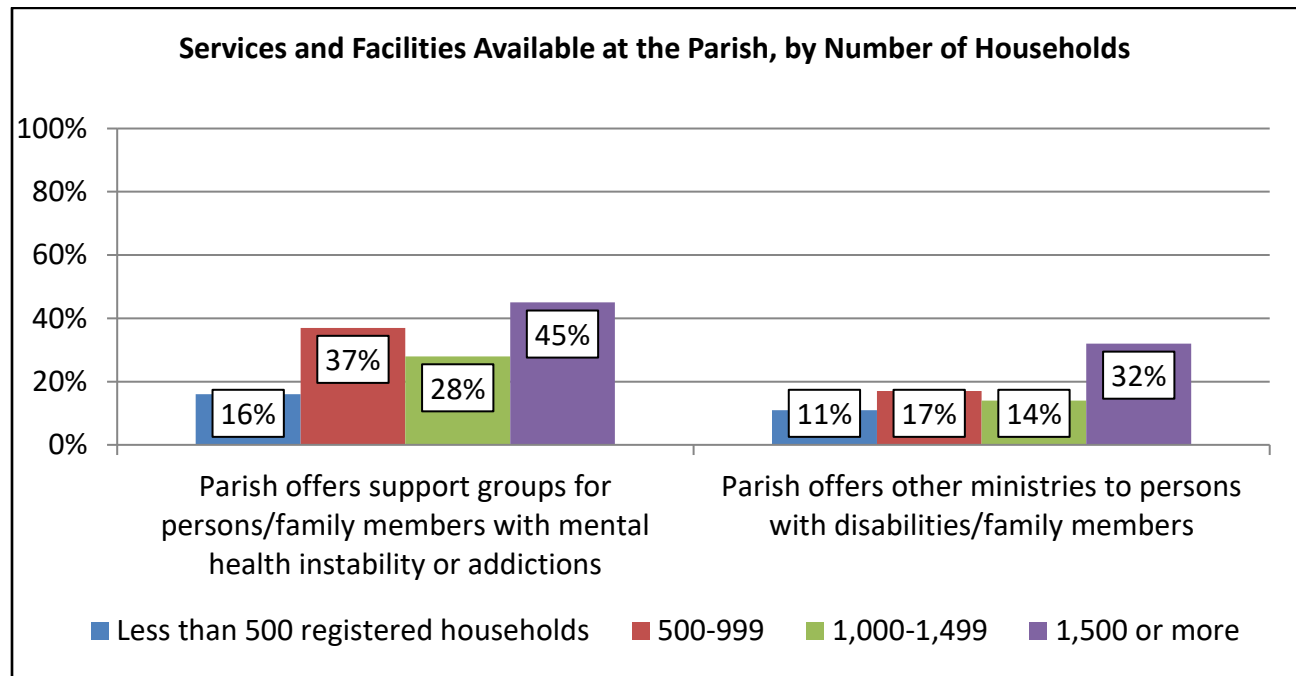
Parishes were asked whether they offer support groups and other ministries to persons with disabilities, with mental health instability or addictions, or to family members of these persons. The findings are presented below.²⁵



²⁵ Twenty-two percent did not respond to the first question presented in the figure and 29% did not respond to the second.

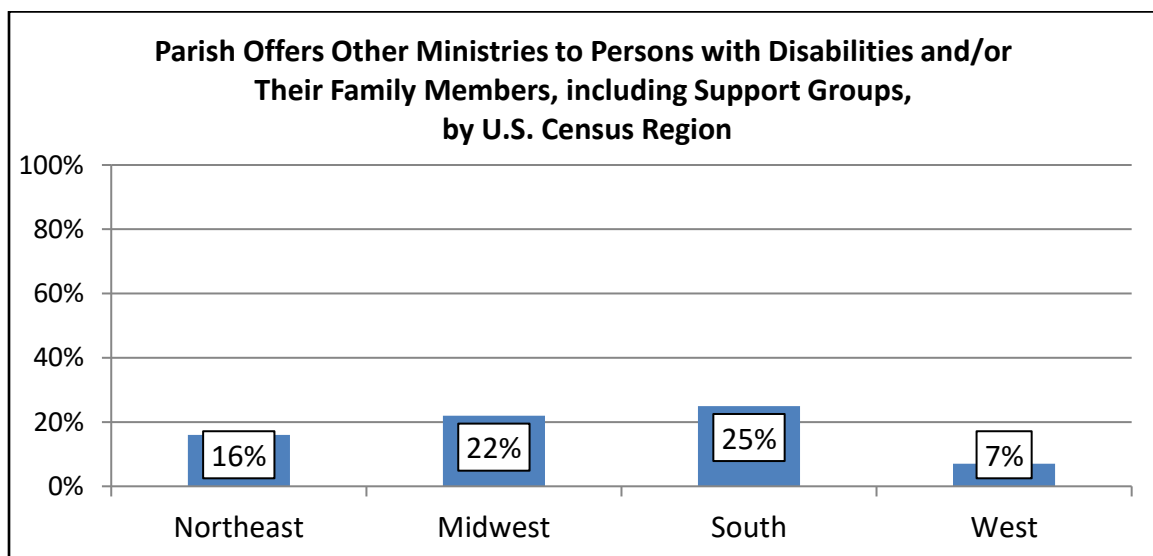
Differences by Number of Households at the Parish

Parishes with the largest number of households are most likely to report having support groups as well as other ministries for persons with disabilities and their family members.



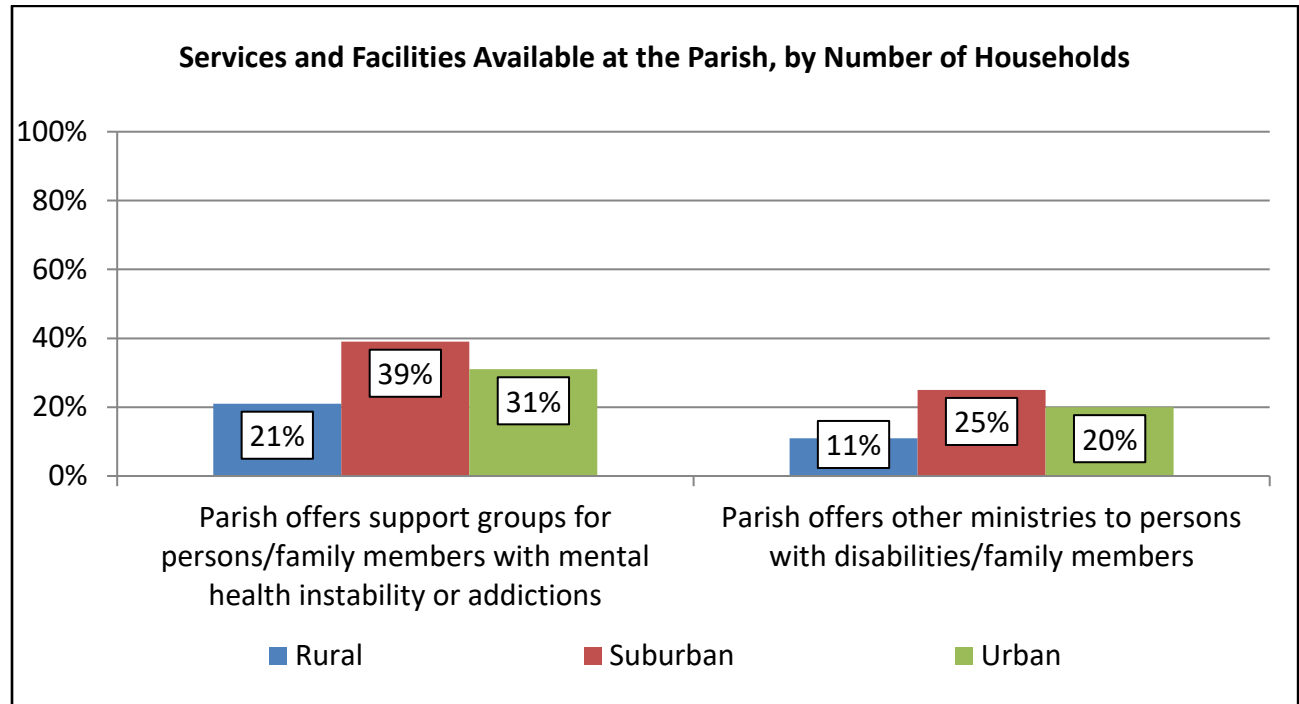
Differences by U.S. Census Region

West Census Region parishes are *least* likely to report that their parish offers other ministries, including support groups, for persons with disabilities and/or their families.



Differences by Location Type

Rural parishes are *least* likely to report having support groups or other ministries for persons with disabilities and their family members.

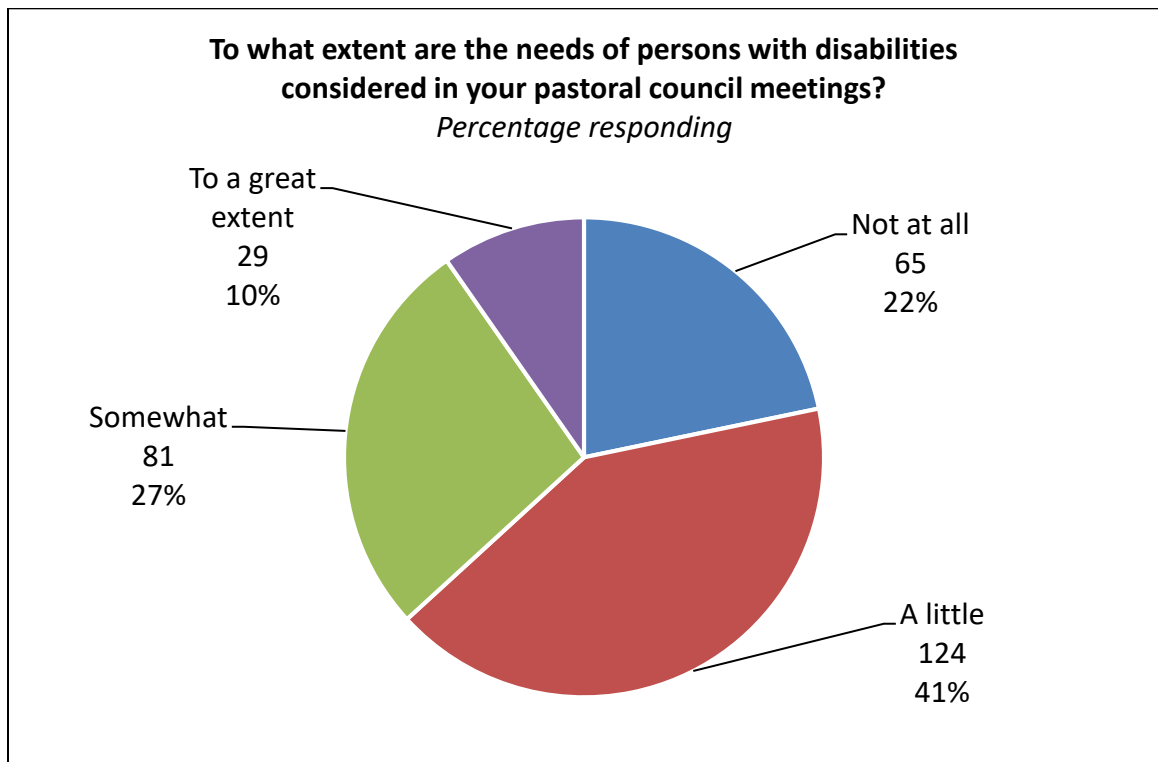


Section IV: Efforts to be More Inclusive of Persons with Disabilities

This section of the report presents survey findings focused on parish efforts to include persons with disabilities in parish life.

Whether Pastoral Council Considers Needs of Persons with Disabilities

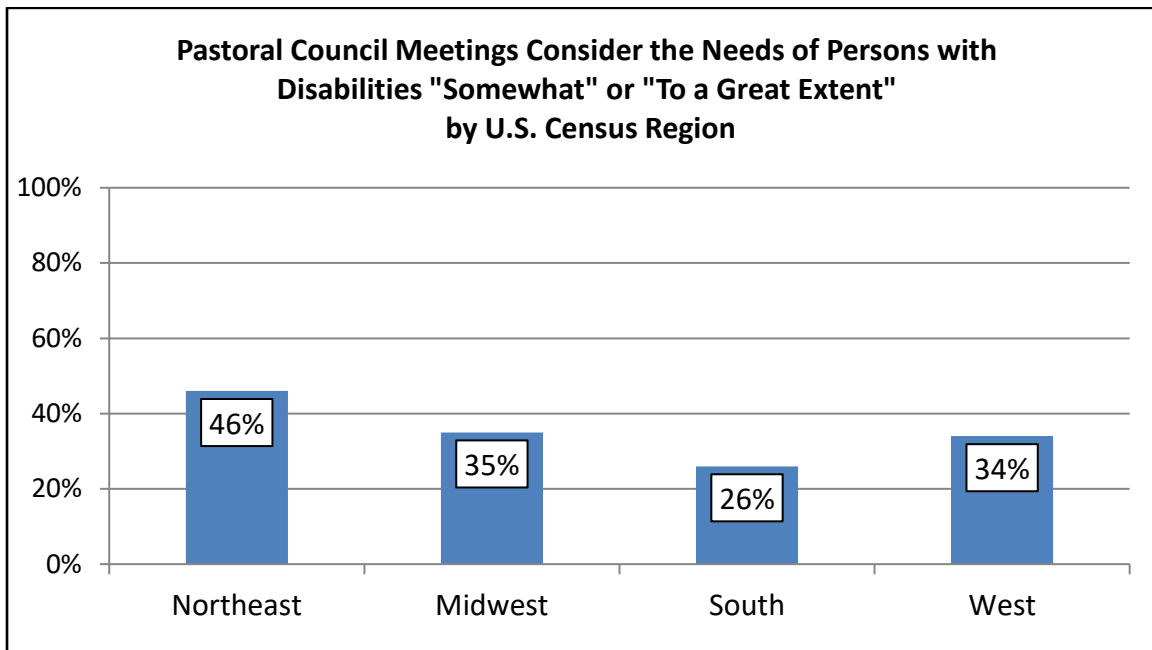
Respondents were asked to estimate the percentage of the needs of the persons with disabilities considered in the pastoral council meetings.²⁶ Almost a combined two in five (37%) say those needs are considered “somewhat” (27%) or “to a great extent” (10%).



²⁶ Fifteen percent did not respond to this question.

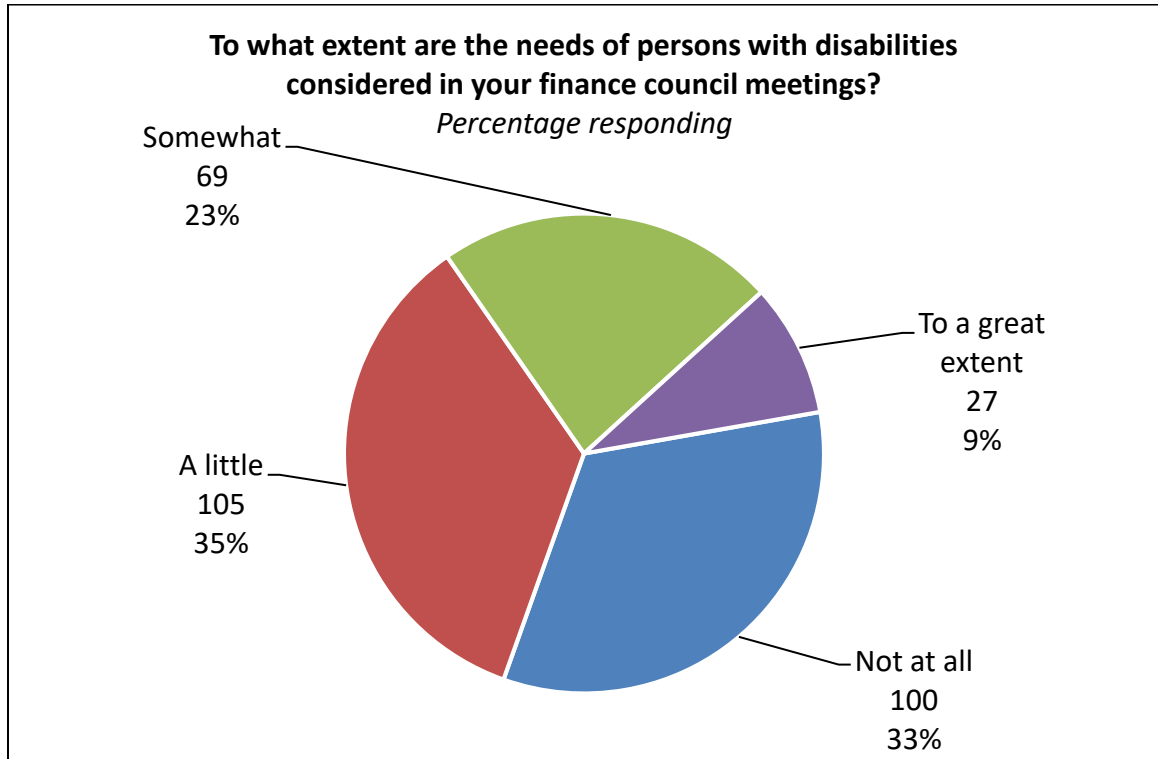
Differences by U.S. Census Region

Northeast Census Region parishes are most likely to report that their pastoral council meetings consider the needs of persons with disabilities “somewhat” or “to a great extent,” with those in the South Region *least* likely.



Whether Finance Council Considers Needs of Persons with Disabilities

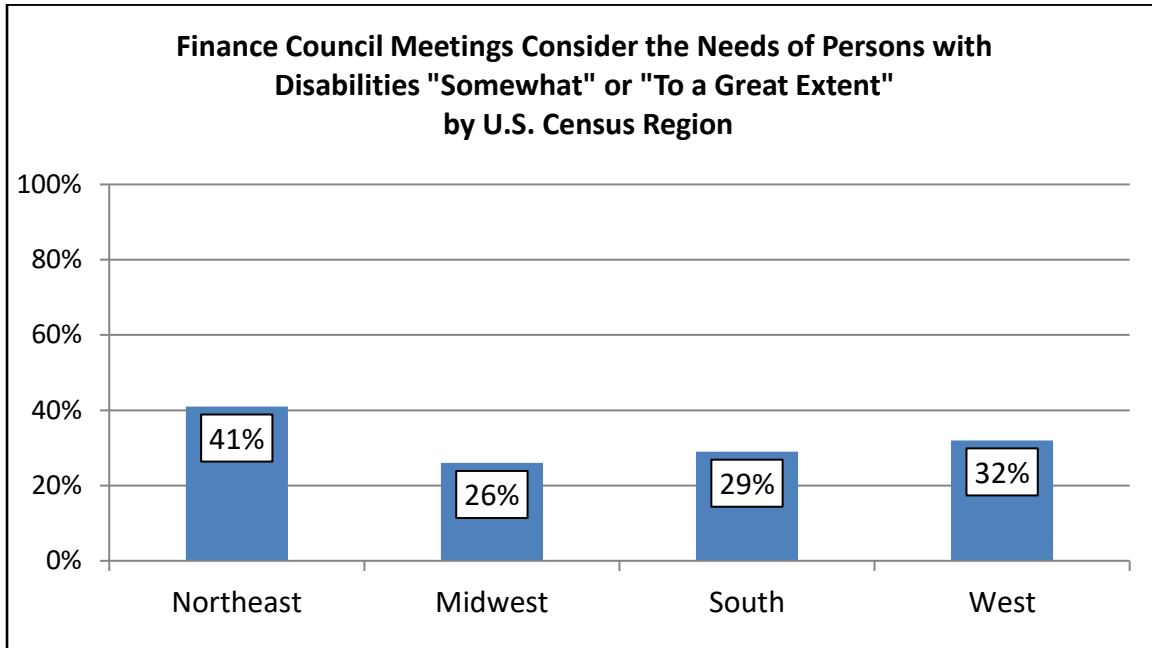
Respondents were asked to estimate the percentage of the needs of the persons with disabilities considered in the finance council meetings.²⁷ A combined third (32%) say those needs are considered “somewhat” (23%) or “to a great extent” (9%).



²⁷ Fifteen percent did not respond to this question.

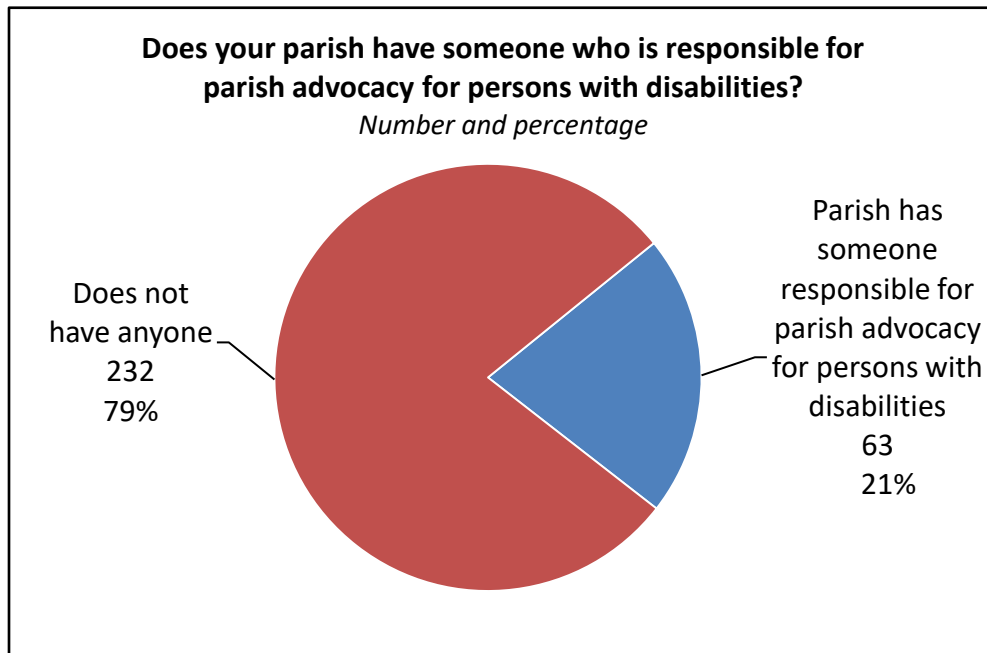
Differences by U.S. Census Region

Northeast Region parishes are most likely to report that their finance council meetings consider the needs of persons with disabilities “somewhat” or “to a great extent.”



Presence of a Parish Advocate

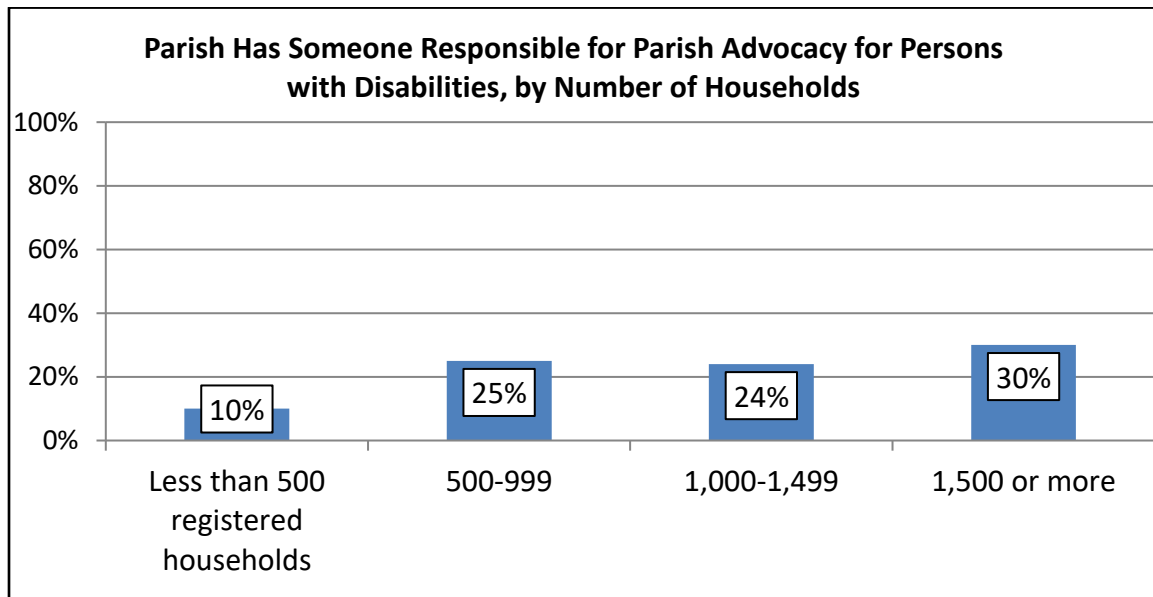
Respondents were asked if they have someone at their parish who is responsible for parish advocacy for persons with disabilities. One in five say they do (21%).²⁸



²⁸ Sixteen percent did not respond to this question.

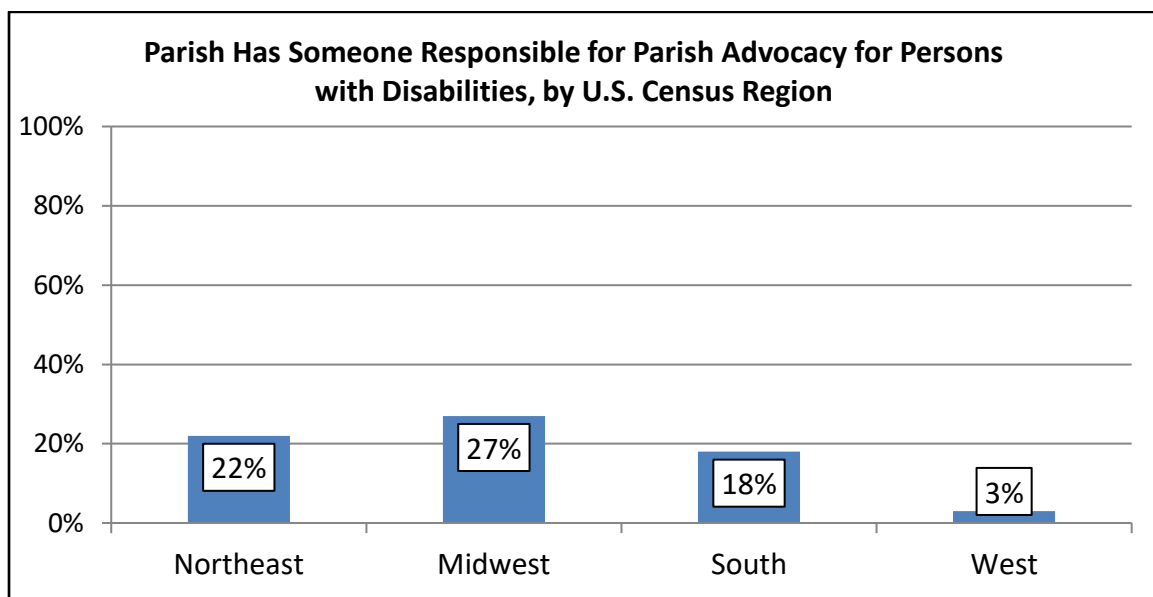
Differences by Number of Households at the Parish

Parishes with 500 registered households or less are *least* likely to have someone responsible for parish advocacy for persons with disabilities.



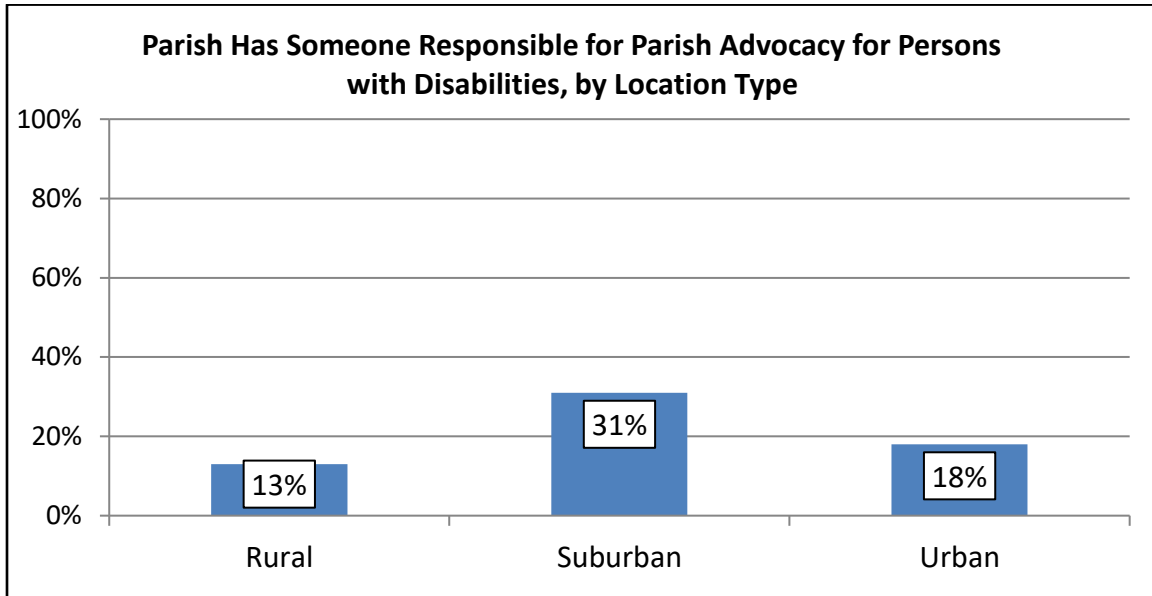
Differences by U.S. Census Region

West Census Region parishes are *least* likely to report that their parish has someone responsible for parish advocacy for persons with disabilities.



