

INCLUSION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN CATECHETICAL PROGRAMS: A CHURCH PERSPECTIVE

Catechesis, according to the General Directory of Catechesis (GDC 29), is one of the most important ecclesial activities. The catechetical program must reflect the broader meaning of the mission of the Church. The Catechism of the Catholic Church points out that the definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch, but also in communion with Jesus Christ (CCC 426). In accord with canon 777(# 4) and the GDC (#167) all the baptized, because they are called by God to maturity of faith, need and have therefor the right to adequate catechesis. It is then the responsibility of the Church community to respond to this in a fitting and satisfactory manner. This vision prompted the United States Catholic Bishops in their 1978 *Pastoral Statement on People with Disabilities* and their 1995 *Guidelines for Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities* to state that catechetical and sacramental programs need to be inclusive of parishioners with disabilities and catechetical formation programs may need to be adapted for some parishioners with disabilities.

Keeping in mind that all the baptized have a right to catechesis and that every person, however limited, is capable of growth in holiness (GDC 189). It is incumbent on those responsible for the catechetical program to invite, welcome and provide for those with physical, sensory, mental and behavioral disabilities (NDC 61:B.1). Present documents of the Church encourage that as far as possible persons with disabilities should be integrated with the ordinary catechetical activities of the parish (NDC 49). It is the responsibility of the parish community to accommodate for individuals with disabilities by providing generous, competent and realistic programing, seeking dialogue with families, and proposing appropriate forms of education proportionate to the concrete possibilities and needs of the individuals. For individuals with disabilities meaningful and appropriate integration will necessitate different forms of accommodation and varying forms of programing from full inclusion in the parish religious education classroom, to smaller group or individualized instruction (NDC 61:B.1). In order to provide this full inclusion Directors of Religious Education, coordinators and catechists need to seek out and utilize the resources of families, parishioners and diocesan personal to support a program that can be accessible and meet the needs of individuals with disabilities.



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