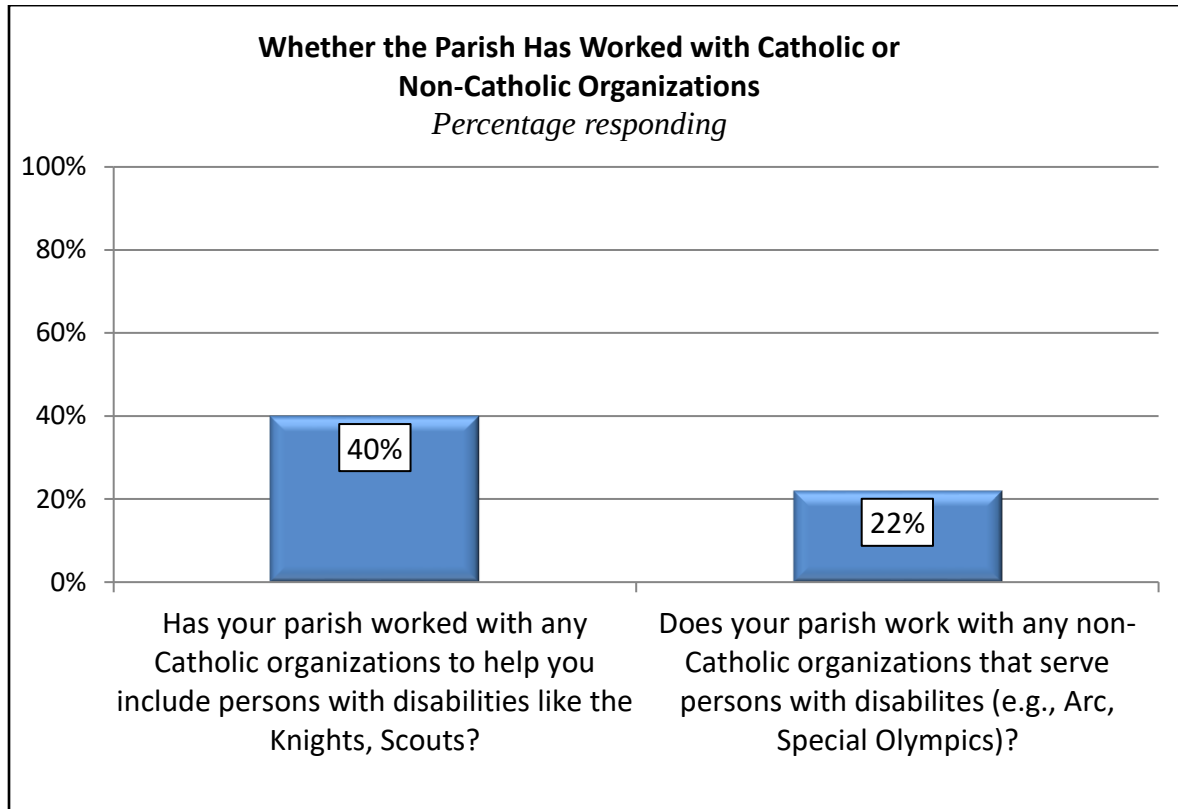
Differences by Location Type

Suburban parishes are especially likely to report that their parish has someone responsible for parish advocacy for persons with disabilities.



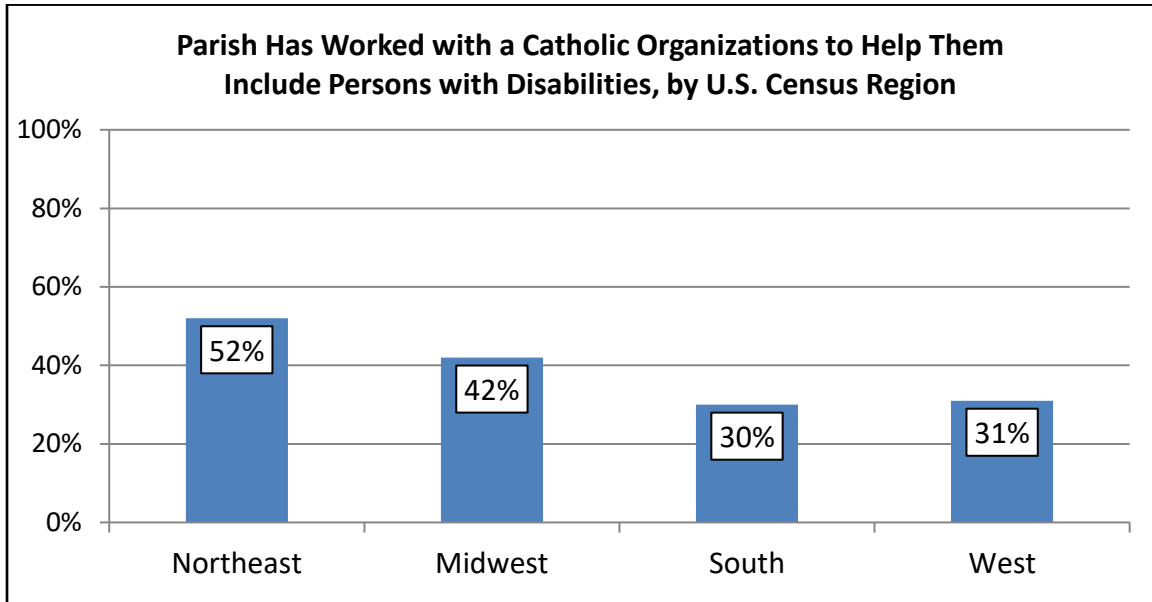
Whether the Parishes Worked with Catholic and Non-Catholic Organizations

Parish personnel were asked about outside organizations they have collaborated with to better serve persons with disabilities in their parishes, both Catholic organizations and non-Catholic organizations. The findings are presented below.



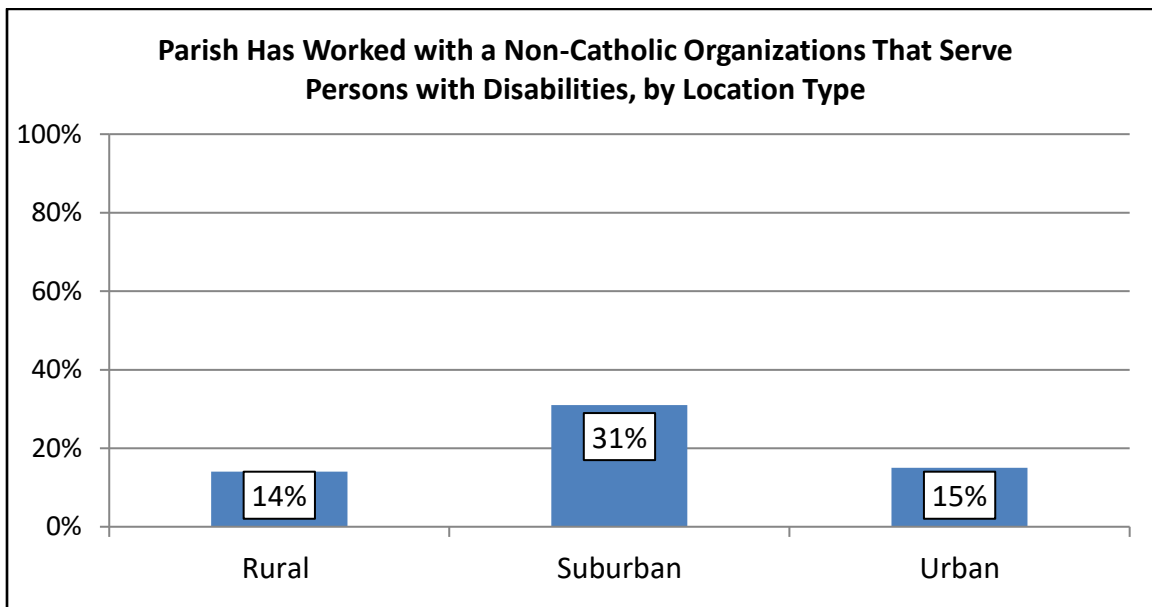
Differences by U.S. Census Region

Northeast Census Region parishes are most likely to report that their parish has worked with any Catholic organizations to help the parish include persons with disabilities.



Differences by Location Type

Suburban parishes are most likely to report that their parish has worked with non-Catholic organizations to help the parish include persons with disabilities.



How Parishes Communicate about the Services Offered to Persons with Disabilities

Responding parish personnel were asked to respond to this question: *In what ways does your parish communicate about the services it offers to persons with disabilities?* A total of 170 (48% of the 351 responses to the survey) provided a response to the question. (1) CARA grouped the responses into the 11 categories shown in the table below. As we can be seen in the examples of comments presented after the table, many respondents mentioned ways of communication in more than one category.

<i>In what ways does your parish communicate about the services it offers to persons with disabilities?</i>		
Way It is Communicated	#	%
Printed and online bulletins	31	18
Announcements at or during Mass and/or programs	28	16
Staff/team outreach/one-to- one meetings	22	12
Part of registration process	18	10
Website online	14	8
Signage in church and other facilities	11	6
Emails	8	4
Social media	8	4
Word of mouth/verbally	7	4
Other ways it is communicated	25	14
Not being communicated/little communication	18	10

Printed and Online Bulletins

About one in five respondents is of the opinion that the parish communicates about the services it offers to persons with disabilities through printed and online bulletin.

Bulletin notices and posted signs (specifically about auditory devices).

Bulletin notices, word of mouth, large print, in pew book racks.

Bulletin, Flock note.

Bulletin, website, printed brochures.

Monthly notification in the bulletin.

Occasional short article in the bulletin.

On a phone call basis.

Printed brochures.

We have a print brochure among the seats that indicates accessible features.

On mention of accessible parking in the bulletin, upon request if asked.

Online, on our phone recordings and in our bulletins.

We communicate through Flock notes and articles in our weekly bulletin.

We periodically put information about Low Gluten hosts in the bulletin.

The availability of hearing assist devices, low-gluten hosts, and an elevator are printed on the front cover of the parish bulletin every week.

We recently remodeled the bathrooms to accommodate people with disabilities which was in the bulletin.

The parish website has a section highlighting the accommodations within the parish and directing people to additional resources outside the parish.

Announcements at/ during Mass and Programs

One in six respondents says that the parish communicates about the services it offers to persons with disabilities through announcements at/ during mass and programs.

Announcements and bulletin.

Announcements in bulletin.

Bulletin and announcements.

Bulletin and Church announcements and Signage.

Bulletin and Announcements at Mass.

Bulletin or word of mouth, pulpit.

Verbal announcements.

Announcements, slideshow before Mass.

Father announces from the altar.

Announcements at Mass.

Individually as needs arise, through announcement and advertising. Through outreach to those we have been made aware of have specific needs.

We regularly announce the availability of low gluten hosts.

Little, St. Margaret of Costello group tries to offer sensory items for children in need at masses, when they have volunteers.

We have also asked parents when registering their children for religious education if they have a child with disabilities in their household (regardless of whether that child is registering for religious ed classes or not).

Staff/ Team Reaches out/One-to-One Meeting

Just over one in ten of respondents mentions that the parish communicates about the services it offers to persons with disabilities through staff/team one to one meeting.

As the parish special needs advocate I try hard to let the congregation know about services and things we provide.

For all religious education events (classes, etc.) for children, we include language welcoming children with intellectual disabilities and encouraging their parents to reach out to parish staff to help us best accommodate their children.

If someone needs to receive the Eucharist but cannot walk to the Eucharistic Minister (EM), the Greeter will talk to the EM for them to walk to the person who cannot walk to offer the Eucharist.

It is part of our Welcoming Pathways agenda. This is an internal leadership program to make our parish more welcoming to all in our community.

Designated persons to deal with disable adults.

Meet with parent/person 1:1.

Monthly inclusion/diversity birthday gathering.

Part of Registration Process

One in ten of respondents mentions that through the registration process the parish communicates about the services it offers to the persons with disabilities.

Greeters and parish staff accommodate those with special needs.

Most of our accommodations are visible. Other accommodations are available upon request.

No message, just react when we encounter individuals.

Two major things that could occur to correct this would be to involve parishioners.

All our parking lots have faded paint - it is hard to see where the handicap parking is. It is also dangerous for all parishioners especially those who are older trying to park when there are no lines in any of the parking lots.

Parish or Diocese Online

A little less than one in ten respondents mentions that the parish communicates its services online through its website or its Parish Social Media sites. through website/online-parish/diocese to the persons with disabilities.

Bulletin and website.

Website, parish visitors.

Email, Facebook, Website and Phone.

Parish website.

Pre-service announcements website.

Previously (before COVID pandemic) there was a designated ASL Mass on Sunday which was published in all of the Mass schedule resources, e.g., website, archdiocese, bulletins, Mass Times app, etc. We have not resumed that ASL Mass post-COVID.

Signage in Church and Other Facilities

One in 20 respondents mentions that the parish communicates about the services it offers to the persons with disability by signage in the church and other facilities.

As the parish special needs advocate I try hard to let the congregation know about services and things we provide.

Bulletin notices and posted signs (specifically about auditory devices).

Signage throughout facility.

Signage where applicable. Greeters to help/assist with access and electric lift assistance.

There are notices in the bulletin and a few signs in the church area.

We let folks that have difficulty walking that we have an elevator.

We will communicate occasionally what is available in the bulletin. There it's also signage about hearing devices available.

Emails

One in 20 respondents mentions that the parish communicates about services it offers to the persons with disabilities through emails.

Bulletin and weekly mail.

Email, Facebook.

Parish disability advocates phone number and email address are listed in the bulletin.

Communicate through emails.

Social Media

One in 20 respondents mentions that the parish communicates about the services it offers to the persons with disabilities through social media.

Several ways, electronically through Flock note, social media, email as well as verbally through announcements.

Social media, newspaper.

Social media, bulletin.

Through Parish social media.

Word of Mouth/Verbally

One in 20 respondents agrees that the parish communicates the service it offers through word of mouth/ verbally to the persons with disabilities.

By word of mouth.

It is mostly word of mouth.

Our ministry leaders are aware and communicate it verbally.

We haven't, unless it is word of mouth to someone that needs a service.

Other Ways It is Communicated

More than one in ten of respondents states that the parish communicates about services it offers to the persons with disabilities in ways that do not fit into the categories above such as these responses.

Our volunteer hospitality ministers are there to assist anyone who needs special services or accommodations: listening devices, special seating.

Though not disabled, we do have accommodations for those who do not speak English. We have a secretary for these translations and Masses offered in Spanish, as well as, religious education classes, marriage and baptism prep in Spanish. All documents available in both English and Spanish.

Through all promotions - please let us know if you need accommodations for sight, hearing, mobility, etc., within 2 weeks prior to event.

In our parish bulletin and personally.

We are a very small parish, so communication is easy.

We do not have particular communications about services for people with disabilities.

As a small parish, everything we do is done in the context of the individuals rather than be a set program.

Greeters to help/assist with access and electric lift assistance.

The Pastor of our Parish is a paraplegic, so the entire campus and all buildings/spaces are accessible to all parishioners. He has created a culture of awareness. He also was involved with the document "Opening Doors" published by the NCPD.

We also provide full inclusion Mass and Music program along with a School of Religion to make sure that everyone has the sacraments made available to them.

Upon request since low numbers.

They've existed for so many years that people just know about them without us having to say anything.

Little or No Communication

In addition to responses describing their communication efforts, some parishes wrote in that their parish has no communication or little in this area, including the examples below.

Little to no communication/ little to none.

One-on-one conversation with the person needing and asking for it. We don't have a broad communication plan for these services.

Our Parish has not focused on our parishioners with disabilities because one person is making efforts to do it all and be involved in everything- while this is noble, the time, attention, quality and focus are not there and many things are over looked. And communication is not direct or transparent because one person simply cannot do it all and be running all ministries.

Instead of controlling everything and trying to do it by one's self - empowering our parishioners as a family of faith and allowing them to do the work they want to do and God's work will allow for our parish to be a healthier parish and one where all are included.

There are no specific "services" offered to persons with disabilities, so there is nothing to communicate, very little.

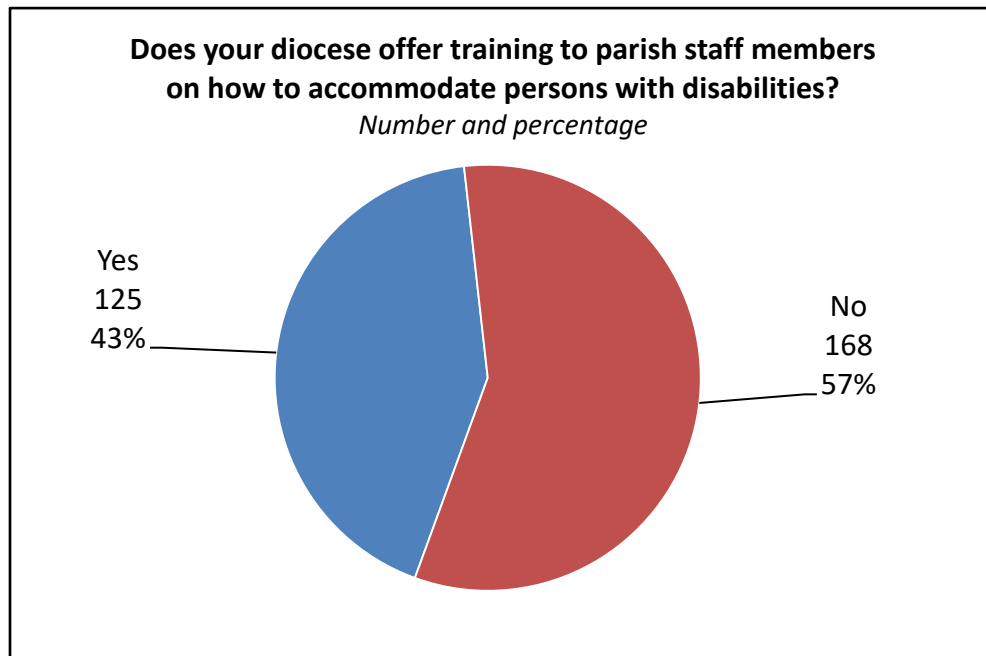
We currently do not communicate these things very well. We are just finally getting back into discussing various vulnerable groups. We do discuss disability inclusion in our Faith Formation Commission Meetings, but not Parish Council or Finance Council Meetings. We do a poor job with this.

We don't really communicate about any services for disability.

Section V: Training Needed

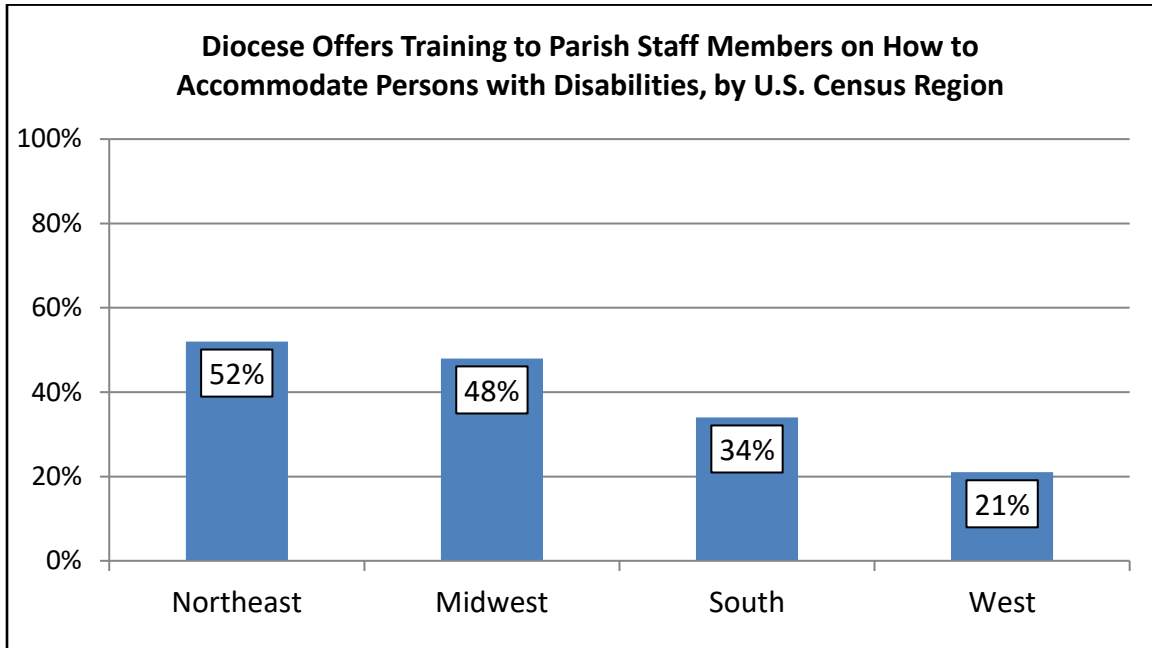
Whether Diocesan Training Is Offered to Parish Staff Members

Respondents were asked whether their diocese offers training to parish staff members on how to accommodate persons with disabilities. Forty-three percent say their diocese does so.



Differences by U.S. Census Region

Northeast and Midwest Census Region parishes are most likely to report that their diocese offers training to parish staff members on how to accommodate persons with disabilities.



Helpful Training

Parish personnel were asked to write in a response to this prompt: *What training would be most helpful to your parish to aid you in being more inclusive of persons with disabilities and their families? Please be as specific as possible.* Altogether, 144 responded to the question, many mentioning more than one kind of training, with many also mentioning resources. In addition, some wrote in that they are not sure what kinds of resources they need as well as that they do not have any persons with disabilities in their parish.

The suggested kinds of training and resources vary tremendously. Generally, these are the kinds of training and resources requested:

- Training to accommodate those with specific disabilities
- Ministry-specific training and resources
- Suggestions for renovating facilities with limited resources
- Assistance with identifying those with disabilities
- How to communicate to persons with disabilities that they are welcome
- Strategies to encourage parish staff to prioritize inclusion of persons with disabilities
- Building awareness of disabilities among parishioners
- How to effectively refer those who need help to corresponding resources
- Making persons with disabilities more visible in parish life
- Parish facilities checklist
- Providing formation for persons with disabilities of all ages
- Building support networks and support groups
- Spanish-language training and resources
- Developing peer-to-peer and family-to-family programs
- Advocating for those with disabilities
- Counseling those with disabilities
- First aid and defibrillator application training

Below is a list of the topics and groups that parish personnel would like training and materials for:

- ADHD
- Anxiety disorders
- Autism-spectrum
- Caretaker respite
- Diabetes
- Dyslexia
- Elderly/age-related disabilities
- Emotional trauma
- Families of those with disabilities
- Fibromyalgia
- Hearing-impaired/deaf

- Homeless
- Mental health
- Neurodiversity
- Physical disabilities
- Visually-impaired/blind

Below are some examples of what respondents wrote in, including those who do not feel they need any training or resources. To read the complete transcription of their responses, see Appendix II.

Caregiving and respite. Behavior support. Social activities.

Catechesis for persons with disabilities (specifically ADHD, Autism, and Down Syndrome).

1. Awareness (types of disabilities and how to best accommodate) 2. Mental Health First Aid (or similar).

Greater emphasis on the giftedness of persons who are Deaf or live with a disability in the surrounding "typical" parishes outside of [Parish Name] Deaf Catholic Church.

I'm not sure that lack of training is our problem, but rather a lack of priority. Our children's and youth ministry staff could use training on how best to accommodate those with autism, ADHD, intellectual disabilities, and mental health challenges. Our diocese and parish already offer Mental Health First Aid training from the National Council for Mental Health. The accommodation that would have the greatest impact at mass would be auditory devices for those with hearing loss.

How to recognize, welcome, accommodate person's with physical, cognitive and sometimes invisible disabilities (fibromyalgia, dementia, emotional trauma, etc.).

Low-Sensory Mass. Faith Formation classes for those w/ neurodiversity.

More people struggle with mental health, especially anxiety but we don't offer support, help, counseling, or instruction. We also have numerous children with dyslexia and ADHD but again no full church offerings are available. One of our reasons to switch to family faith was that families could instantly accommodate for their kids and know their own kids' abilities. We also never put people of any age "on the spot" by requiring them to do a task, especially read or write in front of a group BUT many in our parish don't even understand how devastating those tasks can be.

People working with mental and emotional issues, especially.

Respite care training.

A basic start would be to bring awareness overall, discussions of inclusivity for the disabled. Classes on "invisible" disabilities such as diabetes, mental illness and behavioral issues.

Training to help the deaf and blind feel more included, perhaps.

Sign language; accommodating children with autism at Mass and in CCD; providing spiritual formation for people with non-physical disabilities (youth and adults). That would be a good start.

We are simply too few people with not enough time in the day. We rise to the occasion as need rises, we do not leave anyone behind, training is great, but disabilities are specific. If I have no blind parishioners, training for that right now is not helpful when trying to assist someone with a different disability like autism for example or vice versa.

We have a parish nurse. Works with the church and the school. More training on education for all staff and ministry leaders regarding accommodations for all the various disabilities mentioned. Currently it seems to be individuals who assist individuals but not an organized effort to seek out those with needs and find ways to meet the needs. A better system to identify and reach those people and survey their needs.

Anything that doesn't become an extra duty for the pastor. I have two parishes, only part-time help, mostly volunteers, no maintenance staff, too many hats to wear. Years ago, the diocese had a person to coordinate handicapped concerns. We haven't had anything since the last three bishops!

Training to pastors, parish councils, finance council, formation leaders and school principals.

Parish staff training – awareness. Catechist training, inclusion across ministries.

Sacramental preparation with persons with disabilities.

Training for usher to offer safety while caring for mentally unstable homeless. Faith Formation materials that are supportive of families.

Specialized training for specific ministries (children's faith formation, liturgical ministers, etc.).

Specific training for Youth minister, and priests. Training for parish volunteers. Raising awareness for the needs of families caring for children and adults with disabilities.

1) How to ask if parishioners would like accommodations without seeming to be a busybody. 2) How to make accommodations to the physical building when that building is nearly 200 years old. 3) How to provide support and respite for families of people with

disabilities. 4) So often organizing volunteers for this falls to the families of people with disabilities, who are already overwhelmed and don't have the time/energy to organize volunteers. 5) Training for catechists who will be teaching children/teens with intellectual disabilities.

I am new to the parish and just starting processes on inclusion. We need a telecoil system and a new ADA ramp for the church and the sacristy, and some compliant bathrooms.

ADA requirements and how to upgrade 75-year-old facilities to increase access to people of all abilities.

I would love training on how to communicate using the parish bulletin and other ways to contact parishioners regarding aid for persons with disability, I would also love to get information to help the parish and maintenance and finance councils to see the need of an accessible ramp or accessibility to the front of the church, and how much it is important to those who need it.

The implantation of items such as an elevator that would take parishioners from the church to the parish hall located under the church level. This has been a passion of mine since returning as parish secretary. Our area is a retirement area and as our demographic age being 72, it pains me to see more and more who are now in wheelchairs or walkers that cannot easily go to activities held in the hall. It is accessible to go outside, around the church and down a hill to get in, but this is not inviting to do at all. Our volunteer parish nurse is very good at bringing learning presentations from MU pertaining to aging such as when to give up the keys to driving, and signs of dementia.

Examples of what could be offered, other than building changes. For example, large print missals, etc. Also, how to best communicate accommodations to the parishioners.

How to communicate about our functions so that people with disabilities know they are welcome and can be accommodated.

We are inclusive. Maybe a blurb from you to put in bulletin.

About 5 years ago, we had a Special Needs Ministry and would try to meet monthly. Volunteers were older mothers with older child along with a few young moms with young children. Meetings were not attended. So, it was determined that the staff would assist one on one as the needs came up.

General training regarding making accessibility a priority rather than something we respond to when someone asks/needs an accommodation.

Our families need to see it at our cathedral first.

Training to help increase awareness of and sensitivity toward people with disabilities would be helpful. It would also benefit us to be given clear direction on best practices of how to speak to and about individuals with disabilities. There is an overall lack of empathy toward differences within our parish and community.

It would be nice to train everyone on how many people are considered disabled, in pointing out how relevant it is to be accessible, and how easy it is to make everything accessible. People seem to think it is too costly and unimportant to make events and buildings accessible. It would be nice to learn how to support families with disabled family members, to become a resource for them.

A training on the specific resources available from the archdiocese for individuals with disabilities. With associated names and phone numbers of individuals to call.

A walk-through of our churches to see what would be helpful through the eyes of a disabled person. Training for the staff, volunteers, and lay people to help open eyes on how to be more inclusive. It is something, we have only addressed situations as they arrive. We need to be more proactive.

A general audit of the parish that would reveal what we are doing well and what we could do in addition would be helpful.

How to organize and run support groups and peer-to-peer and family-to-family ministry.

Including and empowering parishioners - allowing them to lead and run ministries not having one person attempting to control everything and being involved in everything and the contact person for everything - our parish is far to vast. We need to find the leaders in our community and allow them to build a team so that team can work together with their gifts and talents and collaborate with God and continue to grow our parish and service our faith family / parishioners. If we followed this model, I am sure there would be more voices heard, more families heard, and more support and representation for those with and without a disability. However, if we do not listen or include these voices then we will never see our parishioners who might need an accommodation - be it great or small.

How our programs and resources can be reasonably changed to make accommodations for students with special needs.

Being an advocate by giving rides to church and other places like grocery stores, medical appointments, etc. Most volunteers are hesitant, as well as the archdiocese because of lawsuits if something happens.

First aid training and defibrillator training.

We are currently trying to develop a sensory-friendly liturgy - in conjunction with various departments and offices of the chancery. We could use some help with this. While willing to do so, neither of us, the parish priests, knows what this entails.

Training to make the best use of what we have to accommodate.

We are a relatively small rural parish. We are limited to financial resources to offer extra resources for disabled persons. We do offer what is required of us, but much of our congregation is elderly and we do the best we can to provide what is needed.

We are a very rural area with multiple small churches and a large seasonal tourist population. We don't have many people that obviously need special assistance. When someone comes that does we don't have something ready for them. More resources that can help us assist people with mental illness and similar things would be helpful. Our community doesn't have many resources in this area.

Any training at all since we have none.

Not really necessary. The Pastor is a permanent wheelchair user and quite knowledgeable about the needs of the disabled. The issue that may prevent implementation of particular issues are financial, not due to ignorance. On a separate note, you may want to check your mailings. The email that requested support of this survey indicated that previous email requests were made for completion. This was the first time this survey was sent to me or to my parish.

Not required at this time.

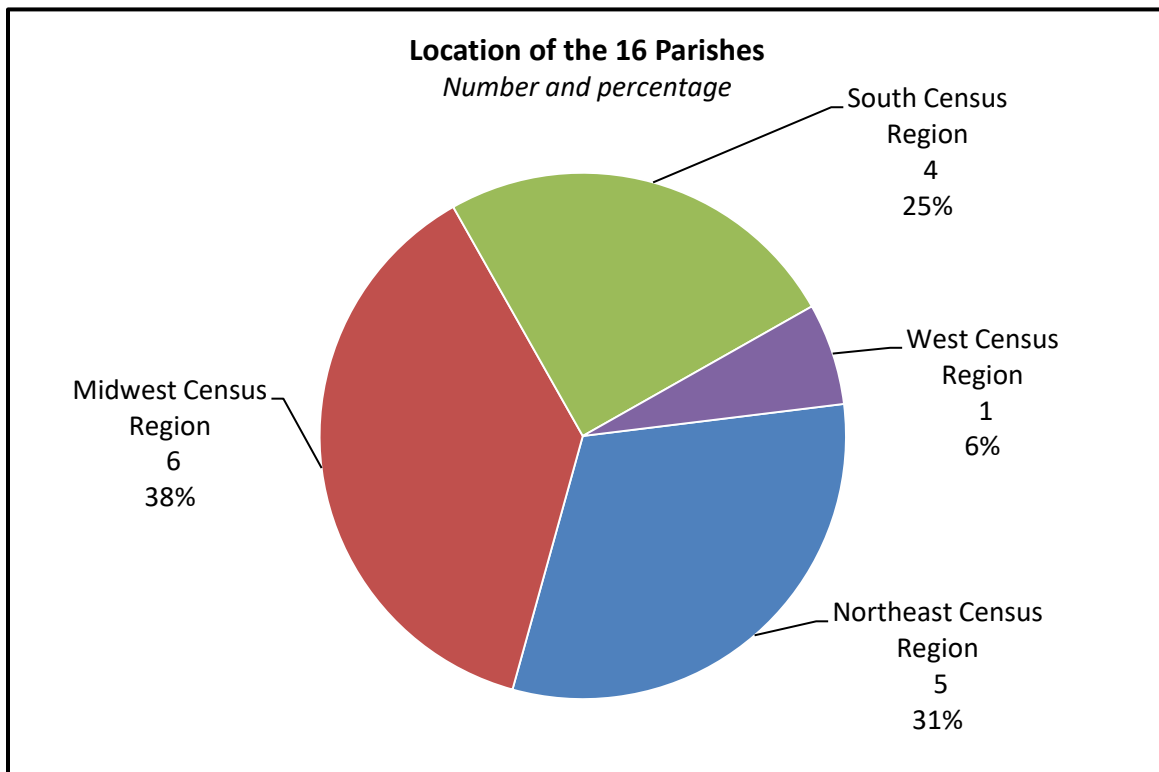
Not sure. Our churches are accessible, we have ample parking, all are invited to worship, to activities, to events and many persons with disabilities attend.

PART II: INTERVIEWS WITH PARISH STAFF MEMBERS

At the end of the survey, respondents were invited to write in their name and contact information if they were interested in being interviewed for the project. Altogether, 66 wrote in an email address where they could be contacted, all of whom were sent an email. In the end, 19 agreed to an interview, all of which were conducted by Zoom from June to August 2024. The interview protocol used for the interviews is presented in Appendix III.

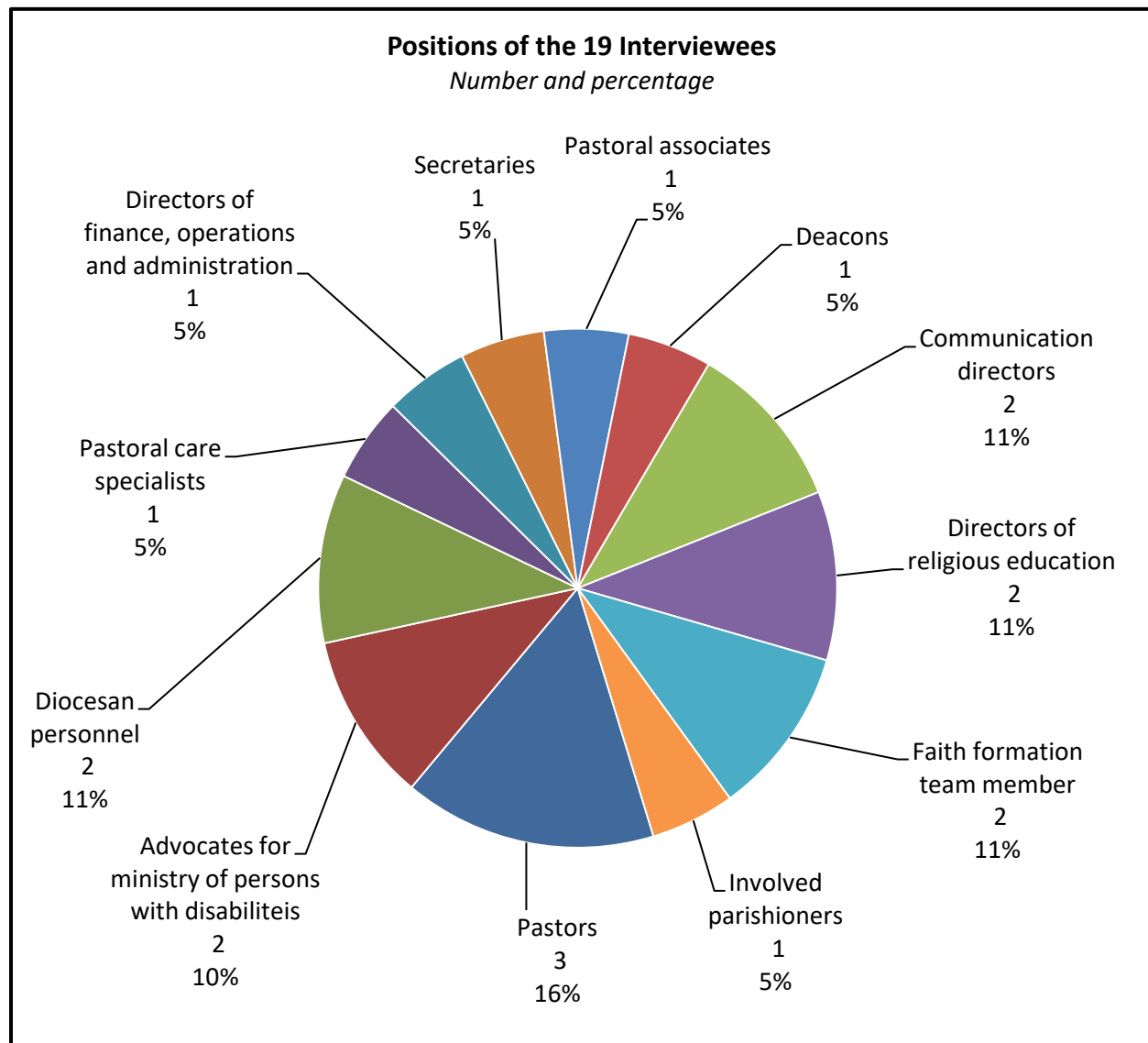
Section I: Background and Location of Parishes and Interviewees

Altogether, the 19 interviewees came from 16 parishes (as well as two dioceses), with one parish having two people whose responsibilities include inclusion of persons with disabilities, both of whom wanted to be interviewed.²⁹ The figure below shows the U.S. Census regions of the parishes. They are most commonly from the Midwest Census Region (38%), with only one parish volunteering to be interviewed from a parish in the West Census Region (6%).



²⁹ The two diocesan personnel are excluded from this figure. Both are from Midwest U.S. Census Region dioceses.

Two of the 19 interviewees turned out to be diocesan personnel, which had not been known to the researcher.³⁰ Others had more than one role, such as a deacon whose responsibilities include being in charge of faith formation at his parish. The positions identified by at least two interviewees each were pastors, faith formation team members, DREs, advocates for persons with disabilities, and communications directors. The figure below displays the main position titles of these 19 persons.



³⁰ The diocesan respondents said that parish leaders who had received the survey invitation forwarded the interview invitations to them, believing them to be more knowledgeable about outreach to disabilities than they themselves. As such, the purpose of the interview had not been adequately communicated by the researchers. The interviewer still conducted the interview, but asked general questions about their dioceses.

Section II: How Parishes Identify Persons with Disabilities

None of the 16 parishes or two dioceses report that they feel they are successful at identifying the disabilities present among their parishioners. While one parish reported that the parish does not really make an effort at present to identify persons with disabilities (“Well, I don’t know that we actively go looking for people”), the others say their inability to find ways to ask about and be trusted enough for persons to tell about their disabilities or their children’s disabilities is a major source of frustration for them.

Two interviewees described their frustration in this way:

Interviewee 12: First I just want to tell you that I think you sending us that survey was really a great opportunity for us to kind of assess all of these kinds of questions because we encounter people with disabilities at every level, and pretty much every ministry. So really kind of caused us to stop and assess how we were doing things. So, I appreciate that, I thought that was really a good time to kind of look ourselves in the mirror and ask, you know, how we were doing on that. But a part of answering your questions, I don’t know if this is exactly what you’re looking for, but really when we first sat down to kind of talk about how we can kind of answer the question that you were asking, was what data do we have? What information do we have at our fingertips where we can kind of look at and say, okay, these are our numbers, right? What we realized right away was the data is lacking. Listen, obviously it’s very sensitive information for some people. It’s medical involved information. We know all the privacy laws that are in place. So really the only information we have at our fingertips was regarding religious education. That’s for one parent registering their children for our programs, and they voluntarily share some of that information with disabilities and challenges that some of our younger parishioners have, so that we can accommodate them and obviously be aware of some of the challenges that they present. Other than that, the rest of the assessment on our end as far as figuring out where are these people with disabilities, was really just kind of having a discussion about where do we encounter them, and what are we observing? So, it’s really just kind of, you know, it’s not that hard data that we want to see as much. So, it’s more like, okay, yeah, we really focus on that for a minute. We see people coming in the mass, you know, with a walker, or needing a wheelchair, or they need a hearing assistance device. So, it was really a lot of, I would say guess work, but guest imitations on where they are. But it really did open our eyes to say that, wow, they’re all over. These challenges are all through our parish. *[Deacon in the Northeast]*

Interviewee 18: I think in terms of parish life if we don’t know what the need is it’s very hard to meet it because I can make some assumption, but they’re very rarely correct. Sometimes with some people we’re able to talk to them and we’re able to get the information that they want us to have. But because of privacy and people having the right to keep whatever information they want private, especially medical information we are

really reliant on the person who struggles to trust us enough to tell us what we need to offer to help them. *[Pastor in the South]*

The two most common ways parishes report identifying those with disabilities are through their faith formation programs for children and by sight for those attending worship services or participating in parish life. The findings related to these two ways of identifying persons with disabilities are described below.

Identifying Disabilities among Children in Faith Formation or Enrolling in a Parish School

Seven of the 16 parishes indicate that their registration form (mostly online) for children's faith formation programs includes a section where parents can write in any "special needs" their children may have. Some wondered aloud if this is the best way to identify such disabilities as they lamented that many parents leave that section blank, and they have to discover the disabilities while the children are participating in the programs, as is described in the excerpts below.

Interviewee 2: So, I'll start out with how we find out and then what we do. So, the usual way I find out is when we register students for youth ministry programs, we do have a list there for parents to just say, hey, is there anything we should know about? And that's just kind of meant for generic – not all parents share the information, which, to be frank, I'm not...³¹ don't really try to push for, because if they're not comfortable sharing it or they don't feel we need to know. [...] ³² I kind of don't want to go there unless I have permission. So, we usually find out... obviously, some physical disabilities are a little bit more obvious. Like, one of our students has Down syndrome, so that one's easy to see. Sometimes for better or worse, though, also we've had people – this is not so much students themselves, but siblings might be like in a wheelchair or stuff like that, so that's more obvious. But, yeah, most of the people I work with, I just find out through registration or parents mentioning it before an event or something. Then what we try to do, well, I'll start out with general and then get more specific to my programs. *[Youth Minister in the Midwest]*

Interviewee 5: So, identifying and reaching out to people is definitely an area we, as a parish, need a lot of work. To help you understand my answers, I'm going to give you not my entire life story, because that would take a while, but I'm going to give you some background, just so you know how I approach things... I'm one of six children. One of my sisters is blind and profoundly autistic. She currently lives in a group home in the same town as my parents. It's been a great fit for her. They have fought very hard to have her be active and involved in her parish. I myself also have six children, one of whom has a

³¹ This symbol denotes when a small amount of text has been omitted.

³² This symbol denotes when there is a lot of text omitted from what is presented for brevity and clarity's sake.

rare genetic condition that leads to some medical challenges, as well as intellectual disabilities with autistic features. So, as I said, this issue is near and dear to my heart. But it also means I kind of have an eye, you know what I mean, for the atypical or...and I've seen this in my kids, too. They can sort of spot, like, "Hmm, that person is a little atypical." And it's not like we're profiling people. It just makes us more aware because we're living it, so we see it, and so we get it. So that's my background. Now, how that plays out in our parish, so in terms of identifying people with disabilities. So, in our parish database, there is a little box that can be checked for special needs. But I don't know that we ask that information when people are registering as parishioners. I mean, it's been a long time since I registered, so I don't recall exactly, but I'm pretty sure that our form – I mean, there's always, like, the blank where you could tell us things, but we don't specifically ask. And it's something that I've been wondering if we should [ask]. And if we should, how should we? Because we don't – you want to be inclusive and you want to be able to accommodate people and meet people's needs, but sometimes people don't like being asked, "What's your disability?" So, trying to figure out how to do that. *[Communications & Development Director in the South]*

Interviewee 15: Just a quick FYI, my background, before I worked now for the diocese. But before I came working for the diocese I was a behavioral therapist and I work with people with cognitive disabilities. So, when I think of disabilities that sometimes is where my head goes. So, when it comes to, especially within our, like religious ed program, often times families will talk either directly with the director of religious education, or might mention it on, like when they're registering for things. Often times it's families that are coming and saying, you know, here's where my child is at. We had in our Confirmation class, there was a young lady a couple of years ago who has some more cognitive disabilities. So, we worked with the parents to assure them that we could still incorporate her into the class, and that she could still be a class member, and kind of work with her ability. So, a lot of it is more direct reporting from parents. [...] It's not overtly. I think a lot of it more comes from relationships. So especially like families that have been around for a while, like they know the director of religious education. So, they, you know, hopefully they feel comfortable. *[DRE in the Midwest]*

Interviewee 16: The other way would be that several years ago we changed our enrollment form with religious ed to have a question. It's a very ambiguous question and it's not fool proof. So, with the question, does your child have any special needs of any kind? That's all it is. But it's amazing how many families don't disclose needs, don't recognize that that question could be talking about needs that could arise in a religious setting, even though they are fully aware that their kids have needs in a school setting. So, it's not fool proof, but we did add that question. So that's one thing. Then once I started working with kids and religious ed, it was like an organic need. There's a kid who was really struggling and somebody in the administration knew that I was special

education teacher. So, she reached out to me and I was already helping in religious ed. I started working with this kid directly, just with him in the classroom setting. I stayed with him until he unfortunately with Covid he no longer, he didn't return after that. But then every year, like he didn't return when religious has started back up after Covid. There was somebody else they reached out to me about. Then the next year there was somebody else they reached out to me about. So, organically for the last several years I followed one specific student. Then any years that started without a specific student, I would pop in to different classrooms and sort of observe, pay attention, talk with teachers when I got a chance, and just kind of get an idea of who may be showing a need in those settings. That's a little tricky, because then what you do with that? Like do you just provide the support, or do you have a conversation follow-up with parents? *[Parish Advocate for Persons with Disabilities in the Midwest]*

Interviewee 17: Through the faith formation means. That's where we have that first encounter when families reach out. Usually it's with the sacraments that are needing to get some formation, or need of the sacrament so we invite them to the formation. We look at what their needs are. Then we determine the appropriate area, and needs. But there's also, that sometimes it's the entry way, but sometimes we recruit them to also help in other areas, you know, depending on their gifts and talents. There could be, you can apply them to the choir and other areas that once they've been in the formation, in formation for several years and they want to help in other areas, we definitely recruit them, recruit families to help them be included in other ministries as well. [...] Well it says, usually there's an announcement during mass when faith formation is starting. So, there's that invitation that starts but we do get a lot of families that walk in. If there also is an area on the registration once families show up for that registration. If they have any additional accommodation needs that they need on that registration form, so that's where we can get that first. [...] There definitely is, and even in the bulletins we can, we made a priority to, when announcing that on the bulletins to invite families with any learning disabilities, or any accommodation needs. [...] But word of mouth also goes a long way because I'm always interested in. We're always interested. How did you hear about us? It's usually like from a family member, a cousin or somebody else that has heard of us too. *[Lead Advocate for Ministry for Persons with Disabilities in the South]*

Interviewee 18: So, one of the biggest challenges here in the [State area], we're seeing since Covid a tremendous increase in dyslexia in the school. It may have always been there and was just going undiagnosed. But whenever mom and dad, with Covid and they're learning through online learning, and that was a struggle. That's when they were doing a rapid skills development. *[Pastor in the South]*

Interviewee 19: You know, for a religious education program a lot of times the parents will let us know that they have a disability. So, we mark that down on our registration form. We have that access. *[Pastoral Associate in the Northeast]*

Identifying Disabilities Mostly by Sight When Persons Participate in Parish Life

For their adult members, all of the parishes report that they learn of parishioners' disabilities mostly by observing them when they enter their parish buildings for worship or other parish functions. For example, some parishes have trained their greeters or hospitality ministers to direct those struggling with mobility issues to areas of the worship area with pew cut-outs or to ramps/elevators to enter the church itself. Four interviewees spoke of relatives they have who have disabilities (or they themselves), and that making it easier to identify those who are struggling. Nearly all interviewees expressed frustration with this way of having to identify persons with disabilities, wondering how they could gain persons trust enough to disclose their disabilities. They also wondered what would be effective ways to ask persons about their disabilities. Excerpts from the interviews are presented below.

Interviewee 4: My first spontaneous thought was that we notice when the person is having a hard time at church, or in particular, their disabled child is having a hard time at church. Occasionally, folks with mobility issues, they might say something about the front steps. Our church and our parish center both have a long flight of steps, but you can get in the back door of the parish center and the side door of the church without, so sometimes older folks will mention that. But we don't necessarily get any kind of preemptive communication, like "I'm coming to visit, and here are the issues that I have, can you accommodate?" I've never heard that. We did have a couple, I'm not sure if they were older and just had standard older people accessibility, mobility kind of issues, but they made a connection with a young girl in the parish who saw them, who just immediately latched onto them and took them to the accessible entrance and made sure they were seated in a pew with plenty of room and that kind of stuff. *[Parish Secretary in the Midwest]*

Interviewee 8: We have greeters. So, if somebody who was new came with a walker or, as you say, a wheelchair or crutches, we're able to direct them to the elevator, which is at ground level in our parking lot. That elevator would take them up to the church. Or if they needed access to the cafeteria, where we usually would have, every once in a while, Sunday breakfast, so they're able to get to that elevator to get to either the cafeteria, which is the basement of the church, the church is one flight up from there. *[Director of Finance, Operations and Administration in the Northeast]*

Interviewee 12: We see people coming in the mass, you know, with a walker, or needing a wheelchair, or they need a hearing assistance device. So, it was really a lot of, I would say guess work, but guest imitations on where they are. But it [the survey] really did open our eyes to say that, wow, they're all over. These challenges are all through our parish. *[Deacon in the Northeast]*

Interviewee 13: I feel like our parish, so first of all go back a little bit, we live in a small town. So, a lot of times just because we are all in the same kind of circles, we tend to

know, a person's story. But as far as like identifying people with disabilities, I feel like our parish actually does a really good job of accepting people where they are. So, whether or not it's a diagnosed disability, or whether or not that's just that person's the way they function, I think that our parish is pretty welcoming to people with disabilities, which is awesome. We have people with disabilities in real leadership roles, which I think is also awesome. I think that just like in general trying to be welcoming. Now, that being said, it is harder, I think, for people that are really unknown to our parish community to come in and kind of make those connections. Like we had a family that had three kids with autism come. They came for a couple of weeks, you know. Like I made connection with them because I'm sitting in mass, and I'm hearing noises. I'm like, oh, autism is in the house, you know. Like as a person familiar with disabilities, I could recognize that. I made, you know, personal contact with them and stuff. But I think it is hard for a family like that to come to mass regularly. *[Parishioner in the West]*

Other Ways of Identifying Persons with Disabilities

Beyond the two most common ways parishes report identifying persons with disabilities are some mentioned infrequently, such as by word of mouth or by becoming engaged with the group homes, nursing homes, senior centers, and homeless shelters near the parish. These ways of identifying persons with disabilities are described in the interview excerpts below.

Interviewee 1: We have outpatients from the [Name] Psychiatric Center. We have people with mobility issues using either walkers or wheelchairs. We have people with developmental disabilities. A couple of the members of our choir are Down syndrome adults. We have families with children who are autistic. So, I think, in my opinion, the important thing is for the general atmosphere of the parish, regardless of who is coming in the door, to be friendly and welcoming to all. We also have a food pantry, which is a newer construction. Our church — the physical mobility access is through an elevator at ground level inside the building, but you have to follow the signs that say where the access is, and people often don't do that. But anyway, our food pantry is a newer constructed building, and it is at ground level. And we do have, among our guests at the food pantry, people with many disabilities, because a lot of them are elderly. *[Formation Team Member in the Northeast]*

Interviewee 8: We do, besides homebound, across the street from us is a senior citizen center — or not center, a senior citizen living, and then attached to that is those with dementia. So, we do visit them for purposes of ministry and Holy Communion. Once a week, we do a prayer service. One of the deacons or myself, on occasion, will go there, offer a prayer service for people who are not mobile. [...] If someone's at home, like I say, we do make home visits. Somebody from the family will call us, say, oh, they'd like to receive Communion, or they're just looking to have a conversation with somebody or

confession. So, Father will travel to somebody's house to hear their confession. If it's a prayer service or something like that, one of the — we're blessed with three deacons who are mobile, so they'll go and minister, as long as it's not confession. *[Director of Finance, Operations and Administration in the Northeast]*

Interviewee 9: We have an annual stewardship of talent renewal, every year in the parish. I ask all of our parishioners to commit, make a commitment to ministry for at least one ministry for at least one year. If it's not life giving for them, then it's not a death sentence, they can get out of it and do something else at that time. When we're doing that initiative there's a brochure that also goes out that we ask people to identify specific gifts and talents, as well as specific needs that they may have. We have, we sort of promote through also our religious education program if there's any kind of particular needs, special needs. We offer massive inclusion here at Saint Andrew the Apostle, which goes out to the diocesan website plus our own social media outlets to encourage and invite people to participate. We have the reputation of being an accessible, inclusive parish because the rule of thumb is that if I can't get them, nobody gets them. Because I've lived with disability for 36 years of my 37 years of priesthood. So, you know, the entire plant is accessible. I'm often called on with other parishes to kind of help them to understand the concept of inclusion. We sort of just have that reputation, you know. Our church is designed to be what I call, my own language, ABA integrative, rather than just ABA compliant. For example, our pews would have, when I redesigned the, remodel of the assembly area, we deliberately created spaces next to a pew for a person to sit next to the person rather than having an attendant sitting behind them or away from them. Or a section that is just for, you know, wheelchair users. So, you know, I have a sense, I'm so old at this. I argued for the ADA. So, I've been at it for a long time. But we sort of have that reputation in the parish because of my own disability. *[Pastor in the Northeast]*

Interviewee 10: We do have. It is listed on our website, but somebody would have to go there and look. We do put articles in our bulletin like quarterly, or semi-annually, letting people know that we're here and to reach out to us. We don't often get anybody calling us. We usually find out from a loved one, you know, or perchance we find out. Then we did try to look at parish access, and how are we helping those that have physical, maybe mental, you know, something that's causing them to have difficulties participating either in mass or in our activities, and what could we do. We did a survey. We didn't get very many responses from the survey. [...] I usually find out through either them coming up to me, or their family members reaching out to me, or someone in the parish says you need to contact this person. We do have mental health support. We have a program called Project Hope we do twice a year for six weeks. We do have a caregiver group that we do in conjunction with the archdiocese that we do once a month. We have a bereavement group for those that lose loved ones. We have a Young at Heart Group that we, that do activities and stuff, but we reach out to them when we want to try things. We've asked

them to help us with going and sitting with some of our parishioners when the caregiver needs to, you know, needs some time away or whatever. They are gracious in doing that for me. So, we're kind of linking people up together. We do, we have a Cancer Care Ministry. So, we have 12 people trained through the place up in [nearby city]. It's called [cancer treatment center name]. So, myself and another person were certified through them in their training for leaders. Then we've trained some additional people, another ten people, to be able to minister or walk with, or people with cancer. So, right now, we know of about 30. I'm sure there are many more in our parish that we're unaware of. Because again you only find out if they ask. [*Pastoral Care Specialist in the Midwest*]

Interviewee 18: I don't know that in terms of others, you know, in the deaf community cochlear implants are pretty, I don't know if controversial is the right word but it's the word I'm going to use. In the deaf community, especially if both parents are deaf or hard of hearing they typically do not seek out a cochlear implant for their child. But if the parents are hearing and the child is the one that's hard of hearing or deaf, they typically do. I think whenever they're a little bit younger that works better. When they're a little bit older it's a little more difficult. In terms of, like we have an amputee who sings in the choir. I'm just trying to go through other people involved. We have some families with birth defects. Right now, there are at least three adults who are wheel chair, completely wheel chair bound. They would not have the ability to talk. I don't know what their cognitive ability, or, you know, with HIPAA stuff I wouldn't know what they haven't shared with me. But they have received their sacraments because they do go to communion. I don't know the issue with low gluten and celiac is that big of a deal. But I would bet on any given weekend we have five to ten people that who that is a necessity for them to go to communion. [*Pastor in the South*]

Interviewee 19: But we know sometimes because an example we had, an adult women's group living in the community. It was our responsibility to service them. If we have nursing homes in the area, and we go into the nursing home people will tell us. Sometimes they'll bring the residents to the community. That's where, you know, even training for people that help us get them into the parish, and into the pews, those kinds of things, there's not a lot of resources out there for people. You're kind of, you know, using someone who has had the experience to say, you know, we'd like to welcome them as they get off the bus. We'd like to help the person who is bringing them in. Because there's usually one person bringing adults in. But with children it's a little bit easier to identify those. [...] You know, we do offer spiritual direction here at the parish. There's a deacon that does it, myself who are specifically trained in the agnition process. So, a lot of times people that have issues, like that will come in to talk to someone. The pastor obviously, deacons they'll come in and talk. If you get to know your community and they feel comfortable, they'll tell you. It's not something that you can always observe, as you know. So, it's really by word of mouth, by the people telling us they're struggling with

something, or a lot of family members will come in and say, I would like to have you help me manage or navigate this process. My son or daughter is bipolar and now has an addiction. Do you have any resources? A lot of times they'll tell us that. But I think that's because you have the relationships. When you've been in a parish for so long you know the parishioners. I don't know what happens if you don't have those relationships because I think that's key. *[Pastoral Associate in the Northeast]*

Trends Parishes See in Disabilities that are Increasing

Interviewees were also asked if they have noticed any disabilities that have been increasingly common in their parishes in recent years. The most common disabilities are ADHD, autism, a growth in their elderly population (and so in aging-related disabilities), and mental health-related disabilities. They are described in the excerpts below.

Interviewee 3: ADHD is a little bit older group. Down syndrome, ADHD is more, I will say, like, sixth grade and up. But the smaller children mostly is autism. *[Diocesan Director for the Ministry of Persons with Disabilities in the Midwest]*

Interviewee 6: I do think when it comes to younger parishioners, students, ADHD does seem, or ADD, one of the two, or both, does seem to be on the increase. And I don't know – I mean, to a degree, that could be, in my experience, not overprescribing, but kind of just – I mean, maybe also labeling it overly. I don't know exactly, over-labeling some kids who have a lot of energy sometimes, in my experience. But I have noticed it increasing, generally. And then it was interesting that you had on that form [the survey], you had, like, I don't know exactly how you put it, but maybe addictions to pornography, for example. Especially in teenagers, we have...we'll do anonymous surveys at the end of the year and they'll often put in there that's one of the topics they want to cover. So, it's definitely something I think that, unfortunately, is a problem now. *[Communications Director in the South]*

Interviewee 7: Of course, I have lots of kids, ADHD, a few kids on the autism spectrum, but highly functioning autistic. And I know that and have reached out to their parents, and they always tell me that they'd rather them just be included as normal unless they can't manage it. And this year actually was the first year where we really had that happen with a couple of our second graders. They were just both kids with diagnosed ADHD, and both really could not be in a Sunday school classroom. They just could not sit there and participate for the hour in a way that was productive and helpful to the other children and the teachers. So, we ended up making a different plan for them this year. So, I guess when we encounter it, we try to react. Again, it's on a case by case basis because I don't have a large group. And then the other person that I know of is an adult woman, and she is wheelchair-bound. Thankfully, we have an elevator. She has family that can assist her

to getting to things. And if she will express, we've told her, if you want to — because, of course, we have no accessible meeting rooms except for the one very large parish hall. And so, we've told her before, if you want to come, we'd love for you to come. You just have to give us a heads up, because our go-to is going to be to schedule it in some of the non-accessible rooms because they're smaller. But of course, if she expresses a desire to be there, we will change that. And that's what we've done. So, I don't know, that probably was more of an answer than you were looking for. *[DRE in the South]*

Interviewee 9: I would say, without hesitation, families that are dealing with depression. I think that mental illness, mental health, I don't want to use the word mental illness, but mental health. I think that is significant, and not necessarily, there's a stigma about mental health. So, people don't talk about it. But as a pastor I see it growing rapidly and significantly, and people don't know where to go for help or assistance. Parishes are not necessarily equipped to be able to handle some of that. I'm not just talking about, you know, just dealing with depression. I'm talking about really serious significant cases where people are not coming out of their homes. They're non-treatable in terms of their dealing with their mental health or depression. Those kinds of things seem to be growing in leaps and bounds. I don't think the church is really equipped to deal with it, although we do have a couple of counsellors that volunteer their time and their service, because there's concerns about liability, and issues like that, that you always have to deal with. But that's a growing need, that I think needs to have some attention. *[Pastor in the Northeast]*

Interviewee 11: The mental health, the mental health community. So mental health disorders. That's one of the things that my ministry is working on kind of developing. So mental health falls under us, but it's something that we are seeing a lot more, those mental health disabilities, and how to increase that. How to give support to parishes, so that the parish level can also support individuals going through mental health crises. [...] Anxiety, depression, I think are kind of what we're seeing a lot right now. Helping the, like parish level, like the parish personnel understand that those are true disabilities. Just because you can't see them, and just because I feel sad it doesn't mean that my faith is broken. Recognizing that there's a faith aspect and a mental health disability aspect. *[Diocesan Director for the Ministry of Persons with Disabilities in the Midwest]*

Interviewee 13: Like I said, we have, like I said, a number of people with autism. I will say the other disability that's pretty prevalent within like the youth group age is autism spectrum disorder. We live in a state where it's very prevalent. *[Parishioner in the West]*

Interviewee 17: Mental illness, and, yes, those mental disabilities. We've definitely seen a higher rise. [...] I think the whole spectrum of it with also just cognitive as well. So, we've seen, that could be example, but a lot of anxiety and depression is one. But there's also the learning, and the kiddos. What's interesting is we've seen more of a combination

of different disabilities or an overlap not just one specifically. So that combination is what we've seen a higher rise in. *[Lead Advocate for Ministry for Persons with Disabilities in the South]*

Interviewee 19: You know, with our young people, anxiety has to be the number one thing. I mean it's just, it's rampant. I mean, kids are, and they use the terms anymore: It's not I'm nervous, "I have anxiety, anxiety and depression." Especially with young people, and probably the two spectrums, the elderly and the young. The group in the middle is probably working, involved with the community in different ways. But those, many children, young adults, middle school group, which I'm amazed, middle school at this point. So yeah, we see a lot of that bipolar. We have a lot of that. Drugs and alcohol there's some of that. It's tough. I mean, although we're a super big community, we do see some outliers of things. We had a second grader who said in class, "My dad was arrested and is in jail for murder." So, we do hear those things too, you know. *[Pastoral Associate in the Northeast]*

Section III: How Parishes Are Inclusive of Persons with Disabilities

One way that parishes include persons with disabilities are the accommodations they have made to facilities and the programs they offer. These ways are described in this section, as well as the ways parishes have made persons with disabilities included and visible, primarily by having them be involved in parish ministries.

Accommodations and Programs Offered for Persons with Disabilities

Interviewees mention many accommodations and programs their parishes have to better serve the persons with disabilities they encounter as parishioners or visitors. At the same time, many lament that they do not have some facility-related accommodation or another kind of program. Below are excerpts from the interviews that focus on the accommodations and programs they provide. They include their disability-friendly faith formation programs (including home-study resources), sound systems to help those with hearing difficulties, their services for the homebound (including their livestreaming of Masses), the transportation services they provide to parish functions, and some fairly specific accommodations and programs mentioned by only one interviewee each.

Disability-friendly Faith Formation Programs for Children

Interviewee 8: We do have at-home learning for religious education. So, if somebody has a child with a learning disability and the parent is comfortable teaching them at home, we have programs where they can go online to interact with their child in a homeschool situation. We do have that if a child is sick, they're able to dial into the school to be part of live classroom instruction. So that's available. It hasn't been used much. It was in use, i.e., COVID. But we've kept up with the technology so that if there was ever a situation where people needed to use it, it was an available opportunity. *[Director of Finance, Operations and Administration in the Northeast]*

Interviewee 9: Yeah, we have a program for people with particular needs. We kind of use that language. To engage in faith formation, to meet their needs sacramentally, pastorally. *[Pastor in the Northeast]*

Interviewee 15: Just a quick FYI, my background, before I worked now for the Diocese. But before I came working for the diocese I was a behavioral therapist and I work with people with cognitive disabilities. So, when I think of disabilities that sometimes is where my head goes. So, when it comes to, especially within our, like religious ed program, oftentimes families will talk either directly with the director of religious education, or might mention it on, like, when they're registering for things. Oftentimes it's families that are coming and saying, you know, here's where my child is at. We had in our Confirmation class, there was a young lady a couple of years ago who has some more

cognitive disabilities. So, we worked with the parents to assure them that we could still incorporate her into the class, and that she could still be a class member, and kind of work with her ability. So, a lot of it is more direct reporting from parents. [*DRE in the Midwest*]

Interviewee 18: So, we have moved away from a classroom model for faith formation. It's all family-based faith formation. That's been very helpful. The person who is in charge of that, her son is on the spectrum. Apparently, he livestreamed the mass, and typically we have 50 to a hundred views a week. He's about 30 of them. He just types on the mass and watches it. He's fascinated with priests. He's a very kind young man. His mother, because I believe in family-based faith formation and she does too, so that's been helpful. [*Pastor in the South*]

Sound Systems for Those with Hearing Difficulties

Interviewee 5: We do have hearing assist devices. It's basically like an FM system that some folks can either just tune their hearing aids directly into the FM system that the pastor is using. Or, if their hearing aids don't have that capability, or they don't have hearing aids, they just are having a little trouble hearing because, again, it's an old building and sounds bounce all over the place, we do have a hearing assist device that they can request before Mass. It's basically, like, a headset, like you're wearing, that's just linked in to the priest's mic....So, that is a way that we do feature things on our website. We used to have a number of deaf families in the parish, and so we always had an ASL interpreter at one of the Masses. Most all of those families actually have moved away, so we don't have an ASL interpreter regularly. And since our last parishioner moved, we actually haven't had any requests for it. [*Communications & Development Director in the South*]

Interviewee 16: We've also talked about, as a parish, and I might be jumping around on you, but we talked about how to make it more accessible for people who are older, and have a hard time hearing. So, we got the FM systems in place for them, because we were having people who didn't want to sit at the front because they didn't move fast enough for the receiving line in their thoughts. Nobody else thought that, but they didn't want to hold it up. So, then they were sitting at the back but then they couldn't hear. So, they couldn't really have an encounter. So, the FM system, we got that taken care of. I do think reaching out and identifying is one our big challenges though. I feel like that is an ongoing challenge. [*Parish Advocate for Persons with Disabilities in the Midwest*]

Services for the Homebound Including Livestreaming of Masses

Interviewee 6: We live-stream our Sunday Mass, 11 a.m. Mass every week. So that is a big ministry that's grown since COVID. We just kept it going. And I think for a lot of our homebound elderly parishioners, or if they're ill, it's really vital for them, and they love having that service. So that's something that we've really made a priority, installed the cameras, and made sure that they're able to participate in Mass even if they can't physically be with us. [*Communications Director in the South*]

Interviewee 8: Well, we do offer a weekly viewing from their homes, the Mass, so they can at least, if they can't get to church, they have the opportunity to see a live Mass. And however, if they have special needs within their home, that system is addressing it, so they're able to view. So, if they're hearing impaired, they would have whatever assistance built in there. [*Director of Finance, Operations and Administration in the Northeast*]

Interviewee 9: Yeah, we have a program for people with particular needs. We kind of use that language. To engage in faith formation, to meet their needs sacramentally, pastorally. We also minister to a very large number of healthcare facilities, which is an attraction to our parish. Where most parishes may have one or two assisted living centers in their community, maybe a hospital or a nursing home, we have 13 in our parish that we minister to on a monthly basis. We also cover for the chaplain in the hospital, with their local hospice, and these 13 facilities. So, there's outreach to, we stream a lot of our liturgies to these facilities as well. So that if people cannot come to us, we at least try to provide access to them through livestream as well as Eucharistic ministers visiting those sites. If not on Sunday, during the week. [*Pastor in the Northeast*]

Transportation Services to Parish Functions

Interviewee 6: And then the same thing for our homebound — I don't know if you want to call it a homebound ministry, but we do take Communion to those who need it. And often we'll have family members offering to be the ones to pick up Jesus and take it to their family members who can't come to Mass physically. But we'll also have — we have a team of volunteers that does that as well. So, yeah, it's a good group. [...] And I think, oh, yeah, and transportation to Masses. We have only had one parishioner take advantage of that so far. But she's 96, 97, and everyone loves her, and she tries to go to everything. And so, we started a little WhatsApp text group so people could say, hey, I'm taking [Name] to — I didn't mean to say her name. I'm taking her to the 7 p.m. Mass tonight, or I'm taking her to the 11 a.m. today, or I'll take her to Bible study tonight. Just so she has a ride. And she's pretty proactive about it, too. If she doesn't have one, she'll give you a call. So that just kind of came out of — we saw the need, and we just created it. But ever

since that began, we started making announcements at Mass that say, if you need a ride to Mass, let us know, just so we know their names and can do that for them and help them. *[Communications Director in the South]*

Interviewee 8: We do offer outreach that if anybody needs car service to be picked up and come to church, we offer that. *[Director of Finance, Operations and Administration in the Northeast]*

Interviewee 12: We have wheelchairs off to the side. There are a lot of elderly people that are transported over for mass on the weekends from nearby, you know, assisted living facilities and nursing homes. Those vans and specially equipped vehicles for handicapped, they come. They load and unload those people right there, and they're able to kind of come in. So, I think we do a very good job of accommodating people that need to be accommodated. I could see it being much more of a challenge with churches that are older, and maybe have, you know, 20 steps to get in. Or they have a handicap ramp on the side, and it's kind of hard to get in. So, I think, you know, maybe because our building is newer, it's just more convenient for them. *[Deacon in the Northeast]*

Other Accommodations and Programs

Interviewee 6: And then we did recently put, not big font, large font, large print, but just kind of a normal size, regular print, I suppose, of the responses during Mass, because we noticed at our young adult Mass in particular that we might have had a lot of first time — like our young adult community does a lot of evangelization efforts, so they're bringing new people in the doors who have never been to a Mass before, and there may be inviting them to come to Mass. And so, there's the pew — responses in the pews. *[Communications Director in the South]*

Interviewee 8: We do have an elevator for people who are somewhat impaired to be able to get into church. [...] Every once in a while, when the children are there, they will do a signing for prayer or a song. But that's mostly for, I hate using the word show, but it's just there that...we've never had requests for if somebody says, I physically want to be here, but can somebody sign for me? So, we've never really had to address that as a full-time situation. During the Mass, we have some TVs throughout the church, so certain prayers and the readings are put up on the TV. But again, no one is saying, oh, I need to see everything up on the TV. We are available to do that since we have live cameras in the church, so we could televise the Mass internally on the screens. But there's never been a request for that. *[Director of Finance, Operations and Administration in the Northeast]*

Interviewee 9: One of the things that happen in the Diocese of [Name], that's the Diocese where I reside, which has been a profound blessing, was we got out of the business of

managing nursing homes. We sold them all because to be frank and honest, I do a lot of administrative work in the Diocese as well. We were losing money significantly for ministering to a population of 125 people, or 75 people in some of these healthcare institutions that we owned and operated. I mean the church was very significant in terms of the impact that it made in terms of healthcare. But we came to the recognition that we can help so many more people if we use those resources elsewhere. So, the Diocese sold all of those healthcare institutions, took all of that money, put it an endowment by which we fund what's called [Services Name]. [Services Name] is a resource for the pastors to be able to reach out to kind of make those connections. I'll give you an example of how that happened here in our, in my own parish. So, there was a woman that I assisted to, there is a large apartment complex right behind the church that I was instrumental in trying to get built here. It was built using tax credits and things like that. It's to provide housing for people with disabilities, senior population, and people in recovery. Obviously, that's how you're gonna get the tax credits with those populations. So, it's about, I think, a 72-unit apartment complex. I helped one of our parishioners, several of our parishioners to get into that complex. It was a woman that moved in with her son who was dealt with a head trauma issue when he was a young boy. The boy is 65 years old now. The mother has taken care of him his whole life, his entire life is taking care of this boy. He never qualified to be able to get in the Medicaid system. He never received any kind of government assistance outside of maybe social security, disability. She took care of him. The mother passed away. When the mother passed away, they were gonna throw him out of this unit, this apartment complex because he no longer had the financial means to be able to qualify to live there. But I was able to reach out to [Services Name] who immediately put a social worker on to the case. We did some research and we found out that years ago he qualified and was registered for Medicaid and nobody knew it. His mother never told anybody because she didn't want, the mother passed away but she never wanted anybody to know that her son was on Medicaid. There was a stigma about that. So, that service in our Diocese is a way that I'm able to help make the connections with people that need significant, have to have significant needs addressed. [...] I think it's a model for other Dioceses to follow. Because we pour millions of dollars into healthcare institutions, like this nursing home or that nursing home and what not. But we're only reaching a small population, 75-100 people. I think when they did the statistics of the number of people that [Services Name] helped and assisted over the course of, it started a couple of years ago, it was like over 45,000 people. That's an extraordinary benefit for a pastor. *[Pastor in the Northeast]*

Interviewee 10: We also have a ramp in the back. So, the priests do make use of that. They just go in the back and then come out on the altar. So, there's a ramp from either end, so that's really helpful. But again, like I thought every public building had to have automatic doors. We just had a building campaign that finished in 2019. No mandates to

put the buttons on the doors to open them automatically, which I was shocked at.
[Pastoral Care Specialist in the Midwest]

Interviewee 12: I would say on one hand we're fortunate in a number of ways. I mean first of all our church building is newer. It was built in 1992. You just mentioned the choir area, so I'm not too sure about that. But, I mean, the nice thing about our church building is that it's ADA compliant because there's no steps to get into the church or out of the church. It's all, you walk right in from the parking lot, into the north exit, into the church. There are no stairs. The doors are all super wide. *[Deacon in the Northeast]*

Interviewee 18: [Parish Name] has had the deaf ministry for the last 40 years. The noon mass has been interpreted almost that entire time. Right now, we just had a death in that community and we're discovering that she was who held the community together. We didn't know that. So, we're having to find some new glue to help that deaf community. [City] has a very high deaf and hard of hearing population. Because in the 60's and 70's there was a school here that was on the cutting edge of deaf education in the state of [State Name]. *[Pastor in the South]*

Parish Ministries Persons with Disabilities Participate in

While there are, of course, many ways to be inclusive of persons with disabilities in parish life, this part of the section is concerned mainly with how the parish makes visible their inclusion of persons with disabilities. Mainly, these persons are visible through their participation in liturgical ministries, such as being members of the choir or cantors, being greeters or hospitality ministers, being ushers, and being altar servers. Eleven of the 16 parishes mentioned some ways that their parishioners with disabilities serve, with some sample excerpts below.

Interviewee 1: The people who receive the call to be greeters, for the most part, there's always one or two, really their heart is a welcoming heart. So, it's just...maybe at some point in time we did training, but I think this is genetic...not genetically, but this is generally the type of person who is called to this ministry. And even the person who's more grouchy than friendly, his work was as a social worker. So, he might be grouchy, but he also was on the alert, so he'll help someone out. *[Formation Team Member in the Northeast]*

Interviewee 2: Yes. I know we kind of take the lead from the school on this, but our Catholic school is very much a...everyone is going to lector sooner or later at the school mass throughout the year. If you go to the school for a couple of years, you're going to lector sooner or later. In youth ministry, we don't have as many masses that...we don't have a regular youth ministry mass, but I kind of just say that's open to everyone. I know we've had a history of, again, a student with Down syndrome altar servers, and it's a

great, I mean, he seems to enjoy it, seems to want to keep doing that. So definitely I have, the one thing I will say is it's something we let the student and their family opt, I get the impression we let people opt into. But if that's something they want to do and, again, like I said, if reasonable accommodations can be made, we obviously are happy to let people do that. *[Youth Minister in the Midwest]*

Interviewee 5: I remember when I was filling out the survey, checking off, like, yes, we've had people as greeters, yes, we've had people help with parish events. Okay, mostly that's my kid. That's [Name]. Oh, for sure. For sure. She loves it. She's a greeter. She helps at the social events. She especially likes to be on cleanup duty because she knows if you're on cleanup after a reception, you can get the leftover cake. But whatever the motivation, that's totally fine. But we do have...there's that kind of overlap between disability and aging. And as people age, they do develop some physical disabilities. And, so, we are seeing that in some of our ministries. Right now, to access the altar, if you want to be a lector, an altar server, a Eucharistic minister, there's one step. It's about this high. And we've noticed that that step is starting to become a barrier for some of our Eucharistic ministers and some of our lectors. So, we are actually currently working on having a ramp made, just a small one that we could use...we want it on wheels, and we want it to be pretty, to match the church. But just a way to remove that barrier of that one step so that we can have people continue as they age or if they develop some sort of mobility disability, to be able to still access the altar. *[Communications & Development Director in the South]*

Interviewee 10: So, mostly if they're physical it's mostly been we accommodate them however we can help them best. We do have elderly people that are still greeters, or they still lector. We have a handrail that they can get up on the altar for. So, we do have those accommodations. Although we don't have automatic doors coming into the church, I don't know how we did that, but yeah. [...] Our choir loft is on the same level as the pews. So, there's no, you don't have to go up a step or anything like. There are steps for some people but they would not have to go up. We don't have an upstairs or anything like that, for our choir. *[Pastoral Care Specialist in the Midwest]*

Interviewee 13: I have a son that has a disability that's involved in ministries. I think that I'm more aware, I think, of people that have disabilities within the parish just because I'm, you know, I have that close connection to one. [...] Yeah, absolutely. So, one of our cantors is an adult with autism. Our main altar server, I mean this man he's in his 30s, is absolutely the most articulate altar server you'd ever meet. He knows exactly what to do, when to do it, even when there's changes in the mass. He does it so incredibly, proudly, and reverently. It's just beautiful. What's beautiful about our parish is when this man was a child he was all over the place. He was absolutely all over the place. His mom just did not know what to do. The priests said, let's put a robe on him. That changed everything, right. Because now he had a job. He got to get up during the mass to do his job. Now, like

just about a year and a half ago our priests brought him up and said, you know, we want to recognize your role in our parish. It's so important. The fact that he has availability in the middle of the day because he does not work, he comes and he serves at funerals. He comes on Thursdays when we have Adoration and helps father with the incense. So, like him being an altar server in our parish is his job. That's a beautiful thing. So, they gave him a special sinecure that's gold in color and they said, you know, you have earned this. You may wear it whenever you are serving. This is an honor. You know, like anyways. So, it's beautiful that they recognize that. My son is another altar server with FISD and autism. He, again, is an adult who still altar serves and he loves it. It has been a wonderful way for him to experience the mass. Because sitting and listening, you know, he has auditory processing delay. So, he can't sit and listen. It's not meaningful to him. But if he's doing things, then it's a way for him to experience the mass, you know, in a different way that relates to his learning style, I guess. *[Parishioner in the West]*

Interviewee 15: We have a lot. Some people in our ministries are a little bit older, so that they use more devices to help them like with mobility. So, there's a lot of greeters and there's a few people that are in the choir that are able to have access. We do have, in our choir, which is I think one of our biggest ministries, we do have someone who has a very, like outwardly visible, like mobility issues. She's able to use the stairs. She uses kind of canes to help her out. But we also do have a few people with more cognitive disabilities helping out. My brother has some minor cognitive disabilities, and he's in the choir. He's kind of found that nice niche there. So that's kind of fun. A couple of families when they minister together, they also have that, too. *[DRE in the Midwest]*

Interviewee 17: Through the faith formation means. That's where we have that first encounter when families reach out. Usually it's with the sacraments that are needing to get some formation, or need of the sacrament so we invite them to the formation. We look at what their needs are. Then we determine the appropriate area, and needs. But there's also, that sometimes it's the entry way, but sometimes we recruit them to also help in other areas, you know, depending on their gifts and talents. There could be, you can apply them to the choir and other areas that once they've been in the formation, in formation for several years and they want to help in other areas, we definitely recruit them, recruit families to help them be included in other ministries as well. *[Lead Advocate for Ministry for Persons with Disabilities in the South]*

Interviewee 18: So, in the choir we have several people with severe mobility issues, one who is completely blind. In terms of greeters several of our older, they would probably qualify as a special need or mobility issue, they do help with greeting and ushering. A couple do help with communion. I will say as a priest that can be very frustrating because I want people to be able to serve the Lord as they are called, but at the same time I have to turn over a parking lot. That can be very difficult when someone will not let someone else carry the paten back up to the altar. You just have to kind of grin and bear it. You

just kind of have to say this is the way it is. I want to be treated with kindness and respect. I need to treat others with kindness and respect. *[Pastor in the South]*

Interviewee 19: We do. Sometimes we will have, like we have a prayerful ministry. Sometimes people with disabilities will come in to be part of that ministry because it's a ministry that, you know, we do personals and blankets for babies, and booties. So that's the ministry that we could get them involved with. Also, with our hospitality or parish life. Because we had some women living in a group home. When we would have a spaghetti dinner, I mean it's really reaching out to them to invite them, would you like to come to the dinner? Then we'd save a table for them. Other times we'd say would you like to get involved? So, they could do something with, you know, putting the utensils together. So, there are things that you could do if you think outside the box in the different ministries to get them involved. I have to say it's about community. So, the more we get people involved, it's a win-win for everybody. *[Pastoral Associate in the Northeast]*

Section IV: Help Parishes Receive from Dioceses and Outside Organizations

This section examines what help the parish personnel report receiving from their dioceses in terms of resources and suggestions for how to better be welcoming and inclusive of the persons with disabilities within their parish boundaries. It also examines the outside organizations that the parishes have received help from in the past.

Helpfulness of their Dioceses

Seven of the 16 parish personnel say that there is no real prioritization of helping parishes reach out to and include persons with disabilities by their Dioceses. Six of the sixteen parishes, on the other hand, say that their Dioceses are very responsive to help them meet the needs.

Before examining these excerpts, however, it is instructive to review how the two diocesan personnel – whose ministry is to help parishes reach out to persons with disabilities – say their Dioceses assist parishes in this area.

Diocesan Personnel Describing Plans to Cover Persons with Disabilities Geographically

Included in this part of the analysis are the diocesan directors and one pastor who describes how their Dioceses are thinking geographically about how to provide coverage for persons with disabilities.

Interviewee 3: So, our vision, when I started and was actually nothing to even offer, so my vision was to start a program, especially Sacramental Preparation program, that will give accessibility within 20 minutes' reach for the parents. So that's why I located the 10 parishes. I took a map, I sat down – because we have 117 parishes, some of them are closing now because we are restructuring, but at that time was 107 parishes. So, I looked and I did almost, like, with the marker when I want to place parishes that will be easy access for parents to have something, that they can receive sacramental preparation, not only for children, but even adults with disabilities, because we have right now in program, a 64-year-old person that we're accommodating and doing one-on-one preparation with that person. So that's exactly how I structure the first year. And the 10 parishes, I provided training. We found volunteers. So, actually, those 10 parishes are equipped to do any type of disability. They have pretty much like regular, you will say, religious education classes. They meet twice a month, and they have structured program. So that's something that's, when somebody calls me, first thing, I will refer them to the website and say, look at on the list of all the parishes that are equipped to do, because they list the ages, they list when they meet, they list the coordinators, and see if that is convenient for you and if that's something that fits your needs or respond to your needs. If somebody is more severe, then we have options to either do training online, or we also

have option to have one-on-one. So, we almost have like substitute teachers who will be stepping in, catechists, and be working one-on-one with the parents and the child or the young adult or adult. And then on monthly basis, we meet with those people and we kind of assess the situation, where they are with the learning, how much they know, depend which sacrament they are working on. So, yes, but now what you are saying is actually we start another move that with parish in [City Name], we have smaller parishes that don't have the manpower like [City Name] and more south. The smaller parishes, they don't have people. So, what we did, we are working right now with Chicago to bring the SPRED training program that will be every day of the week for different group age and different level of disability. And, also, at the same time, right now, what I'm working with all the catechists and volunteers is to have support groups during the time for parents. So, many people, of course, drop off the kids and go and do chores because that's exactly their time kind of free for an hour or so. But many sometimes sits in the car and they have nothing. They just wait for the 45 minutes to an hour.

[...]

Interview 3 Cont'd: So, what we've done, every year, we have we call kickoff program for all the catechists and leadership in the parishes. So, it's not only catechists or DREs, but also all formation program directors, youth formation, young adult formation. So, it's about 170 people every year, twice a year, because we do the kickoff in September, usually another one is March, like midyear. And that's where we have a day of training on disability specifically. So last year, what we did, we had a doctor, Dr. Madonna Healy, who is not only specializing with her background in ADHD, but also, she is a mother of four with ADHD. So, she did a very beautiful education session for probably like over an hour with questions and answers. And then they work in the groups with different scenarios that they were working together, how they will respond to different needs. And we ended with panel discussion. So, on the panel was actually a seminarian who was brought up with a brother with disabilities, was parent, was catechist, was priest, and also was volunteer. So was panel of professional people combined with those who work directly with the person. And it was absolutely amazing training. Everybody raves about this. We received many comments. So, for this year, for September, we are bringing a speaker who is also a doctor, and she's going to address this year more specifically on treatments and therapies and everything that will be available in that aspect. But now, because, as you know, budget is very limited even on the diocese level for disability, okay? [...] So, I was fortunate enough that I received a grant. So, with this grant, specifically the grant is written for education only. So, with this grant, I want to do almost like parish clusters, what you were talking about, that's maybe four parishes, and bring all those parishes together and do education that will focus...maybe have a day training where...or we'll see. Maybe we can even do it all day training, when we're going to address the most important disabilities that exist. So that would be autism, Down

syndrome, the ADHD, and also another, like, physical aspect of disability, from that angle. So, we were looking at, last week, mapping again to see how many parishes we can bring that we can fit within the fiscal year and have the training available. [*Diocesan Director for the Ministry of Persons with Disabilities in the Midwest*]

Interviewee 11: I honestly would just like to see, so what I see kind of a lot happen at the parish level is that we create a spot for individuals with disabilities to go. So, like we might have a specific row, we might have one wheelchair cut out. But that one identifies what they are. So, we should be breaking down the social barriers of all of our pews, and all of our space, should have access for individuals with disabilities. So that we don't have to roll to the very front of the pew, like to the very front, especially if we're running late. That's embarrassing. Nobody likes to do that. But yeah, it's just more, I think it would be great if there were more ministries for people with disabilities. But I would like to see them more included in what the church already has offered, because separate is not equal. So, we don't need, like we have my office who I work with getting inclusion in the schools in the parish levels. But if we already have something, like we have a Knights of Columbus, how do we get that Knights of Columbus to be accessible so that anybody with a disability can join. [...] So, I currently have, so my ministry serves 550 families throughout the entire diocese. Of those we have like six or seven families who have individuals with disabilities that will read, there will be lectors. Now that was a little bit of a fight to get it to show that hey, they might not read exactly how you expect them to read, but they can read and they still should be included. If they want to encourage their faith, like if they want to grow their faith, and be a reader or a lector, then we need to allow that.

[...]

Interviewee 11 Cont'd: Right now, it's both in our Diocese. We have, we're very lucky to have my ministry. My ministry is not something that is very typical. I have two Dioceses in Canada that call and ask for advice on how to handle this. I have Diocese throughout the United States that call because our ministry is so, it's not the norm. So right now, we have kind of little pockets. We have different parishes that are known for their special education, their resources that they have. So, families will move or migrate to those parishes. But ideally, each parish would, like if you have a child, or anybody, because I work birth through end of life. So, if you have somebody that comes in with a disability, ideally if you need help supporting them you would call my office and I would go out and help you create ideas and all of the things so that this person can be successful, to keep them in their home parish. [...] One of the things that we have really done, so I've only been in this position for a year. I have really worked with the community resources within [City]. So, if that were to happen, off the top of my head I know of two places that I could go to see if they have adult changing tables. I would go reach out to them to see, these are free or very lost cost for parishes or families. I just helped a family get a

wheelchair that the needed for their kiddo. So, we would go to those two places. If they come back, and it's \$50 instead of \$500 and the parish still could not afford that, we would then go through the diocese and find money for them to be successful. *[Diocesan director for ministry with persons with disabilities, Midwest]*

Interviewee 9: Yeah, we do. I'm very friendly with [Name] who runs the office of disability, and death ministry. So, there's about five parishes in the Diocese that offer massive inclusion. So those are like heavily advertised in our catholic paper through the diocesan office. One of my parishioners is the executive secretary to that ministry in the Diocese. She sits as support to many ministries. So that's how people can find their way to us as well. So, between what we promote in terms of our own outreach, we use constant contact as a vehicle for communication in the parish. I think that's how the word gets, invitations are, you know, channeled back to our parish. *[Pastor in the Northeast]*

No Real Prioritization of Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities by their Dioceses

If the Dioceses of the interviewees whose excerpts are presented below are actively trying to help parishes, the interviewees are not aware of it.

Interviewee 1: We had in our Diocese a person whose job was disability awareness, and she retired. I don't believe they filled that position. And she's a member of our parish, and she was someone who would always be pointing out to me something that I needed to do better or differently. But I know in her work for the Diocese, it was largely reactionary. She had a very small work schedule. So, it was if someone called, she would respond and provide assistance. It wasn't proactive, as had been in the 1990s, where there was a big thrust to...probably 1990s into 2000s, where there was an intentional thrust towards creating disability awareness and also programs that particularly ministered to...for example, we used to have, twice a year, a retreat for people with disabilities, adults with disabilities. *[Formation Team Member in the Northeast]*

Interviewee 2: I think some things that...I'm going to take this in and let me write this down, actually, for myself to share. So, I think some things that would be helpful is I can do this on my own, but obviously it's a little bit more effective it comes from the Archdiocese. Just an understanding that, like, the mass is open to all. And if the person sitting next to me in mass may have – I'm just going to go with this one – might be someone who doesn't have housing and may not have housing because they have mental health issues, they're welcome here and they're valued here. And as a parish, we want to be welcoming. Obviously, we will still have some boundaries, but... *[Youth Minister in the Midwest]*

Interviewee 4: I am not aware that there's anybody at the Diocese. I've never heard any communication about it. Now, we're really fortunate that our PSR coordinator actually

works for [State Name] First Steps. And so, she knows all about disabilities and accommodations and that kind of stuff, so we'd be able to keep it local. But, no, I've never heard it. And really, the last big in-person secretaries meeting last year that I was at, at the chancery, there's a woman who...she's a secretary at another parish, but she used to go to church here, and I think cerebral palsy is what she's got going on. And she's got kind of the forearm crutches, and she kind of has to drag herself around. It does not look comfortable. And they had absolutely no accommodation for her in the room where we were all meeting. She just kind of had to do her best to scooch between tables that were too close to each other, and how was she going to get to the lunch table and carry that back. And so that, I definitely kind of raised my eyebrows at that. [She looks up her diocesan website during the interview] Well, we do have a weekly communication from the chancery, called the Monday Morning Memo. And it gets into minutiae. So, I feel like if we had something or developed something new, that word would spread pretty fast. It's possible that the people in charge of religious ed at the diocesan level have something, and I just don't know about it. But outside of the religious ed office, I've never heard anything. I think it probably would be useful. This is a really rural diocese, though, and so we may not have the resources of a big city diocese, but we also don't have, we don't have the population. Of course, aging, yeah, lots of aging people. And I'm sure that there are folks with autism and things like ADHD. But other disabilities, feels like it might be one or two people in a parish. And so, I don't know if they would feel called out or too much attention if something was publicized about it. But it's also the kind of thing that I could put in a bulletin. Hey, we want to be more aware of individuals with disabilities and how we can be hospitable and accommodating. And if you've got any input from your personal experience, your family, your friends, anything, tell me. [*Parish Secretary in the Midwest*]

Interviewee 7: We have, and I guess I should have brought this up before, but we have a fairly major challenge here with folks with mental health issues, unhoused folks, or people who are housed, but just feel drawn to the parish for one reason or another. And we all feel very ill-equipped to deal with that. We do deal with it every single day, but it is a constant struggle, and it's pretty depleting. And I wish...like, we end up calling city services constantly. And that's their job, right, but it's...I'm very torn between maybe we particularly should offer more to help people with mental health issues, but then we don't have the money to hire somebody. That's really what we need, is to hire somebody to be on staff for that particular thing. But, of course, we don't have the money for that. And so, I don't know. Like, that's a real struggle and something I wish we had more support on. And it's honestly, like, I think very well of the folks who work at our archdiocese, but they live in a little suburban world, and it is an entirely different experience than being in a city parish. And so that, to me, is just a, it's a bit of a conflict. Sometimes I get the sense they don't actually believe us when we are sharing something. Maybe it's just a sense of disbelief that what we're talking about happens all the time, the things we're dealing with.

So that would be really nice to get more support for that. And a real, like, who do we send people to in these situations to, kind of answers to that question. *[DRE in the South]*

Interviewee 8: I'm not aware of them. I mean, I think this is more than a parish function. I think it needs something at the diocesan level to at least develop the content or the information source that can be put on each parish's website or even on the Diocese, if that's where the link had to be. But it's definitely a local problem, not a diocese problem. So, I think the delivery needs to come through the local parish, but the Diocese needs to say, here's the content, put it on your website, and then if you have issues of helping that individual, then reach back out to the diocese for resource. They have human life, Office of Human Life and Dignity. But, it has things like mental health, religious freedom, volunteer, march for life, palliative care, substance abuse, health ministry. But I don't see anything specifically to this. *[Director of Finance, Operations and Administration in the Northeast]*

Interviewee 12: Yeah. I'm not the one that reached out. Our youth minister reached out for the contact of the Archdiocese after I spoke to, spoke to her on our side, she said that they really didn't have what we were looking for. But I would say, larger, picture wise, what you're asking, it probably would make the most sense for the Archdiocese person who is kind of a liaison with the parishes for people with disabilities, like that should be the person that has access to all these resources. Because, like I said, we're a very large, vibrant parish, with a lot of parishes. Their staffs are just struggling with, in many ways, and they don't have access to those resources at their level, and in their communities, which is, the Archdiocese should be the place where they're going. *[Deacon in the Northeast]*

Interviewee 13: What I would really love to see my Diocese do is to require some sort of, like I said, even if it's just a 30-minute video that all the faith formation teachers watch. Or something that parish councils, and, you know, can hey, you guys need this information. If you're gonna be doing ministry within our Diocese. You know, similar to safe environment training. Like I think that like ministering to people with disabilities should be required. Because, I think that that population, again, particularly those with an intellectual disability, are vulnerable people, right? I think that they're easy prey for the devil. I hate to like, you know. But it's so, they are looking for belonging. They're looking for community. They're looking for genuine friendships. Where are they gonna find it? If they don't find it in their parish, where are they gonna go looking? So, I think that it's like, anyways, it's just near and dear in my heart. *[Parishioner in the West]*

Interviewee 14: Well, you know I've been at this for two years. So, they throw a huge volume of information at the pastor. It's so much that we turn into administrators more than pastoral ministry people. Because there's paper just drown you. So even to go on the website for the Archdiocese, there's so much information. Some of the bulletins that we

have sent out to us have links. So, it's a little paragraph link, paragraph link, paragraph link, paragraph link. It takes like a half hour to an hour to read this one email. It's like oh my gosh. So, I haven't seen it, but I get overwhelmed with all the information. So, I don't know that just printed, or e-blasted information is enough. At most it's goanna get a cursory glance by me with a quick skim and then move on, you know. What would be most beneficial is a workshop, and we have our spring and fall business meetings in the Archdiocese. Those are really well run. It's like a 10-to-2 meeting. It's refined down to the minute. There's a time keeper and it's really, it's a really fine, fine well-run meeting. I don't know if this has been a topic on the business meeting agenda. I'm sure it has in the past, but I've only been here two years. *[Pastor in the Midwest]*

Interviewee 15: Yeah, it's, I'll say at a diocesan level, I think it's something that we're very much aware of. We do have, our intercultural ministry coordinator. It falls under kind of her job description, to reach out to different communities. One of the things that we're finding, which is probably again, one of the places that, she's just one person. She's not just supporting like the community of people with disabilities, but also Hispanic ministry, and black, and African American ministry, and Asian American, you know. So, all these different cultures. So, it's just one of the hard things. [...] We do have a Mass for people with disabilities every year, which is really great. It's a great community coming together. We also do partner with, once a year there's like a resource fair that we partner with some of the local agencies within the area that work with people with disabilities. So, it's like it was sponsored by the Diocese. So that goes out to everyone, if you need resources or anything like that. *[DRE in the Midwest]*

Active and Responsive Dioceses

The excerpts below are from interviewees who say their Diocese has been supportive of their efforts to reach out to and include persons with disabilities.

Interviewee 5: So, the Archdiocese, again, [Diocesan Person] has got a phenomenal office over there with all sorts of resources. You mentioned Sunday school and a catechist needing to work with a kid. That's exactly what happened. We actually, again, it was my daughter who wanted...she just finished up sixth grade, and she really wanted to be at her grade level with her peers. Now, my daughter can't read, so accessing the material is very, very challenging for her. So, we called [Diocesan Person] and said, what should we do? How do we do this? And she came over and met with us and we figured out a phenomenal plan in which my daughter has an assistant, like a one-on-one aide in the class with her. It's a high school kid, so it's not an adult. It's kind of more like a peer, kind of like a peer relationship kind of thing. So, it doesn't stand out as much in the classroom. So, she's got a teenager in there with her who helps her access the material. [Diocesan Person] also suggested, and this is something that we've implemented in all the

Sunday school classrooms, is a visual schedule for the class, which it starts with like morning prayer and then this activity and then this lesson and then closing prayer. And the teacher will move the little marker on the schedule throughout the class, which is very helpful to my daughter because, again, she needs that visual reinforcement of, like, where are we in the class? Super helpful to the ADHD kids because then they can also see, like, okay, I just got to focus for a few more minutes, and then we'll have our activity or our break or whatever. So, again, as so many things with disability, like, you make an accommodation to help one person, and it actually ends up helping a ton of people. [...] So, yes, we have that resource. [Diocesan Person] has also been great. When we were talking about building this ramp, I reached out to her to ask, did she know of anybody who does that kind of thing. And she had some good suggestions for us. What else have we used her for? So, their office is pretty good about reaching out to parishes as well. They are working on like a mental health, a Catholic mental health group, sort of support, sort of scripture, sort of kind of all those things combined into one, which we are hoping to be a part of. *[Communications & Development Director in the South]*

Interviewee 10: Yeah. They do send me stuff from you guys [NCPD] in a newsletter monthly. They do have a disabilities ministry listed. It has events, news, awareness, inclusion, adaptive materials, deaf and hard of hearing ministry, sensory friendly mass information, mass guide, forms. So, there is stuff there. But that would be helpful if we would have somewhere we could refer people to. I perhaps need to look at that website a little more to see what's out there. Yeah. I mean I get the NCPD newsletters, but it tells me what's happening generally, right? Not specific to here or our diocese, or what our diocese is recommending we adopt from what you guys are offering, you know. It tells about events and stuff like that, masses. I see those when they have the special masses for disabilities. But, yeah. *[Pastoral Care Specialist in the Midwest]*

Interviewee 13: Yeah, to my knowledge. So, a couple of things. First of all, I have the position of Director of Faith Formation for a couple of years. When I had that position, I knew that I had access to the U of Dayton, ULCFF programs. I've noticed on there that they have some specific to ministering to people with disability. So, I knew of that as a resource that would be available to people in our Diocese because we're partnered with the program. When I had the position, it was during Covid. We did not have an Archdiocesan director of faith formation, but I know we do now. So, if I was in that position she would be the first one that I would call and be like, okay, what resources do we have? You know, kind of makes me want to call her just to ask that question anyway. *[Parishioner in the West]*

Interviewee 16: Okay. It was [Name] He's the reason that there are parish advocates in every parish in our diocese. That was his big, he was a former special education director. He had like both going on. He understood both. He also had a ton of leadership and administrative experience. So, he was very strategic, and his first thing was to get parish

advocates. He accomplished that. Then when he retired the person who replaced him, his angle has been a little bit more the mental health area. But he has kept some of the anchors that were in place when [Name] was there. So, we have at the diocesan level, there's a respite care night once a month. There's an I Care Mass, I think, once a month, local parish. There's a support group, or a respite care night for a few fostering some kids who they often have needs. Then there's some camps. There's a special needs family camp. There was a special needs Totus Tuus specifically for kids' special needs who may not be successful in their local Totus Tuus, or might need more support than that can offer. *[Parish Advocate for Persons with Disabilities in the Midwest]*

Interviewee 19: We have had several workshops on this, you know, on people with disabilities, persons with disability. So, they've trained the staff on how to work more efficiently, and also some of the resources from some of the publishers. Like for first Holy Communion, Loyola has some great resources that we use for, you know, home study programs if they can't come in for autism. Even just little puzzles about the mass that they could put together. So, I think the diocese has done, I think, a really good job of informing us it's, do we have the right people going to those things all the time? *[Pastoral Associate in the Northeast]*

Help Received from Outside Organizations

For the most part, the parish personnel report that they have not received any help from outside organizations to better reach out to persons with disabilities. Two say they did not need such help as they are affluent parishes, with most of the others saying they would welcome having organizations that could help identified. Below are some examples of parishes who say they have not received any help as well as excerpts where they do identify organizations, such as the Knights of Columbus and Catholic Charities. Note that in the previous section, in addition, one parish mentioned that their Diocese shares NCPD resources with them and one mentioned University of Dayton's ULCFF programs.

Did Not Identify any Outside Organizations

Interviewee 2: We are, for better or worse, we're also two of the wealthier parishes in the Diocese. So usually its money...we're not throwing out money here and there for no reason, but incorporating people who have disabilities is usually seen as a good reason. So, a lot of that, I think, just comes in-house. But if there ever was a need, I do know our, I think there are some grants on the diocesan level. And it's the sort of thing where I imagine their grants are available on a national level. I just haven't had the need to look into it. *[Youth Minister in the Midwest]*

Interviewee 6: I'm sure that they exist, but maybe, I don't know if funding is limited in those areas or...yeah, I think what we ended up doing is pulling resources from parishioners who wanted to contribute to something like that in the end, just to make that final push for making it happen. *[Communications Director in the South]*

Interviewee 12: I know there are organizations that are dealing with helping out and providing, you know, monetary assistance and certain aspects. Again, I think our parish might be a little bit an anomaly because we are a growing, strong, vibrant parish where, and super, super generous. I mean the people are just really... I mean if we express a need in the parish. I mean, we have people lining up to kind of help out with the resources to do that. So, I don't know that I can really answer for more of like a generalized parish situation. *[Deacon in the Northeast]*

Identified Knights of Columbus

Interviewee 4: [If they needed help]: Knights of Columbus would probably be our first ask. *[Parish Secretary in the Midwest]*

Interviewee 8: It's not. So, yeah, yeah, I wish there were organizations that could help. I mean, we have Knights of Columbus organization...chapter here, as well as Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts. So, we do reach out to organizations if somebody is having issues with childbirth or family issues. So, yeah, we may not have somebody who — not on staff, but within our resources, we do go out to various social agencies if it's a one-off outreach type thing. But not again I don't — not again with a disability. It's more, oh, I need help meeting certain obligations. For example, divorced and separated, so it's a group. Bereavement, it's a group. We have women who knit as a ministry and provide warming blankets if people need that. We run various collections, food drive, clothing drive, to help people in need. *[Director of Finance, Operations and Administration in the Northeast]*

Interviewee 13: Yeah. I think our Knights, I mean, and they may have helped with this project as well, you know. Like we do have Knights of Columbus. I mean I guess I don't think about them as being separate from the parish. But yeah, technically I know who they are. They're just old men, right? *[Parishioner in the West]*

Interviewee 16: We only have one other thing I want to make sure to tell you about that we're trying to get launched, and that's sensory mass support bags. So just other churches have them in our diocese. That word is not working with me. We are close to execution. We've been close a couple of times. Covid shut us down once. We were really close then. We had someone who is willing to buy everything and donate everything, and then Covid happened and it was like we couldn't even ask. I mean it was not even possible. There was just too much stuff that would have been shared and touched, that we couldn't do.

[...]

Interviewee 16 Cont'd: I would say there's a disconnect there. We've had a lot of stuff turnover, or shifts. There's one main person who kind of like, I know I can go to that kind of like has been there from the very beginning. She was the DRE when she first pulled me in what that first kid. She's still there but in a different role. So, I can go to her and that helps. But it doesn't always, it can always move as fast as I would like it to. But I will say that the sensory bags, we paused on it. We chose to pause on it because we're going through a parish, what do they call that when you're, campaign. [...] So, we just had this huge push. It's gonna be like a certain amount per bag. Our idea was to have families sponsor the bags. So, like if you want to sponsor a bag for a child, any child, or just as a support, it will be this much amount. But we haven't, we've been waiting to make the ask because we just finished a campaign that was financially driven, and we didn't want to go right out after that because we didn't think we'd have as much success. So, I'm hoping to get that kind of moving again because we have like all the items selected. We have an organization that's been willing to donate some items. We've got, everything kind of lined out exactly the cost. We've even had a couple of people donate from within my small core group and be like I'll put this much money towards it. I'm just holding the money at this point because I've just been on a pause. For bulk ordering and stuff, we just kind of need to order all of it. I needed just kind of work through the levels to make sure there isn't like a Knights of Columbus that will be willing to support us to get it going. I've just been waiting. The timing wasn't right. When we were ready the timing wasn't right. So, I've just been waiting. *[Parish Advocate for Persons with Disabilities in the Midwest]*

Interviewee 17: Yes, absolutely. I would always start at our parish where we're at, right? Because there's, like I said, like it's so many ministries in one church. So, for example in ours there's 150 different ministries. One of them that is always willing to help is the Knights of Columbus. If you need something, I think one year, a couple of years ago I was also the early childhood director. We needed a new playground so I reached out to them and they helped us to make it more accessible as well because it wasn't. But they're a resource that I would definitely mention. But there's others, catholic daughters that are, I'm sure, organization like that that are more national, like NCPD, I'm sure, would probably consider helping in an area like that as well. *[Lead Advocate for Ministry for Persons with Disabilities in the South]*

Identified Other Outside Organizations

Interviewee 5: Yeah. I think it's called Sanctuary. It's mental health stuff. And I've looked at their materials, and those look phenomenal, because in that, like, everything is done for you. So, like there's a physical book, there are videos to watch, there are discussion

questions, the whole format of, like, how you would do this mental health support group. All you have to do is show up. There's no special training. They have done everything. And Sanctuary isn't specifically Catholic, but they do have a Catholic track, if you will. Yes, and they were recommended by the Archdiocese. But they've done — it's just phenomenal. Just looking at their materials, it's like, oh, wow, all I would have to do is publicize this and like bring the snacks and bring the people, and it's all done for us, and done very well. So that kind of thing. Talk about a large job to give you, right? Just do all the things. --- But something comprehensive like that, that really has covered the follow-up questions and the format and the content. That is super, super helpful.

[Communications & Development Director in the South]

Interviewee 18: Yeah, so here in [City] we have something called [Name] Center. It focuses on women and families where the mother or the woman is dealing with addiction or chemical abuse. So, they have 85% success rate in helping people get clean and stay clean for ten years. So, we regularly refer there. We have good relationships. There are two applied behavioral analysis programs here in [City]. We have good relationships with both of those. Our families do use both of them. In terms of local mental health, we do have short term, a pavilion at the local hospital for short term. The state of [Name] has something called 411, and it may be everywhere, but 411, or 211. 211 is digging, 411, I can call 411 and I can get a referral to practically anything. It's through, it's not Red Cross. It's not goanna come to me. [...] United Way, it is United Way. Thank you, I was like I should know what that serve. But they keep a pretty extensive list of services whether you're in [City], or in one of our smaller communities. So that's helpful for us.

[Pastor in the South]

Interviewee 19: You know Catholic Charities is great. I mean they really, you know, they've been great in coming into our parish for a social concerns group. Whenever we need them, you know, the Diocese will bring us in on, you know, our resources that we need. Yeah, I think they're out there. Are we aware of all of them, I don't know? [...] We refer a lot of people to Catholic Charities because we're not social workers. Even our social concerns group which was dealing with that, we've partnered more with Catholic Charities so that the social workers who are really trained in this profession to do that. But we also do have a list of home front and different areas, list of places where people could go, like seniors if they need to have their house looked at. Someone will come in and say, you know, this isn't safe. We do have a list of things. They'll usually refer it to either the front office, or to faith formation. We also, our parish also offers services if someone can't afford it. That's always in our bulletin. So, people know there's behavioral things that we could help with if they can afford it. *[Pastoral Associate in the Northeast]*

Section V: Resources Parishes Would Find Helpful

Interviewees were asked directly about what kinds of resources an organization like NCPD could create and make accessible that would help them better accommodate and include the persons with disabilities in their parishes and geographical areas. In addition, some interviewees mentioned needs and resources they would like when discussing how better to identify and include persons with disabilities in parish life. Those two sources of needs inform this section, where the resources they say they would find helpful are presented.

Below is a list of the kinds of resources they would find it helpful to have available at their parishes. Following the list, the specifics and details of those resources are described in excerpts by the interviewees.³³

- Help identifying persons with disabilities in their parishes
- Help inviting persons with disabilities in their local areas to come to the parish
- Creating a culture of welcome at their parish so persons with disabilities and their families feel welcome
- Creating disability-friendly ways of communicating and being inviting
- Training materials and instructions for clergy and other parish staff members
- Training materials and instructions for volunteer catechists
- Training materials and instructions for hospitality and liturgical ministers
- Creating short fact sheets about specific disabilities
- Resources in languages other than English
- Best practices for making referrals
- Increasing parishioner awareness and understanding of disabilities
- Disability checklists for programs and facilities
- Accommodating person with disabilities in parishes with limited resources
- Best practices for accommodating persons with specific disabilities
- How to accompany the families of persons with disabilities
- Guidance on disability-friendly faith formation programs for children with disabilities

Help Identifying Persons with Disabilities in their Parishes

Interviewee 3: [Describes a hospital]: And heart failure and everything. We will have a fact sheet that will be laminated and will be at the nursing station. So, everybody knew exactly what to do, what is it, but also what will be the first steps, almost like 911 situation, and how to respond. And that was very beneficial. So, I think if something like that could be created on the national level that is like standardized, so everybody has the

³³ Some of these excerpts were presented earlier and are repeated here to give details about how the resources can be designed to best help parish personnel. In addition, some excerpts are presented twice in this section when they mention more than one type of resource.

same information, so is information that actually is...because people can create anything, go on Google and create any type of fact sheet. But I think it has to be unified message that everybody is receiving the same thing. So, I don't know if they are thinking of something like that. Another important thing will be is a form, registration form that will be unified form for everybody, because not many people, not many parents feel comfortable filling on the registration form all the specifics. And I'm always telling the director of religious education, all the catechists, it is depending how you share that message. Because I say, maybe the parents are afraid that they will be denied, maybe they feel that they will be rejected, so that's why they're not sharing the information. But I say, if you approach and explain to the parents that the more information they give about the child is, you're going to be able to create a better experience for them and for the family to be supported, because you will know exactly what support to provide them and how to create the experience and what to expect in the situation, I say, I can guarantee you that they will not be opposed to give the information. And I actually did an interview with the DRE, with a family, because she called me and she said, oh, this is a very challenging family. I don't think I can handle that. We have to find somebody in the Diocese that can take the family on because I don't have the support. So, I said, how about if I will come and we do the interview together? So, she agreed, and she was amazed. She was amazed to see how they turned around. And I say, see, because that's exactly...people need to know why the information you are asking for are important. And they were more than happy. They brought the entire document from public school, who is working with the child, what kind of medication, when the change of medication happened. And I say, that's another thing that is important for the catechists to know, because if they change medication, that's going to, you don't know how they're going to affect them and how long they're going to be in the system that will keep them...contain the behavior that you are dealing with. So, she was like, "Oh, maybe we need to do mock interview like that for all the DREs and the catechists to see and understand." I say, that would be another problem. So, yeah, so I see that there's a huge need of almost like individual training with each parish. But to get to the point, we have to do first the broadcasting, if you will, because this will take too long. So at least we want to bring the awareness to the parishes so they know how to respond or how to reach out even for help, and then specifically start working individually with teams of individual parishes. *[Diocesan Director for the Ministry of Persons with Disabilities in the Midwest]*

Interviewee 5: I've met so many Evangelicals at the playground who have been, like, come to church with me. And I'm like, I'm Catholic. I would never ask someone that. But maybe we need to. Anyway, so we definitely need some support in figuring out how to ask people, again, being inclusive without being intrusive, how can we accommodate people's needs? We did have, you'll probably hear this from [Name], my coworker. She's our religious ed person. We were talking to, you probably know [Name] from the Archdiocese. We were talking to her about including kids with disabilities in our Sunday

school program and trying to figure out, with the limited resources we have, how can we still include these kiddos. And [Name], suggested putting something on our registration for Sunday school. You sign up your kid, their grade, what school they go to, and then just another section saying, do you have any children with disabilities in your home? And so, we put it on there. And we got a response. Only one, but the woman said, "Thank you so much. We have never been asked before if we have a child with disabilities." Now, her child aged out of our Sunday school program, so that part didn't really matter, but just that she felt like, oh, they're thinking about all of our children. So that's fantastic. And we definitely are keeping that on. I just, I would love some guidance on how to sort of expand that from just our Sunday school to the whole parish. *[Communications & Development Director in the South]*

Interviewee 8: Yeah. I definitely think there needs to be a space on the website that...so, if somebody comes here and says, we're here to help, click here and then see, and there was the menu to choose what they were looking for, I think that's critical. I mean, I want to be sensitive and say, well, if you got a problem, click here. I don't want it to appear crass to somebody, but I definitely...if there was a professionally developed link or something that I can put out there on our website, that would be fantastic. And then we can see, I mean, there are certain things we can do here with the skill base, but I'm sure there's a myriad of things we can't do because we don't know how to provide the assistance. And I think of people who, for whatever reason, prefer signing, I really would like to be able to say, even if it had to be a delay, here's our weekly or daily Mass. *[Director of Finance, Operations and Administration in the Northeast]*

Interviewee 10: We do have. It is listed on our website, but somebody would have to go there and look. We do put articles in our bulletin like quarterly, or semi-annually, letting people know that we're here and to reach out to us. We don't often get anybody calling us. We usually find out from a loved one, you know, or perchance we find out. Then we did try to look at parish access, and how are we helping those that have physical, maybe mental, you know, something that's causing them to have difficulties participating either in mass or in our activities, and what could we do. We did a survey. We didn't get very many responses from the survey. It was parish wide, it went out. I think we got seven responses. [...] What I would really like is to know what are other parishes doing? How do we help without being, assuming that we know everything, you know? I don't want to assume that I know what our parishioners want, but we're not getting the responses, so how do we help, you know, in those respects, that kind of stuff. What are other parishes doing? Is there something I should be doing that I'm not? I would love to hear that. Because I think that's the problem is nothing gets shared down, you know. Like it's always us pushing stuff up that we're doing, but nobody's telling us what best practices are. So that would be nice. *[Pastoral Care Specialist in the Midwest]*

Interviewee 14: Well I think identifying the disability because, I don't know, if people don't come right out and say it, I think it's really hard to know what's under the surface. We try to, you know, love God and love our neighbors. So, we're trying to go right where they're at. So, it's real difficult to identify a problem. But I don't see us turning anyone away. Even some, I would say, scary mental health issues of someone that might be homeless, coming off the street, we're not really sure what's in their mind, and they arrive late, and they leave early. So, there's a sense of, we'll let's just watch, and keep eyes on this person so we don't know what's gonna happen here. An awareness like that, but it's, we try to take people where they're at and welcome them as best we can. [*Pastor in the Midwest*]

Interviewee 17: But one thing that, I'm not sure if I've heard of any addictions. But one thing that I do have heard, you see a lot is there's still this non-transparency of like mental illness or disabilities in which, you know, my background is in education so you see the red flags. You know, there are still families and parents that will not share or not want to be labelled. That's where it's challenging to kind of be able to help the kids or the family with respecting their standpoint in the legal part of it, of not wanting to have that, yeah, that disability. So that's the challenging part when we're helping in a specific need. [...] I would emphasize on maybe helping leaders on creative ways on preaching those families that decide not to, you know, not to have that, I guess that label, that diagnosis, or have those accommodations to, in a way, have these conversations with them that we normally would when there is a, when the need is already discussed, and a fruit comes after, but maybe helpful ways to reach those families that decide, or has made that decision not to go in that direction, but do expect, you know, to be included in every single way. So that's where I think leaders, and catechists and every one could come together in a way and maybe come up with more creative ways on how to reach that fine line of "Okay, well, despite any label, any diagnosis, we still have to creatively come up with resource, combinations, and help the family." [*Lead Advocate for Ministry for Persons with Disabilities in the South*]

Help Inviting Persons with Disabilities in their Local Areas to Come to the Parish

Interviewee 5: So, sometimes when I'm at Mass, if I see someone or I see a family with a child who maybe seems a little atypical, I will go over to them after Mass and say, "Hey, welcome to [Name of the parish]." Nine times out of ten, they're visitors, which is fine, too. We are happy to welcome visitors. But as a mother, I sometimes see people...like, we had a family visiting recently, and they had a teenage daughter with Down syndrome. Well, I have a teenage daughter with disabilities, and so I was like, "We could be best friends." Well, they were visiting. And that was wonderful, and I'm happy that they were visiting, but sort of, it is a little hard as a parent. Sometimes I feel like I'm the only one here who's bringing a child to Mass. We did have a family whose daughter has Angelman

syndrome. And they were coming for a long time, and their daughter's behavior was really challenging that they kept bringing her, and they kept bringing her, and it's so wonderful and so beautiful. And then came the pandemic, and we haven't seen them back at Mass. I've seen them, our daughters do, like, an adaptive sports program together. I've seen them there. And I just have this weird, like, I don't know how to say to them, like, "I noticed you haven't been at church lately. I'm not actually keeping track, but." So I just, I would love some tools on like how to...like that kind of scenario, how to invite someone to come to Mass, to come back to Mass. And I think that one, actually, all Catholics need, not just in the disability community. I've met so many Evangelicals at the playground who have been, like, come to church with me. And I'm like, I'm Catholic. I would never ask someone that. But maybe we need to. Anyway, so we definitely need some support in figuring out how to ask people, again, being inclusive without being intrusive, how can we accommodate people's needs? *[Communications & Development Director in the South]*

Interviewee 16: So, I think what I'd like to drive home is that if you're looking around your parish and you're not feeling like you have that big of a population, it's because they're not coming. Because the prevalence of disability is so incredibly high across the life span, right, for various reasons. But what I'm finding is if those needs are high, families are rotating when they come, so that someone can stay home with that person with that higher need, or they're not coming at all. Because it just feels to them like insurmountable. So, I feel like one of the things, the loop I've gotten stuck in, in trying to keep movement with this, is that the needs aren't being brought to us. So, we organically of course are addressing the needs. Our parish is very good at that. When something pops up, we address it. But I believe there are more out there who want to be and actually probably really need time at mass, but don't think it's even a possibility for them, so they're not showing up at all. So, we're not seeing them. So, it's perpetuating this falsehood that we don't have a big need. If you look at the prevalence of disability, the need is there. It's just a matter of, a) recognizing it, b) having people feel comfortable talking about it, c) them feeling welcome no matter what. Once we get more there, hopefully then more come. It's just, it's like we can't. I feel like that's our big box. So that's the point that I would, and that is what [Name], the parish leader that got me involved, he was really good about laying out statistics like that. That I have taken that to my parish leaders multiple times. If we're not seeing them it's because they're not coming. So, if they're not coming we can't support them, but they're there. So, we've just been talking about that. Any chance I get, I've been talking about that. *[Parish Advocate for Persons with Disabilities in the Midwest]*

Creating a Culture of Welcome at their Parish so Persons with Disabilities and Their Families Feel Welcome

Interviewee 4: I would say, at least from my, again my limited experience, I think really accommodating and welcoming people that are suffering with disabilities stems from the culture itself. So, I think if the culture of the parish is warm, and accommodating, and inviting, and wants people to be there, they will make the accommodations to be there, whether it's consciously or unconsciously. Making some of those practical decisions, as far as, like I said, having the hearing assistance devices that we have, you know. You see people coming in who are, have some impairments with their hearing. They love the devices that are there. We've maintained them. They're charged. They're sanitary. They're taken care of. I think it all stems from the culture. So, if you don't have that type of culture, I don't think, you know, resources and practical concerns are goanna make that much of a difference. I think the families, just thinking about the families that are struggling, I think what they really want is a way. They're looking for a way that they can kind of participate in the greater life of the parish without any more headaches, because they're already suffering day to day to begin with. So, I think, you know, when they interact with us, and a wider community, they need to feel in their hearts that they're a very valued part of our community. They have different challenges. Nothing that we can't deal with, you know. The people that love them and care about them, they want them to be there. I think it all stems from that. So, I know we're getting into a lot of specifics with types of challenges, and resources, and you know, the dynamics of who should be responsible for all that stuff. But I do think the culture is the most important thing. Maybe the starting point, if it's something that's overlooked with a lot of parishes, is finding the right person to be a liaison, and to specifically prioritize making those families and individuals know that they are coming home, and that they're going to be welcomed and taken care of. *[Parish Secretary in the Midwest]*

Interviewee 11: I think there's a couple of different factors. One, it's just, they're unaware. Like they're not necessarily uneducated, but they're not aware of how un-inclusive they kind of are. Like having one cut out for a wheelchair, that's not inclusive. Like if I'm running late, or we have two wheelchairs now, we don't, we're not accessible. So, kind of not being aware of what inclusion truly means. Having different generational aspects. Like we have some older priests in our parish that believe that kiddos with autism just need to learn to sit down and be quiet. Well, that's not possible. Then just, like that education piece, those like cultural differences, I think are some of the biggest challenges that we hit. *[Diocesan Director for the Ministry of Persons with Disabilities in the Midwest]*

Interviewee 15: I think especially for physical disabilities, so for mobility issues where people might be like using a wheelchair, I think that is something that we're very

cognitive of. Again, like in most parishes, we have like an aging population. So, one of the needs is just what people say like it's really hard to get around, you know, this area, because I'm using a walker or something like that. So, I think when it comes to especially physical disabilities, I think that's something that isn't very much on the forefront of everyone's mind. It's a very easy thing to fix. Because, okay, we can put in like a door opener. We can try to add a ramp, or we can do something like that. I think the thing that is still kind of a challenge is helping people with more cognitive disabilities, and helping the parish understand how to, again how to be like that welcoming space for all families, and how to make that more widely known, that everyone is welcome. Again, like with, especially with like the families I know a lot of it is, like, this is very Midwestern thing, too. Like the parents are like I don't want to put anyone out. I don't want to like make it be a burden. I don't want to put anyone, like anyone out or anything like that. So, like there's a lot of things like that. So, it's trying to help take down those barriers. We have it too with like parents with small kids and things like that, even if like they don't have a disability. It's still like, I don't want to make anyone feel upset or anything. So, it's trying to help, just make this part of like the culture of the parish that anyone's welcome no matter what. I was thinking, again like part of it is just like really encouraging people to be here, like to be present, because I think that helps a lot. I think of a young man named [Name] who is amazing, and he's great, and he is in a wheelchair. He, again, he has some speaking issues. But he's really joyful, and it's always great seeing him. It's, like everyone's saying, everyone knows [Name]. Everyone's beside [Name] when he's there. It's really great. Then you see him in the community. Their family owns one of the restaurants in town. So, whenever you go there you see [Name]. He's smiling and he's helping out. He notices you and stuff like that, too. So, it's part of it is really saying like, yeah, we want everyone here. We want to make everyone just feel comfortable. We want everyone to know that this is part of our life. It's that like our parish family includes all people. So, I think that, any way that we could get some resources to help encourage that, I think that would be really helpful. *[DRE in the Midwest]*

Creating Disability-friendly Ways of Communicating and Being Inviting

Interviewee 5: Yeah. So that, website-wise, is what we have. We probably need, now that we're talking about, I'm going to write it down or else it'll leave, to make our website more disability-friendly, just like the whole thing. *[Communications & Development Director in the South]*

Interviewee 6: I think may be all of the above. I think having something online that's accessible that you can just send is a great start. But I also have found that if I send resources to ministry leaders or parishioners trying to start up a ministry or anything, sometimes, unless you have a meeting and a workshop...unless you workshop through it together, it won't necessarily get opened or done. So, I think having it easily accessible

like that is important. And maybe so that it can be featured on the website, for example, for a stranger or someone new to the parish. *[Communications Director in the South]*

Interviewee 16: I haven't heard of any accommodations from viewing the website. I don't know of a banner, but I do know we are a tab. So, if your dropdown into ministries there's a special needs ministry listed. My name is listed. You can send an email that immediately comes to me, which is how I think I found out about the survey which led to this interview. Somehow that got routed directly to me. We have had some success with that. Or like if there's new family that registers for religious ed, and they do disclose, our parish is really good, they immediately get me involved. It just doesn't happen very often. I mean it's not, the frequency of it isn't matching the presence of it, if that makes sense. *[Parish Advocate for Persons with Disabilities in the Midwest]*

Training Materials and Instructions for Clergy and Other Parish Staff Members

Interviewee 1: Well, I think one thing would be including in the curriculum generally for faith formation, out of Christian charity and the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, something that would allow a greater awareness of the needs, and that inside their heads, they're just like us. Their bodies just can't work the way ours can. I remember a long, long time ago, in the parish I was in, they had the parish staff as part of a learning exercise, using a wheelchair. And it was very...I remember it was very eye-opening for the priests in particular, because they had had little or no exposure. And so, I could envision something like a walk on a mile in someone else's shoes. Maybe not a mile, maybe a couple of hours. It could be to have the person who could do that training be serving collectively multiple parishes is probably a good idea to incorporate it into the general faith formation curriculum, maybe as part of this corporal and spiritual works of mercy, might be a good thing. *[Formation Team Member in the Northeast]*

Interviewee 9: I think that, I remember going to a convocation of priests in our diocese one time. This happened maybe about 10 years ago. The bishop had mandated at the time that every parish needed to have a ramp so that people could have access to the worship. One of the priests stood up and said, we don't have the money to be able to afford a ramp. We don't have the resources to do those types of things. Besides, those kinds of people don't come to church anyway. I never see them. Of course, I was like holding on to the table. I'm just sitting around and like, calm down [Pastor Name]. You don't want to calm down. It was just a sense of ignorance that I think still exists. I will tell you what I find, and I found over 37 years of disability. Because a person has a physical disability, people automatically assume that companies develop mental disability. The protocol on the etiquette of how to deal with people with special needs and particular needs, it seems to have fallen, I think, off the radar screen of people. I have seen that in my entire life that people assume because I have a physical disability that there's a developmental

disability. They don't even realize that they're doing it. [...] So, I just think awareness is, awareness and inclusion is critically important to help pastors to see the importance of that, if you're going to be a welcoming community. [*Pastor in the Northeast*]

Interviewee 11: I think something like lay persons language level, I think is what needs to happen. How do we explain? So, I have a PhD in disability rights. So, I can speak left and right about disabilities. But how do we take what we're saying, like at the NCPD level? A lot of you guys are very smart, but how do we take that and present it to families in a digestible way? How do we take it to priest and present it to them in a digestible way? So currently what we do is any trainings that we have, I have to spend hours figuring out how do I turn this into something that somebody without any experience with disabilities, who is coming in at ground zero, how do they understand it? So, it's, I would love to see trainings on different types of disabilities. Not just like stereotypical things, like autism might flap, or they need movement. But how can your parish level actually support somebody with autism? Well that means that we have to accept that they're gonna get up and wander. They might scream, they might do something inappropriate at mass. How do we explain to the pastor and the staff to accept that, and then teach that acceptance to the rest of the congregation? [*Diocesan Director for the Ministry of Persons with Disabilities in the Midwest*]

Interviewee 12: Yeah, well it's interesting that you're asking that question because I also oversee like safety and security on campus. We just purchased some automatic defibrillators to, you know, stow throughout the buildings. We had to do some training for the staff. It was a quick, you know, 20, 30-minute training on how to operate those. It wasn't like a CPR training. But one of the things that I'm looking to do when I kind of come into that role on a more full-time basis for [Name], is to kind of build in like regularly scheduled trainings on different topics. This is definitely one of those things where I think it would be helpful, you know, really, primarily just as an awareness, you know, being aware of these people that are suffering, or being challenged by these individual situations that they find themselves in. Because I think beyond the awareness stage you start getting into the weeds with a lot of those things. That's where I think like somebody who oversees it can kind of get into the weeds but as far as staffing, general is just aware of people that have some of these challenges. I think that would probably be the most important. Then as far as delivery goes, I mean I'd love to have in-person. I always find that in-person is way superior than anything online. So that would be what I would like, I would like to work in an awareness for our parishioners with disabilities, into some type of a regular training schedule for the staff. But I do think in general, I think our staff does a really, really super job with accommodating people with whatever their challenges are, on a regular basis. Even to the point where sometimes, you know, we're dealing with people that are emotionally disturbed in certain aspects, and may even pose some type of a danger. We're still, you know, they get our attention, but it's, you

know, it may sometimes be cautious attention, but it's a loving kind of, caring kind of attitude, I think, that we take towards those people. [*Deacon in the Northeast*]

Interviewee 13: I think that in particular, like the education piece. I don't what training a priest has about ministering to people with disabilities. But if they haven't had it already they need it now. Because, yeah, yeah. [*Parishioner in the West*]

Interviewee 14: One of the required meetings that all the priests have is a deanery meeting with all the pastors get together for a deanery meeting. Most of the pastors are very faithful to that. So, we're 10 months out of the year, and we have guests that come and speak to us. They might take, you know, 50 minutes of the meeting to make us aware of a resource that's available for all the pastors. You paid us to come, and do a lot of workshop with your staff or whatever, or your hospitality greeters, how to identify people of all disabilities. That would be, I think, a fantastic workshop right there in itself. But I think that the way to get the biggest thing for your buck is to approach the dean of the deanery, and then get it on their agenda. Because that would probably, and then you'd get all the pastors listening, and saying, "Oh my gosh, yeah, we don't have anything like that." [*Pastor in the Midwest*]

Training Materials and Instructions for Volunteer Catechists

Interviewee 2: That's a big challenge where most of my leaders aren't professional teachers, and so they don't always know how to handle those, how to handle someone who, they want to be in the classroom, their parents want to be in the classroom, but they may not have the impulse control to be...or their lack of impulse control causes some issues. [...] I mean, and that's something that I know has come up. It doesn't happen every year, but it happens — it's happened two or three times in my seven years of teaching. So, I think that's a big gap where I know there's resources out there and I have tried to share them with leaders at times, but at the same time, it's also when they're a volunteer, they don't have a lot of time to dig into stuff, and my knowledge is certainly lacking. [*Youth Minister in the Midwest*]

Interviewee 11: So, it would be super useful, one, to have like kind of a fact sheet on when your, when this kiddo is getting distracted, here are some different things that you can do to refocus them. Maybe they need a break, maybe they need a waited lab thing. What are some actionable things that I can do that I don't have to go out and search for? But what can I do to actually help this kiddo that is in front of me right now? Having visuals already made. That's what I spend a lot of time doing. So, we do have volunteer catechesis then to keep kids in PSR and other different programs. I get called in. Before a student gets kicked out, then I have to create the visuals. I have to create the action plans. I have to create the fact sheets. So, having something readymade that can just be ready to

go, like little packets that can be ready to go for individuals, that's not, I don't know how to say it, but unhelpful general stuff isn't what the parish level needs. They need actionable, like when you're, when this student is getting up and wandering around the classroom, let them stand up but maybe tape a box on the floor so that they know they need to stay inside this box. Just actionable things that they can do where they don't have to go out and look for it. *[Diocesan Director for the Ministry of Persons with Disabilities in the Midwest]*

Interviewee 13: Yeah. I mean I do think that, I do think it makes sense. What I would really love to see my Diocese do is to require some sort of, like I said, even if it's just a 30-minute video that all the faith formation teachers watch. Or something that parish councils, and, you know, can hey, you guys need this information. If you're gonna be doing ministry within our diocese. You know, similar to safe environment training. Like I think that like ministering to people with disabilities should be required. Because, I think that that population, again, particularly those with an intellectual disability, are vulnerable people, right? I think that they're easy prey for the devil. I hate to like, you know. But it's so, they are looking for belonging. They're looking for community. They're looking for genuine friendships. Where are they gonna find it? If they don't find it in their parish, where are they gonna go looking? So, I think that it's like, anyways, it's just near and dear in my heart. *[Parishioner in the West]*

Interviewee 16: [Training for] Volunteers would be helpful. I did that one year, several years back, but then it wasn't repeated. So, like in their gathering, like they kind of have, like, an organizational gathering before religious ed started for the year. I did a short training. It was very short. There wasn't much time allowed for it. But at least it gave people a face and a name, and a little bit of information to take with them. So, like an intentional training every year because the people who are doing the teaching attend to rotate and change. Those who don't change are just gonna probably pick up something different each year. That, and then I also think like offering like something with welcoming people with disability to our parish, like informational session, that would not just be the staff, but to community, parishioners. Because what happens is I think there's chunks of people who totally get it from whatever experiences they have. There are people who make assumptions. Then there's people who, like really, like disability isn't even a thought in their head when something could be going on. If it's not a visible disability it's a lot less, there's less tolerance for whatever you might be seeing or hearing. So, I think something like that could be helpful. We are inundated with emails from our parish right now. We're also, I just feel like it's hard to be a voice that stands out among all the information that's coming. So that is a challenge. So, I wonder sometimes about having a couple of offerings a couple of times a year. Just to sort of like trying to keep that prevalent on people's minds. *[Parish Advocate for Persons with Disabilities in the Midwest]*

Interviewee 17: A checklist. That would kind of, kind of like maybe a ten essentials to have that equips persons that serve others with disabilities. Because one thing I do hear a lot of is, and this is in the formation area where we get new people coming in all the time, especially after the pandemic, and trying to, you know, answer the call. But having them feel comfortable enough to be equipped because I hear a lot of the, I don't, I'm not specialized in that area. I don't have the specialization. Like you don't have to have a master's degree, or a doctor's in the field. But just having that assurance to get them to feel the confidence, and trust that these ten essential things will help and guide you throughout the way. So that's the challenge I think that we could help catechist in because even in, maybe not being there one day. I know I've never missed a day in all the years that I've volunteered, but when you're not gonna be there for persons, or kids with disabilities, you have to have a whole lesson plan, and everything ready. When you have that you just have the person. You have all the tools that they need. *[Lead Advocate for Ministry for Persons with Disabilities in the South]*

Training Materials and Instructions for Hospitality and Liturgical Ministers

Interviewee 3: So, we were discussing that. And we were discussing about the welcoming committees that include the ushers and people at the welcome. And exactly what you said about the fact sheet and the information, that's exactly what I was talking to the communication director and say, how about have the list of specific things, bullet points for the secretaries at the parish, because they don't even know who to refer to. [...] You just asked me a question that I wanted to share. I just had a meeting with a sister who is responsible for the liturgy, and we had the discussion for liturgical ministers. Because I say, how they are trained? Do you even bring a topic of disability, how they're supposed to respond to somebody who is coming to receive Communion or whatever? So, she was honest. She said, no, I didn't have anybody speaking about this. So, we already agreed that the next training I am in, and I'm going to be talking about this. And the same thing I told her, I say, okay, you're doing this training, and it's supposed to be train the trainer, but in a sense, what about those who are trained 20 years ago? What kind of updates they receive? *[Diocesan Director for the Ministry of Persons with Disabilities in the Midwest]*

Interviewee 15: Almost like, okay, like how do we help liturgical ministers to make sure that we can distribute community to them in a way that is helpful, in a way that will be, you know, helping like with their mobility issues and things like that. So, anything like that kind of help would be, I think would be really good. *[DRE in the Midwest]*

Interviewee 17: But one thing that I can think about is there's so many different masses that we have at the parish, and different languages. There are different teams of maybe hospitality. So, a challenge is sort of trying to get every single volunteer hospitality ministry, and get that training in there. With not only the hospitality team that kind of

assist in sitting persons with disability in the right areas, but also like the liturgy, there's a liturgist, the Eucharistic server. So, there's all those different pieces, and kind of have to make time to meet with them and train them. As they come and want to help and volunteer to kind of make them aware of those different ways of helping others. *[Lead Advocate for Ministry for Persons with Disabilities in the South]*

Creating Short Fact Sheets about Disabilities

Interviewee 2: But at the same time, I think it would be handy to have like, I don't know how familiar you are with youth ministry curriculums, but we use the Life Teen program. [...] And they have some like one one-sheet guide – one 8.5 by 11 guide. They're focused more on like, how do you have a bus ride with kids, or how do you lead Reconciliation with kids? And I think that's the kind of...again, I know most of that advice would be general, but at the same time, it'd be nice to be able to say, "Okay, here, Mr. Catechist, here's maybe one page or front and back, just general ideas for someone who has ADHD or someone who," yeah, has some of these learning disabilities. *[Youth Minister in the Midwest]*

Interviewee 3: That will be amazing because I think a fact sheet on every single disability that is mostly dealt with within the Catholic Church, I think that would be amazing. Because like you said, my background is in healthcare, so I spent 20 years in healthcare, and that's exactly what we did. [...] And heart failure and everything. We will have a fact sheet that will be laminated and will be at the nursing station. So, everybody knew exactly what to do, what is it, but also what will be the first steps, almost like 911 situation, and how to respond. And that was very beneficial. So, I think if something like that could be created on the national level that is like standardized, so everybody has the same information...because people can create anything, go on Google and create any type of fact sheet. But I think it has to be unified message that everybody is receiving the same thing. So, I don't know if they are thinking of something like that. *[Diocesan Director for the Ministry of Persons with Disabilities in the Midwest]*

Resources in Languages Other than English

Interviewee 10: Well we are getting more and more non-English speaking parishioners. To me that's not a disability, but it is on our plate to have to accommodate. So, there are accommodations that we have to make for that. I don't know how, you know, we welcome them, we talk to them. They can speak some English. Obviously, I've gotten connected with this family, and I'm a godmother, or a sponsor for Confirmation for one of the kids, you know. But how do we, how can we be more welcoming as a parish? That, you know, I thought even about English speaking classes, you know, learning English, you know, those kinds of things. Is that something that other parishes are doing when

they're getting, you know, immigrants coming into their parishes? [*Pastoral Care Specialist in the Midwest*]

Interviewee 17: But one thing that I can think about is there are so many different masses that we have at the parish, and different languages. There are different teams of maybe hospitality. So, a challenge is sort of trying to get every single volunteer hospitality ministry, and get that training in there. With not only the hospitality team that kind of assist in sitting persons with disability in the right areas, but also like the liturgy, there's a liturgist, the Eucharistic server. So, there are all those different pieces, and kind of have to make time to meet with them and train them. As they come and want to help and volunteer to kind of make them aware of those different ways of helping others. [*Lead Advocate for Ministry for Persons with Disabilities in the South*]

Best Practices for Making Referrals

Interviewee 3: And I did survey, secret survey myself. I spent a week calling every single parish, because they didn't know me, I just started so they had no idea who I was. One parish was only able to give me information about disabilities from the entire diocese. I thought I will have heart attack. [*Diocesan Director for the Ministry of Persons with Disabilities in the Midwest*]

Interviewee 7: We have, and I guess I should have brought this up before, but we have a fairly major challenge here with folks with mental health issues, unhoused folks, or people who are housed, but just feel drawn to the parish for one reason or another. And we all feel very ill-equipped to deal with that. We do deal with it every single day, but it is a constant struggle, and it's pretty depleting. And I wish, like, we end up calling city services constantly. And that's their job, right, but it's...I'm very torn between maybe we particularly should offer more to help people with mental health issues, but then we don't have the money to hire somebody. That's really what we need, is to hire somebody to be on staff for that particular thing. But, of course, we don't have the money for that. And so, I don't know. Like, that's a real struggle and something I wish we had more support on. [...] So that would be really nice to get more support for that. And a real, like, who do we send people to in these situations, kind of answers to that question. [*DRE in the South*]

Interviewee 8: Truthfully, there's nothing within the area that if somebody has a disability and wanted to talk about it, there's no, I don't think, I haven't seen in any parish anything that somebody could at least say, "Oh, let me follow this to see where I can get help for whatever their particular situation is." I would love people to technically be able to, if they were able to come to church and needed to see signing, that there was some way making use of the existing technology or TVs to have somebody signing within a box on the TV. [*Director of Finance, Operations and Administration in the Northeast*]

Interviewee 10: No, not really. But that would be helpful if we would have somewhere we could refer people to. I perhaps need to look at that website a little more to see what's out there. *[Pastoral Care Specialist in the Midwest]*

Increasing Parishioner Awareness and Understanding of Disabilities

Interviewee 1: Yes. And now here's truthful disclosure. I have a 17-year-old granddaughter who was born with very rare neuromuscular disabilities, has been immobile, except by wheelchair, for all of her life. And when she was in the faith formation program, so she also has aphasia. And when she was in the faith formation program, I would accompany her as her aide because she couldn't go to the bathroom by herself. And if there was a critical issue that arose, someone would need to be attending to it. And I did experience in that setting a lack of awareness of the children – and I'm going into middle school, which is when her family moved out of the area – to a lack of sensitivity to people with disabilities. When she was trying to, due to her aphasia, and she had a hard time getting her words out, she was made fun of. There wasn't, in the planning for the class, there was not an awareness of how to include her in, for example, whatever physical activities there might be. So, I think, I know public schools have gone...I don't know about Catholic schools but, I mean, my children were in Catholic schools, but I don't know about currently Catholic schools. At public schools, there was a push towards mainstreaming, which I don't believe is the thrust any longer, and so children with special needs are in special needs classes. So, the appreciation of young people to be sensitive to how children are different, I think is missing. And I think that would be a very great help to form...I see in our young people great consideration for elderly or frail, but I saw in the classroom minimal appreciation or desire to assist another child. *[Formation Team Member in the Northeast]*

Interviewee 2: So that's a worry. Like I said, there's been the anti-bullying thing. My background is in experiential education, so I just, due to changes in curriculum, I don't do it as often, but in the past, I have done initiatives or team building exercises where not everyone necessarily...a couple of them are, everyone's blindfolded, but even some of them are just like taking the talkative person or a natural leader and then as part of the exercise, okay, "Hey, so-and-so," you're a great leader, but I'd like you to step back on this one. So, unfortunately, you have blindfolds. *[Youth Minister in the Midwest]*

Interviewee 12: I think we'd be interested in looking at any materials that you have to help. Because I do think a lot of those things, especially with like the mental health issues, I think. I think as a society we don't do enough to provide resources for our families and people that are dealing with mental health issues. That's troubling to me. *[Deacon in the Northeast]*

Interviewee 19: I'm just picking up on something you said about being a welcoming parish. I mean that's really so important. Even people, understanding what their role is through their baptism. How do I give back to my community? How do I get involved with our community? That's what our strategy is right now, is trying to get more people involved in these ministries. Because, you know, there's a handful of people in ministry. Those are again, the numbers are dwindling there, too, because of parish budget. So, training materials, for people that need to understand what some of these things are, like autism. We have a cry room, which I hate to see people go in there because I feel it's part of the community. Are there little booklets? Like we do have some materials for people, but do they always pick them up? How do we get them to them to understand a community as diverse, it's filled with all kinds of people. We don't know until we walk in someone's shoes, what they're dealing with. So, some of those things, just understanding autism, anxiety, depression, alcoholism. Some of those things that people don't want to talk about but they're out there. We hear it. *[Pastoral Associate in the Northeast]*

Disability Checklists for Programs and Facilities

Interviewee 12: First I just want to tell you that I think you sending us that survey was really a great opportunity for us to kind of assess all of these kinds of questions because we encounter people with disabilities at every level, and pretty much every ministry. So it really kind of caused us to stop and assess how we were doing things. So, I appreciate that, I thought that was really a good time to kind of look ourselves in the mirror and ask, you know, how we were doing on that. But a part of answering your questions, I don't know if this is exactly what you're looking for, but really when we first sat down to kind of talk about how we can kind of answer the question that you were asking, was what data do we have? What information do we have at our fingertips where we can kind of look at and say, okay, these are our numbers, right? What we realized right away was the data is lacking. Listen, obviously it's very sensitive information for some people. It's medical-involved information. We know all the privacy laws that are in place. So really the only information we have at our fingertips was regarding religious education. That's for one parent registering their children for our programs, and they voluntarily share some of that information with disabilities and challenges that some of our younger parishioners have, so that we can accommodate them and obviously be aware of some of the challenges that they present. Other than that, the rest of the assessment on our end as far as figuring out where are these people with disabilities, was really just kind of having a discussion about where do we encounter them, and what are we observing? So, it's really just kind of, you know, it's not that hard data that we want to see as much. So, it's more like, okay, yeah, we really focus on that for a minute. We see people coming in the mass, you know, with a walker, or needing a wheelchair, or they need a hearing

assistance device. So, it was really a lot of, I would say guess work, best estimates on where they are. But it really did open our eyes to say that, wow, they're all over. These challenges are all through our parish. [*Deacon in the Northeast*]

Interviewee 15: I think sometimes what I found with talking with some people, it's like they don't know what there...or what would be helpful if they don't know about it. So even, yeah, even seeing some of those things [on the survey for this project] was like, oh yeah, we should be doing that, or that's something that would be really helpful. Or what, you know, like what really would be feasible within like with what we're able to do and things like that. So, I think even having that there, not be a way of saying like shame on you if you don't have any of this, but these are things that have helped people out in the past that might be helpful for your parish as well. Almost like a parish assessment or something like that, that would help just kind of jog people's memory. I work a lot, like I said, with youth and young adults, and that's something that we talk about a lot. Like, having like a quick parish assessment. Like having thought about this, or has this come across. That can range from like the physical building to like a door opener, or like an adult changing room or something like that. To something like, do you have people who sit on your parish council who have a disability? Do you have like training for people? So, like even listing best practices, almost, like would be really helpful. Like a best practice list. That would be super helpful. Almost also like different. So, like I don't, I'm not asking for something like super specific. Like, okay, so like hospitality ministry, but I think it was sometimes like that. Like if in the hospitality ministry, this is an example of how you can welcome people with disabilities, and youth ministry. This is how you can help people with disabilities. In parish leadership, in liturgical ministry, things like that. How can you help? This is, I know, I was just thinking. I'm going through like now my list of like parishioners that I'm like, oh, okay, I know that this parishioner might need some assessment. But like, there's a family, I don't know exactly the disability, like the diagnosis, but there's a dad, and then there's like a 30-year old son. Both of them have some mobility issues, especially with like shaking of a palm, that kind of thing. Almost like, okay, like how do we help liturgical ministers to make sure that we can distribute community to them in a way that is helpful, in a way that will be, you know, helping like with their mobility issues and things like that. So, anything like that kind of help would be, I think would be really good. Any kind of like, almost like a training for like parish leaders. So, like if you have like a person at your parish, like this is something that they're passionate about that they could be trained on, to then help like another ministry. So, almost like a parish consultant or something where they, where like, okay, so in our parish we have this person who is trained, and if we have a question or anything they can go to that person. [*DRE in the Midwest*]

Interviewee 17: A checklist. That would kind of, kind of like maybe a ten essentials to have that equips persons that serve others with disabilities. Because one thing I do hear a

lot of is, and this is in the formation area where we get new people coming in all the time, especially after the pandemic, and trying to, you know, answer the call. But having them feel comfortable enough to be equipped because I hear a lot of the, I don't, I'm not specialized in that area. I don't have the specialization. Like you don't have to have a master's degree, or a doctor's in the field. But just having that assurance to get them to feel the confidence, and trust that these ten essential things will help and guide you throughout the way. So that's the challenge I think that we could help catechist in because even in, maybe not being there one day. I know I've never missed a day in all the years that I've volunteered, but when you're not gonna be there for persons, or kids with disabilities, you have to have a whole lesson plan, and everything ready. When you have that you just have the person. You have all the tools that they need. But there has to be something more practical, I think, also as new people come in. So yeah, like maybe a checklist, or resource list of some sort to kind of have you, as long as you have these, you know, everything else is kind of critical instruction. *[Lead Advocate for Ministry for Persons with Disabilities in the South]*

Accommodating Person with Disabilities in Parishes with Limited Resources

Interviewee 6: Well, one of the newest things coming up, it was always a hindrance for us before because we have a big parish space in our basement, and we have our church accessible via a handicap ramp, and the church space is accessible, but the basement is not. And we have a lot of events down there, and parish...even Bible study or whatever it is, that's kind of extra in addition to attending Mass. And so, we have been looking at installing an elevator for a long time, and it's always been a very, it's been a challenge because it's a very expensive, it would be a very expensive installation. [...] But I think we're finally at the point where we can do it within the next year. It still seems far away, but we have the estimates, we have the people who can do the work, and we're excited about that. So that's coming up soon. And then, we always leave the first pews reserved for anyone with certain mobility issues. *[Communications Director in the South]*

Interviewee 15: I think that we talked about a lot. Again, I think within my own sphere, like within my own parish especially, when it comes to like physical disabilities, I think something that could be helpful is again like how do you retrofit a building that isn't handicap accessible, or are there resources, or grants, or anything like that to help enable, to be able to do that? Or is there something local? What about it do we need to know? Then, like I said before, especially for cognitive disabilities. *[DRE in the Midwest]*

Best Practices for Accommodating Persons with Specific Disabilities

Interviewee 1: Well, I remember going to a workshop a long time ago that was hosted by, if not the Council of Churches, by a collective of Christian churches, maybe even...it wasn't exclusively Christian, it was a whole day-long thing that involved, encouraged parish staff to come and learn about a whole array of issues. I think the title may have been, More Than a Ramp, the idea that attentiveness to persons with disabilities is more than just putting a ramp or an elevator on your building. So, anyway, it was a whole day. And I remember, one of the things that came up during that day that I wasn't sensitive to, was people who have olfactory disabilities. And so, you go into a church with everyone wearing perfume, or at Easter time when you have a bazillion flowers, or you're trying, I mean, yes, you still want to be able to do those things, but you provide better ventilation to try to offset the situation. Anyway, so that was a whole day-long thing. And I remember that being very insightful for me, and that was long before my granddaughter was born. *[Formation Team Member in the Northeast]*

Interviewee 13: I think that education would be a piece. You know, I know that I would be allowed to, and you know, put myself out there to give a presentation on different things. Because I think this is just really not even specific to a parish, but communities need to be educated in particularly intellectual disabilities. Because there's the thinking, especially in older generations of, you know, children should be seen and not heard. I can't believe that your child is making noise in church. I even had a woman, when my kids were young, I had three boys very close in age. I had someone come up to me at mass regularly. But the thing that she said that has always stuck in my mind is, you know, my husband can't hear the homily because your children are too noisy. Well, our parish at that time did not have a cry room. They had nothing, right? That was so disheartening to me. If I didn't have my own convictions of faith, I would have left, you know. I would have just said, I'm out of here. I'm not welcome here. This is not okay. The reality is I had developmentally delayed 3-year-old, a one year old, and a newborn baby. I was doing my best, right. [...] So, I think that something short that goes across, you know, just talks about disabilities in particular. But I think specifically intellectual disabilities. The reason I say that is because we see the physical disabilities, right? We recognize them. In general, we know how to accommodate them. Like a person who, you know, like yeah, it's just easier. It makes more sense. The people with the intellectual disabilities, it's just, it gets tricky, and we don't necessarily know how. Oftentimes the behavior is the only, you know, symptom of the disability. So, we say, "Oh, that child has bad parent. That child is bad." That's just like such bad theology, right? I think that developing something that would kind of put out that message, that intellectual disabilities are the same as physical disabilities. We need to, you know, it's just as equally ethical to accommodate them. How can we change our classrooms in order to make them more accommodating, and change our teaching styles as well? Because it's,

you know, basically based on what's needed for that child. You know, God meets us where we are. God doesn't say, well you can only come to faith formation if you can sit still for an hour. *[Parishioner in the West]*

Interviewee 14: Just, these are the tell-tale signs of depression, and things to look for in youth and people around you, also the elderly. I think that would be very, very helpful to know. I don't know, in many ways I see myself like having a crazy magnet, or sometimes I get a lot of crazy people that are attracted to me by the way I dress. Just being, sometimes the parishioners, not knowing what to do, then bring them to me. In some cases, I'm like, okay, this is a bit timely to have this conversation with this individual, okay. What did I say last time? So sometimes I even think those workshops I think would be helpful for pastors, too because we're just in the eye of the public, and oftentimes placed with situations and not really knowing how to respond because you, like, the catechetical message is not getting through. So where do we go from here? *[Pastor in the Midwest]*

Interviewee 15: The other thing that I know that we didn't talk about, that I would love to figure out how to do is translation services, and how to like ASL interpretation, or for people who are visually impaired. Like that is one of the big things that like I struggle with as a minister. I'm like okay, if someone came to me and they were blind, how would I best help them? Or if someone was hearing impaired, how would I best help them? That is, for me, personally, that's a blind spot. I know what it's like for our parishes. I don't even, I think that there might be one, maybe, parish that has an interpreter. But that is hard to come by. I'm thinking also from my diocesan standpoint, events and things that I don't even know. How do I go to find a viable sign language interpreter? How do I? Like, we're planning a conference within our office for next year. I'm, like, how do we best help people so everyone feels at home? What is it that we need? Something like that would be like super-duper helpful. *[DRE in the Midwest]*

Interviewee 16: We only have one other thing I want to make sure to tell you about, that we're trying to get launched, and that's sensory mass support bags. So other churches have them in our diocese... We are close to execution. We've been close a couple of times. Covid shut us down once. We were really close then. We had someone who is willing to buy everything and donate everything, and then Covid happened and it was like we couldn't even ask. I mean it was not even possible. There was just too much stuff that would have been shared and touched, that we couldn't do. [...] I would say there's a disconnect there. We've had a lot of stuff turnover, or shifts. But I will say that the sensory bags, we paused on it. We chose to pause on it because we're going through a parish campaign. *[Parish Advocate for Persons with Disabilities in the Midwest]*

How to Accompany the Families of Persons with Disabilities

Interviewee 13: So, you know, the thing that I think is really important to understand about people with disabilities, well, I should say children with disabilities, is that the parent is the expert. So, there's a lot of wisdom that can be gained from parents' experiences through raising their child within the parish. I think that it's really, really important that other people become educated about their child's disability, and other people are willing to welcome that child. Because that parent is exhausted, guaranteed. The idea that they could safely leave their child in, you know, the instruction of someone else who is willing to go the extra mile. Because that parent, the other, you know, I don't know how many hours are in a week, but all those other hours, they are like "on." It's a lot. So, the idea that people within the parish would come alongside and say, I got this, you know. That's a beautiful thing. I have been involved in faith formation teaching and everything since I was 13 years old. This coming year, because I'm starting a new job, is going to be the first year that I'm not gonna be teaching. But I have said, if there's a child with a disability that enrolls, I would be more than happy to come and attend class, and just be extra set of hands, you know. So, I think it's really important that we minister to the parents of children with disabilities. [*Parishioner in the West*]

Interviewee 15: Yeah, I think part of it is there's...especially when like maybe someone with cognitive disabilities, I think that we need some more better education on how to make the parish a more welcoming space for those families and those individuals with those disabilities. I'm not saying that we don't have that, but to make it kind of more uniform, like we're all on the same page, and we're all using updated language, and we're all using like personal first language, or whatever that might be. But just some more education so that we can help people be more welcoming. I think that that's, like, one of the first things. I think when it comes to religious education, again, just some more formation, like a good plan. So, in case this happened, or in case like someone has this special need we can help that, and we can address that. So, I think that that, honestly, is one of the first big barriers is just making sure that we're talking about the needs of people. We're talking with people with disabilities. Talking with them and really encouraging them to be part. I think that that's one of the big things. Because I know that there's a few families that they have kids, like there's one great family, and they have an older son who has pretty severe autism. He's somewhat non-verbal, but sometimes he has some big real issues as well. The mom, just because she didn't want to put anyone out, or she didn't want to make anyone feel uncomfortable, she's like, well, we can do the religious education at home. We can do that at home. So, trying to have a support system within the parish where people feel comfortable bringing their children to church, or bringing their children to religious education, or any ministries that might be there, so then people, instead of coming from this place of "Oh, like I don't know how to help this

person. I don't know what to do," to replace it with, "Okay we got this, or we know how to help everyone feel at home." [*DRE in the Midwest*]

Guidance on Disability-friendly Faith Formation Programs for Children with Disabilities

Interviewee 2: But we're not, like, you have to get X number of hours of instruction with your students. So, thankfully, that's a big blessing for us where it's...I know some do and I can. So, it's a lot easier for me to go with parents for homeschooling to just say, have the conversations. However long they go is however long they go. [...] Also, I just have a general rule, and I try to share this with catechists for if a student isn't comfortable, we don't really press doing an activity, we don't press them for the reason. We just, because I know for some disabilities, it might look to me like the person is perfectly fine and willing to participate, but they may not want to play basketball or dodgeball or whatever, and I try to be accommodating to that. Usually the answer is, great, would you mind helping me referee? And the understanding is, as long as you're not causing a distraction, I'm perfectly fine. [...] I'm just going through my head. And that's...I mean, I think that covers the big one. I mean, I don't have a lot of...I guess I should mention, too. Our Diocese does have an office of disabilities inclusion. They do send a lot of resources. Unfortunately, I have, and like, they've been given out, they've given out free books in the past. Unfortunately, in terms of professional development, that's pretty low on the list for me. A lot of times I'm just busy treading water and, well, I don't want to say that it's not something I'm...It's not something I don't care about, but it's just something that I've just been continuing to try and offer reasonable accommodations. Oh, this is something also, sorry to mention, things are coming back to me as I'm talking. Honestly, the hardest thing sometimes is when we have students who may have behavioral issues, like, I'll just throw out some students who have ADHD, and our programs start at 7:30 at night, so if they are on meds, chances are their meds have worn off or are starting to wear off at that point.

[...]

Interviewee 2 Cont'd: And [Catechesis of the Good Shepherd] is very sensory. And the way he presents is that he really, really benefits from sensory involvement. So that's just been a blessing for me to see at the parish, just that he is able to be in the regular classroom. And he's high-functioning, so we haven't had a lot of issues. But it's something that really speaks to him on a different level that, and I also know there are several other...I don't know the specifics because they're not in my program, and I just...but I do know just from talking with parents, there are some other students who have neurological disorders, who also participate in Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. And the entire mindset of that program I really appreciate because it's, by default, it's open to...it's more...not saying that traditional religious education with kindergarteners is

close, but at the same time, I guess it's nice to know that it's not a program focused around everyone sitting still and listening to someone talking. There's also tactile stuff. [...] I mean, I know the training alone is 90 hours, and that's a big dive, but at the same time, it's definitely...and I guess I can say this, I think it's something that I'm looking forward to see what comes out of it, because it speaks to children on so many different levels. [*Youth Minister in the Midwest*]

Interviewee 5: So, we've been able to do it within our budget thus far. That may change depending on what we decide to do and what we find the needs to be. I would say I could see maybe us needing some support in some way as we welcome more and more kids with disabilities into the Sunday school program, because that's one...like, we're okay at the moment with our teen volunteers, but if a kid has more intense needs, that I could see that being an area where it would be really hard to find a well-qualified volunteer who could be consistent enough. Like that, we might have to outsource a little bit for that. But we're not there yet. [*Communications & Development Director in the South*]

Interviewee 12: So, I would say for the really severe disabilities for some of our children for doing sacramental prep, you know, if you have non-verbal, autistic, or like severe conditions that some of the children or families are suffering with. We really kind of bend over backwards and try to accommodate them any way that we can, really, more supporting the parents. So that they can be the first ones that are doing that, and we're more in a support role. I would say for children that are suffering with less severe conditions, no matter what they are, whether it's, you know, a learning disability, or just like a nut allergy, whatever it might be. Those we just kind of build into like our general precautions, you know. Awareness of it is usually the biggest, the biggest thing that we try to work on. [...] I mean one thing that just kind of pops to mind, I don't know if this is related or not, or if this is a question that you're going to ask, but one thing that we've found so far, especially in the last couple of years, is that just getting back to some of those families that have children that are really suffering with severe autism, or some of those challenges, would you find that there's not really any dependable resources? Because it seems like the situations are so unique to the families, that there really can't be a one-size-fits-all resource, or training aid, or lesson plan that kind of works. So, I almost feel like it would be nice to have almost like a depository where we could go and say, okay, to mom and dad, these are the resources that we have for this program. Which one do you think fits best for your situation, your family, your child? Because a lot of it, so far, has been trial and error. We had one family last year, the boy was in 7th grade. He's going to 8th grade now. He's nonverbal, autistic. Even our youth minister reached out for our contact at the Archdiocese who made some suggestions, recommendations. We set them up with a curriculum last year. The parents got back to us after the year and said it really wasn't helpful. It really wasn't good because his learning style is more visual. He likes to be in front of the screen. Then we just recently found out that, or realized that a

few years ago we actually had a content creator come to us with a suggested plan where the whole lesson plan was a game on a screen, on learning the faith. So, we're actually going back trying to find that person to find out more about that plan so we can go and share that with the family, and hopefully that's a good fit. So those are just kind of, those are the things that we, you know, it takes up so much time because it's just this one family needs this one solution to kind of make it work. We just don't have it readily available. *[Deacon in the Northeast]*

Interviewee 13: Yeah, for faith formation teachers, I think specifically, I definitely think that across the board we've had good ones and not as good ones. Ones that understood that there was something different, and ones that really did not. So, I think that if there is a training piece that could go along with any sort of teacher formation, and I would say it couldn't be very long, unfortunately. But maybe a 30-minute video or something, that the director of religious education could play at a training that talks about disabilities. Here's where you can go for more information. Then also maybe if there was some sort of like training module in case you had students with particular disabilities. You know, but really the experts. *[Parishioner in the West]*

Appendix I: Survey with Response Frequencies



Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate and National Catholic Partnership on Disability

Survey of Parish Disability Awareness and Practices in the U.S.



This survey asks about your parish's accommodations and services for persons with disabilities (physical, intellectual/developmental, behavioral). Please be assured that your responses are completely confidential. Results will only be presented in aggregate. [352 respondents to the survey]

To the best of your knowledge, estimate the **numbers of people** from your parish living with the following:

	None	1 – 9	10+	NR
1. Physical/mobility – malformed or missing limbs, muscle/joint pain, paralysis, osteoporosis, cerebral palsy	5	44	52	4
2. Chronic pain - severe arthritis, fibromyalgia, Lyme disease, nerve damage, back/neck pain	5	35	60	3
3. Chronic illnesses - diabetes, heart disease, autoimmune, lupus	2	22	75	4
4. Cognitive processing difficulties – auditory, visual, speech, language	10	55	35	3
5. Deafness (uses sign language)	57	39	4	5
6. Significant hearing impairment (uses spoken language)	17	52	31	5
7. Blindness or significant vision impairment	31	62	8	5
8. Autism Spectrum Disorder	11	57	32	5
9. Intellectual/developmental – Down syndrome, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), learning differences	8	59	33	5
10. Genetic - Fragile X syndrome, cystic fibrosis, sickle cell	60	35	5	11
11. Traumatic brain injury	45	51	4	9
12. Dementia/Alzheimer's	6	55	39	6
13. Mental health –Moderate to severe anxiety, bipolar/depression, eating disorders, suicidal ideations, prolonged grief, paranoid personality, obsessive compulsive, conduct/antisocial	10	39	51	7
14. Addictions – alcohol, drugs, gambling, pornography, sex, food, smoking, shopping	11	35	54	8
15. Post-traumatic stress disorder	18	51	31	9

AVG NR

- 20 20 16. Estimated **percentage** of persons at your parish who have *one or more* of the disabilities/disorders listed above?
- 48 28 17. Estimated **percentage** of persons at your parish ages 65 and older?

Do your facilities have the following accommodations? **Please check all that apply.** NR=6

	Church building	Parish hall	Class-rooms	Parish offices	School building
18. Nearby dedicated accessible parking	98	79	47	69	39
19. Wheelchair accessibility	98	77	48	60	33
20. Electronic door access	40	22	9	16	12
21. Accessible restroom	76	65	31	44	29
22. Electronic restroom door	5	2	1	1	1
23. Family restroom	35	19	4	10	4
24. Restroom with adult changing table	24	14	2	6	5
25. Assistive listening devices	39	4	1	1	1
26. In which of the following areas have you provided modifications and/or accommodations, e.g., <u>curricula</u> , <u>large print</u> , <u>buddy system</u> ? Check all that apply.					
49 Mass/liturgical celebrations					
23 Early childhood/family faith formation					
38 Children's faith formation					
17 Youth ministry					
39 Reconciliation/Eucharist preparation					
30 Confirmation preparation					
- Marriage preparation					
23 RCIA/OCIA					
21 Adult faith formation					

Yes No NR

- 43 57 17 27. Does your diocese offer training to parish staff members on how to accommodate persons with disabilities?
28. To what extent are the needs of persons with disabilities considered in your *pastoral council* meetings? NR= 15
- 22 Not at all 27 Somewhat
- 41 A little 10 To a great extent
29. To what extent are the needs of persons with disabilities considered in your *finance council* meetings? NR=15
- 33 Not at all 23 Somewhat
- 35 A little 9 To a great extent

30. Which of the following are available for persons with disabilities? **Please check all that apply.**

- 22 Transportation to Masses
- 15 Transportation to parish functions
- 11 Calming/sensory room
- 7 Resource room for special education/therapies
- 19 Behavior support during faith formation
- 9 Sensory-friendly Masses
- 4 American Sign Language at Masses
- 61 Posted hymn numbers for the hearing impaired
- 44 Missals/worship aids for the hearing impaired
- 22 Large print missals/worship aids
- 3 Materials in Braille e.g., lectionary, missal, curricula
- 65 Low-gluten hosts
- 50 Pew cutouts in the church
- 25 Ramp to altar
- 14 Ramp/elevator to choir space
- 6 Accessible/adjustable ambo
- 9 Other:

31. In what ways does your parish communicate about the services it offers to persons with disabilities?

NR=50

32. In which of the following have persons with disabilities participated at your parish in the past three years? **Please check all that apply.**

- 88 Mass
- 34 As a staff member (paid/volunteer)
- 37 As a greeter/hospitality minister
- 37 As an altar server
- 38 In music ministry
- 33 As a lector
- 19 As an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion
- 69 Receiving low-gluten hosts
- 42 Eucharistic adoration/public devotionals
- 68 Parish community events
- 13 Pastoral council member
- 10 Finance council member
- 33 Member of any parish committees
- 24 As a catechist
- 12 In early childhood/family catechesis
- 31 In a sacramental preparation program
- 30 In children's/youth faith formation
- 22 In youth ministry
- 9 In young adult ministry
- 7 In marriage preparation
- 21 In RCIA/OCIA
- 29 In Scripture study
- 25 Participating in retreats/days of reflection
- 25 In adult faith formation
- 39 Volunteering in any of the above parish ministries
- 2 Other:

Yes No NR

- 21 79 16 33. Does your parish have someone who is responsible for parish advocacy for persons with disabilities?
- 40 60 18 34. Has your parish worked with any Catholic organizations to help you include persons with disabilities – like the Knights, Scouts?
- 22 78 19 35. Does your parish work with any non-Catholic organizations that serve persons with disabilities (e.g., Arc, Special Olympics)?
- 12 88 29 36. If your parish has a construction committee for renovations/new construction, does a person with a disability/advocate serve
- 46 54 58 37. *Respond if your parish has a Catholic school:* Does your school have a resource room for special education/therapies?
- 28 72 27 38. Does your website offer accessibility features such as ability to increase font size, captioning, screen reader compatibility?
- 19 81 22 39. Does your parish have a list of resources available for persons with disabilities and their families?
- 15 85 25 40. Does your parish offer respite for parishioners who serve as caregivers?
- 84 16 18 41. Does your parish have a ministry to conduct visits and/or phone calls to the homebound?
- 79 21 19 42. Does your parish have a ministry to visit local nursing homes?
- 30 70 22 43. Does your parish offer support groups for persons/family members with mental health instability or addictions?
- 19 81 29 44. Does your parish offer any other ministries to persons with disabilities/family members including support groups? a. *If so, specify:*

AVG NR

- 1,157 29 45. Number of registered households in the parish?
- 6 27 46. Number of full-time staff members at the parish?
- 5 27 47. Number of part-time staff members at the parish?
- 48. What *best* describes the location of your parish? **NR=24**
37 1. Rural 40 2. Suburban 23 3. Urban
- 49. Parish ZIP code: **NR=28**

50. What training would be *most helpful* to your parish to aid you in being more inclusive of persons with disabilities and their families? Please be as specific as possible. **NR=59**

A second part of this study involves interviews with parish personnel about their efforts to include and accommodate persons with disabilities. *If you are willing to be interviewed*, please share your email address here: **NR=80**

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

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Appendix II: Complete Transcription of Open-ended Comments

Q 31. In what ways does your parish communicate about the services it offers to persons with disabilities?

These comments have been lightly edited for spelling and punctuation, as well as to remove any information that would identify their parish or diocese.

Announcements and bulletin.

Announcement in bulletin.

Announcements in bulletin, on website and following Mass.

Announcements occasionally.

Announcements, livestream Masses.

Announcements. Bulletins.

Announcing from pulpit. Ushers available to help with questions. Video bulletin.

As the parish special needs advocate I try hard to let the congregation know about services and things we provide.

Availability is mentioned throughout the year.

Bulletin.

Bulletin.

Bulletin.

Bulletin. Case by case inquiry.

Bulletin & announcements.

Bulletin & Church announcements & Signage.

Bulletin & Website.

Bulletin & website.

bulletin (rarely).

Bulletin and Announcements at Mass.

Bulletin and weekly email.

Bulletin. Email.

Bulletin notices.

Bulletin notices and posted signs (specifically about auditory devices).

Bulletin notices word of mouth large print in pew book racks.

Bulletin or word of mouth.

Bulletin semi-annually.

Bulletin, website, word of mouth, signs.

Bulletin, Flocknote.

Bulletin, Flocknotes, announcements,

Bulletin, postings, phone call, word of mouth, pulpit.

Bulletin, signage.

Bulletin, verbal announcements, social media.

Bulletin, website.

Bulletin, website.

Bulletin, website, parish visitors.

Bulletin, website, printed brochures.

Bulletin, weekly updates.

Bulletins, announcements, slideshow before Mass.

By signs in building.

By word of mouth.

Church bulletin, Father announces from the altar.

Designated persons to deal with disablde adults.

Doesn't.

During Respect Life Month (October), video of Parish Advocate explaining the ministry and support available, sent out in Parish email blast.

Each situation is treated individually.

Email, Facebook, website and phone.

For all religious education events (classes, etc.) for children, we include language welcoming children with intellectual disabilities and encouraging their parents to reach out to parish staff to help us best accommodate their children. We have also asked parents when registering their children for religious education if they have a child with disabilities in their household (regardless of whether that child is registering for religious ed classes or not). The availability of hearing assist devices, low-gluten hosts, and an elevator are printed on the front cover of the parish bulletin every week. The parish website has a section highlighting the accommodations within the parish and directing people to additional resources outside the parish.

Greeters and parish staff accommodate those with special needs.

Hearing devices available in the bulletin and hospitality ministers make them available. Elevator ramp.

Help and support.

I have been a parishioner for 3 years and I have never received any formal communication about services offered to persons with disabilities. It is mostly word of mouth.

If someone needs to receive the Eucharist but cannot walk to the Eucharistic Minister (EM), the Hospitality minister will talk to the EM for them to walk to the person who cannot walk to offer the Eucharist.

In bulletin.

In bulletin.

In conjunction with our diocesan Pastoral Plan and parish pre-synod listening sessions, our new Parish Pastoral Council is developing new and better forms of hospitality the all, including those with special needs.

In our parish bulletin and personally

In the bulletin and announcements at Mass.

In the rest years nothing has been communicated unless asked about and then the Coordinator of Faith Formation helps with the accommodations.

Individually as needs arise, through announcement and advertising. Through outreach to those we have been made aware of have specific needs. We regularly announce the availability of low gluten hosts.

It does not.

It does not.

It does not communicate since it does not have anything to offer to them.

It does not.

It doesn't.

It is part of our Welcoming Pathways agenda. This is an internal leadership program to make our parish more welcoming to all in our community.

It is written in the church bulletin.

Little to no communication

Little to none.

Meet with parent/person 1:1.

Monthly inclusion/diversity birthday gathering.

Monthly notification in the bulletin.

Most of our accommodations are visible. Other accommodations are available upon request.

No message, just react when we encounter individuals.

None.

None.

None.

None.

None.

None.

None.

None.

None.

None.

None.

None.

None.

None that I know of.

Not at all.

Occasional bulletin "blurbs."

Occasional short article in the bulletin.

On a phone call basis.

On mention of accessible parking in the bulletin. Upon request if asked.

One-on-one conversation with the person needing and asking for it. We don't have a broad communication plan for these services.

Online, on our phone recordings and in our bulletins.

Our ministry leads are aware and communicate it verbally.

Our Parish has not focused on our parishioners with disabilities because one person is making efforts to do it all and be involved in everything- while this is noble, the time, attention, quality and focus are not there and many things are over looked. and communication is not direct or transparent because one person simply cannot do it all and be running all ministries Two major things that could occur to correct this would be to involve parishioners instead of controlling everything and trying to do it by one's self - empowering our parishioners as a family of faith and allowing them to do the work they want to do and God's work will allow for our parish to be a healthier parish and one where all are included - small example.... all our parking lots have faded paint - it is hard to see where the handicap parking is. It is also dangerous for all parishioners especially those who are older trying to park when there are no lines in any of the parking lots -

Our registration form asks if anything is needed to support their worship in our church. We have signs for our hearing loop; our ADA parking and doors are readily seen.

Our volunteer Hospitality Ministers are there to assist anyone who needs special services or accommodations: listening devices, special seating...

Parish disability advocates phone number and email address are listed in the bulletin.

[Parish Name] group tries to offer sensory items for children in need at masses, when they have volunteers.

Parish website; Parish bulletin; Parish Special Needs Ministry members and team.

People just seem to know when someone needs help. We're a small community.

Personal contact.

Posted signs and public announcements from time to time.

Pre-service announcements. Website.

Previously (before COVID pandemic) there was a designated ASL Mass on Sunday which was published in all of the Mass schedule resources, e.g., website, archdiocese, bulletins, MassTimes app, etc. We have not resumed that ASL Mass post-COVID.

Several ways, electronically through Flocknote, social media, email as well as verbally through announcements.

Signage throughout facility.

Signage where applicable. Greeters to help/assist with access and electric lift assistance.

Signage, social media, parish bulletin, website, small group ministry meetings.

Social Media and Parish Bulletins.

Social media, bulletin.

Social media, website, bulletin, face to face.

social media, word of mouth, radio and news paper.

[Parish Name] is an intentional best practice model for serving persons who are Deaf and or live with disability.

The Bulletin and webpage.

The hearing assist devices are openly available to all.

The parish bulletin.

The Pastor of our Parish is a paraplegic, so the entire campus and all buildings/spaces are accessible to all parishioners. He has created a culture of awareness. He also was involved with the document "Opening Doors" published by the NCPD.

The Priest makes announcements.

The TV monitor screens advertise of resources.

There are no specific "services" offered to persons with disabilities, so there is nothing to communicate.

There are notices in the bulletin and a few signs in the church area.

They've existed for so many years that people just know about them without us having to say anything.

Those with needs communicate with us and we try to accommodate their request.

Though not disabled, we do have accommodations for those who do not speak English. We have a secretary for these translations and Masses offered in Spanish, as well as, religious education classes, marriage and baptism prep in Spanish. All documents available in both English and Spanish.

Through all promotions - please let us know if you need accommodations for sight, hearing, mobility, diet,..within 2 weeks prior to event.

Through bulletin and pulpit announcements.

Through Parish Flocknote, bulletin, website, social media, personal invitation.

Through Signage for ramps and Handicapped restroom. Through interpersonal communication.

Transportation needs have been met by family or neighbors and friends. We do not have an individual person to take charge of these needs.

Upon request since low numbers.

Very little.

We are a very small parish, and everyone takes care of whatever needs people have for attendance at Mass and church functions.

We are a very small parish, so communication is easy.

We are remodeling Church and it seems all the things mentioned are in the plan.

We communicate the accessibility of hearing aides.

We communicate with individuals as needed.

We could do better!

We currently do not communicate these things very well. We are just finally getting back into discussing various vulnerable groups. We do discuss disability inclusion in our Faith Formation Commission Meetings, but not Parish Council or Finance Council Meetings.

We do a poor job with this.

We do not.

We do not have anything currently in our bulletin. When someone inquires, we will respond the best we can.

We do not have particular communications about services for people with disabilities. As a small parish, everything we do is done in the context of the individuals rather than be a set program.

We do not have specific communication.

We do not specifically offer support, only when a person comes to us with a need.

We don't really communicate about any services for disability.

We don't.

We have a print brochure among the seats that indicates accessible features.

We have a program called iCare Ministries, designed for persons with intellectual and developmental challenges. We have a modified Mass every other week. Please check out iCareministries.org. We also provide full inclusion Mass and Music program along with a School of Religion to make sure that everyone has the sacraments made available to them. We communicate this through our website, through flock notes, through email blasts, and articles in our bulletin. We offer the Mass with braille and sign-language.

We have information in our website and weekly bulletins.

We haven't.

We haven't, unless it is word of mouth to someone that needs a service.

We just do it.

We let folks that have difficulty walking that we have an elevator.

We periodically put information about Low Gluten hosts in the bulletin.

We place notices in our bulletin, offer pulpit announcements and handle most cases by addressing the individual needs of the parishioner.

We really don't have the means to do more because of our size. We do all we can to help but resources are limited.

We recently remodeled the bathrooms to accommodate people with disabilities which was in the bulletin.

We talk one on one with our parishioners and try to accommodate on an as needed basis. Our Secretary is in an electric wheelchair. So, she is more conscious of what might be needed. We work on things that are needed soon as we can and when we have available funds.

We will communicate occasionally what is available in the bulletin. There is also signage about hearing devices available.

We work one on one with the family if we are aware a service is needed.

We yearly reach out to those in need...and try to WELCOME ALL.

Website.

Website and bulletin.

Weekly bulletin, Mass Announcements and Facebook posts.

Weekly bulletin, Parish website.

Weekly emails to families. Sent to all families enrolled in Faith Formation. A separate email is also sent monthly to families who have disclosed a diagnosis.

We've just always been aware to make our facilities available to all. I've attended since 1975 and the church was wheel chair friendly even then.

With word of mouth.

Word of mouth.

You must contact parish secretary.

Q 50. What training would be most helpful to your parish to aid you in being more inclusive of persons with disabilities and their families? Please be as specific as possible.

These comments have been lightly edited for spelling and punctuation, as well as to remove any information that would identify their parish or diocese.

A basic start would be to bring awareness overall, discussions of inclusivity for the disabled. Classes on "invisible" disabilities such as diabetes, mental illness and behavioral issues.

A general audit of the parish that would reveal what we are doing well and what we could do in addition would be helpful.

A letter of introduction to name each of these areas of disability.

A trained Hospitality Team for Greeting and Assistance.

A training on the specific resources available from the archdiocese for individuals with disabilities. With associated names and phone numbers of individuals to call.

A walk-through of our churches to see what would be helpful through the eyes of a disabled person. Training for the staff, volunteers, and lay people to help open eyes on how to be more inclusive. It is something, we have only addressed situations as they arrive. We need to be more proactive.

About 5 years ago, we had a Special Needs Ministry and would try to meet monthly. Volunteers were older mothers with older child along with a few young moms with young children. Meetings were not attended. So, it was determined that the staff would assist one on one as the needs came up.

ADA requirements and how to upgrade 75-year-old facilities to increase access to people of all abilities.

Adaptive Teacher for religious education.

All of it! How to be a more accessible parish, how to make modifications for people who need them, how to advocate for people with disabilities, how to help parish families. All of it. And with resources in Spanish.

Any.

Any that suits the necessity of our parishioners.

Any training.

Any training at all since we have none.

Anything that doesn't become an extra duty for the pastor. I have two parishes, only part-time help, mostly volunteers, no maintenance staff, too many hats to wear. Years ago, the diocese had a person to coordinate handicapped concerns. We haven't had anything since the last three bishops!

Anything would be welcome - just starting to be more aware and welcoming.

Assisting those with disabilities at Mass.

At minimum what we are able to do for our parishioners and how we go about doing it.

At this time, I am not exactly sure.

1. Awareness (types of disabilities and how to best accommodate) 2. Mental Health First Aid (or similar).

Being an advocate by giving rides to church and other places like grocery stores, medical appointments, etc. Most volunteers are hesitant, as well as the archdiocese because of lawsuits if something happens.

Calming techniques for distraught individuals.

Caregiving and respite. Behavior support. Social activities.

Catechesis for persons with disabilities (specifically ADHD, Autism, and Down Syndrome).

Catholic school has a contract with a provider to educate school staff on how to teach children with disabilities. However, very little training offered. School staff need extensive training to support children with ASD. That would probably be the best place to start. Parish school of religion staff would also likely benefit from training.

Conference on best practices.

Creating a safe space for individuals with mental health challenges.

Current code as to what we need to offer, USCCB guidelines and ideas as to what parishes can do, Archdiocesan wide retreats, etc. My biggest frustration is that there are a lot of people with disabilities whom do not have a parish community because they live in a group home, and they do not get to Mass regularly. The former Archdiocesan retreat was their only religious experience every year.

Diocesan or staff leadership trainings.

Disability awareness training.

Disability inclusion.

Easy things that parishes have done; not super-open to putting too much effort into it at the moment. We used to have an Accessibility Committee for 20 years, but that has gone by the wayside, because was not being listened to. Most have left the parish.

Educational awareness of need.

Examples of what could be offered, other than building changes. For example, large print missals, etc. Also, how to best communicate accommodations to the parishioners.

First aid training and defibrillator training.

Formational opportunities to make faculty, staff, leadership and parishioners more aware and to make changes to welcome more pro-actively those with disabilities.

Franciscan At Home course is excellent. The diocese has a subscription so the course is free to all parishioners. It is outstanding and provides a holistic overview for parish participation. We take advantage of that. The course I have taken is Catechesis for Persons with Disabilities. The title is misleading. It covers far more than Catechesis.

General awareness of programs for disabled.

General training regarding making accessibility a priority rather than something we respond to when someone asks/needs an accommodation.

Greater emphasis on the giftedness of persons who are Deaf or live with a disability in the surrounding "typical" parishes outside of [Parish Name] Deaf Catholic Church.

Hospitality.

How our programs and resources can be reasonably changed to make accommodations for students with special needs.

1) How to ask if parishioners would like accommodations without seeming to be a busybody. 2) How to make accommodations to the physical building when that building is nearly 200 years old. 3) How to provide support and respite for families of people with disabilities. 4) So often organizing volunteers for this falls to the families of people with disabilities, who are already overwhelmed and don't have the time/energy to organize volunteers. 5) Training for catechists who will be teaching children/teens with intellectual disabilities.

How to be more ADA Compliant Support and encourage families with disabilities. Have staff, ushers, etc. trained in first aid and aed.

How to better serve persons with disabilities, including specific ministry models. How to engage parishioners in activities that support people with disabilities.

How to communicate about our functions so that people with disabilities know they are welcome and can be accommodated.

How to interact with people with disabilities, what is okay to say and not to say as terms have changed; being patient and accepting of people with differences because they have just as much of a right to be at Mass and participate in activities as anyone else

How to invite and welcome the disabled into parish life.

How to organize and run support groups and peer-to-peer and family-to-family ministry.

How to recognize, welcome, accommodate person's with physical, cognitive and sometimes invisible disabilities (fibromyalgia, dementia, emotional trauma, etc.).

I am a person with a disability. I am the Religious Education Director and Youth Director. I do serve the church weekly in some fashion. In my personal life, I am the Executive Director of an Independent Living Center, a Resource Center for people with disabilities. With the previous priest, I have assisted with access to parking and signage. The current priest has not inquired or asked for any assistance or guidance on access to services, programs or accommodations. I appreciate the questions and the survey. It is extremely important to move parishes in the right direction of inclusion for all ages and all disabilities. I hope that many of the issues can be addressed, and our Dioceses can move forward, while meeting the needs of all parishioners. I believe physical access is most important. Once you have access, then program access can be obtained. Our parish is mainly elderly and Hispanic. Accommodations for visual and hearing impairments is most important. Our mass is said in Spanish the 1st Sunday of the month, thereafter, there is a Spanish mass at 1 pm on Sundays. I understand there is not a bulletin in Spanish. Accommodating the language barrier is a welcoming gesture. I feel this is most important as the Spanish community is the younger community and our parish needs young families, and they need to be included in all activities. The elderly community would benefit from listening devices for poor hearing. Often, I hear, "I didn't hear a thing". Parishioners just go through the motions. Education and training on how to accommodate youth with ADHD or Autism is needed. Youth who are in a Sacramental Programs for First Communion, Reconciliation or Confirmation cannot have the same expectations. Their responses to sacramental questions maybe not be correct, however they are God's children and they do need the blessings received from the sacraments and acceptance as a person. Educating the parish on spontaneous outburst during mass does.

I am new to the parish and just starting processes on inclusion. We need a telecoil system and a new ADA ramp for the church and the sacristy, and some compliant bathrooms.

I believe posters that could be placed in various locations and an electronic section for people to resource if they are looking for information.

I can't think of anything.

I don't know.

I have never seen anyone in the Diocese offer training on this subject. So, any training would be a good start.

I really don't know. I suppose being made aware of the issues that we don't know about.

I really don't know enough to ask.

I really don't know.

I think it would be helpful for my parish if we have training on how to work with people who are autistic and deaf.

I think it would be helpful to have training on how to better communicate our existing resources and also how to create a more inclusive environment.

I think just a workshop about awareness of persons with disabilities would be very helpful.

I would love to learn about respite programs, transportation rules and guidelines. Would like to see. Religious Ed program geared specifically for special needs persons....For the sacramental prep too.

I would love training on how to communicate using the parish bulletin and other ways to contact parishioners regarding aid for persons with disability, I would also love to get information to help the parish and maintenance and finance councils to see the need of an accessible ramp or accessibility to the front of the church, and how much it is important to those who need it.

If this were a diocesan priority, I believe our parish would respond to diocesan initiatives to be more inclusive.

I'm not sure that lack of training is our problem, but rather a lack of priority. Our children's and youth ministry staff could use training on how best to accommodate those with autism, ADHD, intellectual disabilities, and mental health challenges. Our diocese and parish already offer Mental Health First Aid training from the National Council for Mental Health. The accommodation that would have the greatest impact at mass would be auditory devices for those with hearing loss.

I'm truly not sure. Generally, if we see someone we think will benefit for something extra, we ask them if they need us to supply the extra; if they tell us that they need it, we supply it.

Including and empowering parishioners - allowing them to lead and run ministries not having one person attempting to control everything and being involved in everything and the contact person for everything - our parish is far to vast. We need to find the leaders in our community

and allow them to build a team so that team can work together with their gifts and talents and collaborate with God and continue to grow our parish and service our faith family / parishioners. If we followed this model, I am sure there would be more voices heard, more families heard, and more support and representation for those with and without a disability. However, if we do not listen or include these voices then we will never see our parishioners who might need an accommodation - be it great or small.

Inclusion opportunities.

Inclusivity as leaders, more advocates & awareness.

It would be nice to have information sent to us so we can consider the things we should be looking at improving. We don't have many members who have disabilities. We usually reach out to them to ask how we can make their time here easier. but it would be good to have information before someone needed it.

It would be nice to train everyone on how many people are considered disabled, in pointing out how relevant it is to be accessible, and how easy it is to make everything accessible. People seem to think it is too costly and unimportant to make events and buildings accessible. It would be nice to learn how to support families with disabled family members, to become a resource for them.

It would depend on the disability of the person we would encounter. At present, there is no one here that I know of.

Low-Sensory Mass. Faith Formation classes for those w/ neurodiversity.

Maybe.

More of the same as we just had in the inclusion initiative.

More people struggle with mental health, especially anxiety but we don't offer support, help, counseling, or instruction. We also have numerous children with dyslexia and ADHD but again no full church offerings are available. One of our reasons to switch to family faith was that families could instantly accommodate for their kids and know their own kids' abilities. We also never put people of any age "on the spot" by requiring them to do a task, especially read or write in front of a group BUT many in our parish don't even understand how devastating those tasks can be.

More resources.

More training on people with disabilities that are not visible. (EX. mental illness).

Not really necessary. The Pastor is a permanent wheelchair user and quite knowledgeable about the needs of the disabled. The issue that may prevent implementation of particular issues are financial, not due to ignorance. On a separate note, you may want to check your mailings. The

email that requested support of this survey indicated that previous email requests were made for completion. This was the first time this survey was sent to me or to my parish.

Not required at this time.

Not sure. Our churches are accessible, we have ample parking, all are invited to worship, to activities, to events and many persons with disabilities attend.

Once again, we are a small community that is open and receptive to anyone with special needs.

Our building is not accessible for anyone, for example, using a wheelchair. There are grants available for making listed buildings accessible, but we don't have the capacity to figure out whether we would be eligible for any grants or generally planning to undertake large capital projects.

Our families need to see it at our cathedral first.

Parish staff training – awareness. Catechist training, inclusion across ministries.

People working with mental and emotional issues, especially.

Respite care training.

Sacramental preparation with persons with disabilities.

Sensitivity training. Training that educates about the range of disabilities found in elderly populations and how to address them. Training that educates about the range of disabilities found in young family populations and how to recognize them.

Serving persons on the spectrum.

Show examples of parishes that are doing it well.

Sign language; accommodating children with autism at Mass and in CCD; providing spiritual formation for people with non-physical disabilities (youth and adults). That would be a good start.

Sign language; How to find resources; Catechesis for those with developmental issues.

Some written materials with concrete suggestions would be a good start to bring to the parish council.

Something that tells us what is most important to be done. What other parishes in our diocese are doing.

Specialized training for specific ministries (children's faith formation, liturgical ministers, etc.).

Specific training for Youth minister, and priests. Training for parish volunteers. Raising awareness for the needs of families caring for children and adults with disabilities.

Supports for behaviors or profound disabilities.

The Archdiocese works with our youth leaders on walking with persons with disabilities. Perhaps knowing how to invite and accompany people of all ages into the fullness of a life with Christ through His Church.

The entire parishioners are involved in this ministry.

The implantation of items such as an elevator that would take parishioners from the church to the parish hall located under the church level. This has been a passion of mine since returning as parish secretary. Our area is a retirement area and as our demographic age being 72, it pains me to see more and more who are now in wheelchairs or walkers that cannot easily go to activities held in the hall. It is accessible to go outside, around the church and down a hill to get in, but this is not inviting to do at all. Our volunteer parish nurse is very good at bringing learning presentations from MU pertaining to aging such as when to give up the keys to driving, and signs of dementia.

The individual responsible for faith formation coordination has access to resources and utilizes them on a case-by-case basis.

The need has not presented itself to us at this time, therefore we are not sure about any specific training that would be helpful.

The SB40 Developmental Disabilities Board director in town is a very active member of a protestant congregation that is known for being extremely thoughtful and accommodating for people with disabilities. We collaborate with them a lot to help fund special needs for their clients that are not covered by insurance or grant funds. I have no doubt she would be willing bring her staff to do a walk-through of our facilities, ask some questions, and then give us a presentation on where we could improve.

To have a training on people with disabilities and there needs and how to get supports.

To know who needs accommodations in our parish. How to reach out to those who need extra services to better able to attend mass and church activities easier for them.

Training for catechists and volunteers to teach the faith to kids with disabilities. Best practices for how to adapt or help them focus, learn and retain information in a religious education program, sacrament prep program and for children's liturgy of the word.

Training for physical, visual and hearing disabilities. Resources to better the experience of those with disabilities when they come to Mass.

Training for Staff for importance of seeking those with disabilities to have a role in the church that matches their abilities and interest and providing adapted training so the liturgical importance/reverence is present AND the person with needs is in a visible role as a valued member of the Body of Christ.

Training for usher to offer safety while caring for mentally unstable homeless. Faith Formation materials that are supportive of families.

Training on campus upgrades and ministry materials for those with disabilities. What is available? We have to search or wait for a request to make meaningful changes.

Training on how to convert your facility (doors, bathrooms ramps) to make it more accessible.

Training on how to minister to these individuals above the obvious ADA doors and parking spaces.

Training on how to welcome them and treat them.

Training on making our parish more accessible for hearing impaired. in addition, how to budget for wheelchair transportation to mass.

Training on the diocesan level.

Training staff members and parish leaders. Training for catechists and school teachers Training the community.

Training to help increase awareness of and sensitivity toward people with disabilities would be helpful. It would also benefit us to be given clear direction on best practices of how to speak to and about individuals with disabilities. There is an overall lack of empathy toward differences within our parish and community.

Training to help the deaf and blind feel more included, perhaps.

Training to make the best use of what we have to accommodate.

Training to pastors, parish councils, finance council, formation leaders and school principals.

Understanding needs of those with various disabilities.

Unsure.

Ways to make Mass more accessible.

We are a relatively small rural parish. We are limited to financial resources to offer extra resources for disabled persons. We do offer what is required of us, but much of our congregation is elderly and we do the best we can to provide what is needed.

We are a very rural area with multiple small churches and a large seasonal tourist population. We don't have many people that obviously need special assistance. When someone comes that does we don't have something ready for them. More resources that can help us assist people with mental illness and similar things would be helpful. Our community doesn't have many resources in this area.

We are currently trying to develop a sensory-friendly liturgy - in conjunction with various departments and offices of the chancery. We could use some help with this. While willing to do so, neither of us, the parish priests, knows what this entails.

We are inclusive. Maybe a blurb from you to put in bulletin.

We are simply too few people with not enough time in the day. We rise to the occasion as need rises, we do not leave anyone behind, training is great, but disabilities are specific. If I have no blind parishioners, training for that right now is not helpful when trying to assist someone with a different disability like autism for example or vice versa.

We are working on getting ramps at all churches. A better sound system would be helpful for hearing impaired. We have a newly formed Knights of Columbus that could be helpful in the future.

We can always use more training.

We could really use training on how to best connect parishioners with disabilities with the resources that would best serve them; we could also appreciate a way to connect with our elderly members who rely upon landlines and need user-friendly websites to acquire the most pertinent information as it relates to them!!

We have a Mental Health Ministry which we launched about 2 years ago. Our ministry works with the Association of Catholic Mental Health Ministers, and we offer Spiritual Support Groups, provide a resource area in the lobby and bring in speakers for presentations. A Deacon provided MHFA training, but not many staff members attended - mostly those from the community and others who were assisting me in the MHM. We have not had any formal training here for staff regarding inclusion, and could also benefit from having training or presentations to increase understanding and acceptance with the parish at large. I could see this coming under the covering/sponsorship of our Mental Health Ministry.

We have a newly developed special education program in the school but do not have a formal ministry or plan to support people with disabilities in the parish. This support comes mostly on a case by case basis and is not a packaged program or person in charge that is ready to support people with disabilities.

We have a parish nurse. Works with the church and the school. More training on education for all staff and ministry leaders regarding accommodations for all the various disabilities

mentioned. Currently it seems to be individuals who assist individuals but not an organized effort to seek out those with needs and find ways to meet the needs. A better system to identify and reach those people and survey their needs.

We need a lot of help....we do not provide help with much 🙄 🙄

We need training in how to increase knowledge and challenges of persons with disabilities. If we don't have things to offer, they do not come...it is a vicious cycle.

We participate in training offered by the Archdiocese and have a parish rep who attends their meetings.

We really don't have anyone with disabilities. We have an old population so our disabilities are mostly age related.

What else we could be doing to help.

What is available for resources and to challenges us to consider people with disabilities. Many times it does not come to our mind.

1) Workshop with staff and committee leaders. 2) Follow-up with planning initiatives to implement specific changes ranging from simple fixes to structural accommodations. 3) Including this area in pastoral planning with parishes through the initiative of the diocese. 4) Highlighting good work to promote accessibility in parishes by the diocese. 5) Using persons with disabilities to offer practical helps to effect changes in parish.

Yearly reminder conference and UTD (Up To Date) info and resources.

Appendix III: Interview Protocol
NCPD – National Catholic Partnership for Disability
Interviews with Parish Leaders
Interview Protocol – June & August 2024

Introductions and Brief Description of the Interview

5 minutes

Record button in Zoom on Off

Hello, my name is Jon Wiggins from the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA). I am working with the National Catholic Partnership on Disability (NCPD) to help them discover what resources Catholic parishes need to advance the full participation of persons with disabilities within their parishes.

Our goal is to seek understanding and this interview is simply a guided discussion or conversation. It is a way to understand how people think or feel about a particular topic or issue and to get some feedback from them. This is not a test. There are no “right” or “wrong” answers to the questions we will be asking. I also want to be clear that I am not here to promote any particular policy or agenda. I am here for your honest feedback.

You bring an important perspective to the study. While we know some of the hard numbers from the survey process, we do not really understand the kinds of strengths and challenges your parish encounters when including persons with disabilities in parish life. We wish we understood better, for example, (a) how much of a priority including persons with disabilities is among your staff, councils, and committees, (b) what specific challenges you have experienced or are experiencing in being inclusive of persons with disabilities, and (c) how your diocese encourages and supports your parish’s capacity for including persons with disabilities and what is still needed.

I anticipate this interview will last about 20-30 minutes. Your anonymity is our top priority. We will never use or share identifying information such as someone’s name, parish, diocese or city. We would like to record our conversation, however, so that we get your exact words to help us summarize the interview content and maintain integrity of the information.

Any questions about that? Any concerns? *In that case, may I turn the record button on? Again, it is just to help me get accurate notes, your exact words?*

- 1) Based on your response to the survey, you are as a parish aware of persons with disabilities within your parish boundaries. What strategies, initiatives, or outreach do you have in place to address their needs and include them in parish life?**

10 minutes

What disabilities or diagnoses have you been noticing to be increasing within your parish community?

What kinds of parish supports would you like to provide that you are not able to do at the present time? What is preventing you from doing so?

If it were to become more of a priority for your staff and leadership, what kinds of training materials and resource formats would be most helpful? What would this include?

If including persons with disabilities were to become more of a priority for your parish community, what kinds of resources and training would be most helpful? What would make it more of a priority for your staff? For your councils and committees? For your faith community?

2) What challenges have you experienced when trying to reach out to persons with disabilities? *10 minutes*

What has your diocese and its chancery offices done to demonstrate that they are concerned with this issue? What do they do to advocate for parishes to make efforts to be more inclusive of persons with disabilities?

Does your diocese offer parish personnel (both paid and volunteer) opportunities for training online, in-person at the diocese, or a combination of the two? If so, how?

Are you allocating funds to help with these parish efforts? If so, how? If you lack the funds, have you reached out to any organizations to help you? If so, who? Outcome?

Closing

2 minutes

Was there anything you wanted to discuss that we missed?

Thank you!!!