



Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities

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Abbreviations

CCC - Catechism of the Catholic Church

CCEO - Code of canons of Oriental Churches

CIC - Codex Iuris Canonici (Code of Canon Law)

GCSPD - Guidelines for Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities

NDC - National Directory for Catechesis

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1. Parish access, limited mobility
***** Sacramental Guidelines, §§ 3-8 *****

The Baker family has been attending Immaculate Conception Parish for 18 years: Nathan and Melissa, and their four teenage children. Last year, Melissa was diagnosed with a progressive neurodegenerative disease (ALS)—an incurable condition wherein the body’s motor neurons progressively cease to function. The average life expectancy from the time of diagnosis is three years. The degenerative process typically advances from muscle weakness to a loss of voluntary motor control, then paralysis, and eventually death. Melissa’s condition has progressed rapidly and she requires the use of a wheelchair outside of her home.

The Immaculate Conception Parish building does not have an access ramp that can accommodate Melissa’s wheelchair. Years ago, the pastor of I.C. looked into having a ramp installed, but there were complex architectural challenges and the projected expense seemed prohibitive. Moreover, at the time, the pastor did not know of any I.C. parishioners who actually needed an access ramp. For all those reasons, the project was abandoned and the pastor developed a top-notch ministry visiting elderly parishioners in their homes.

At first, Melissa’s husband and teenage sons were able to carry her up the stairs. However, as Melissa’s condition has worsened, the electric wheelchair and the other assistive devices that Melissa requires have made it virtually impossible for her family to continue with that practice. Although Melissa is still capable of traveling outside her home, because there is no access ramp leading into Immaculate Conception Parish, Melissa can no longer attend Sunday Mass with her family.

Some parishioners have suggested that the community should spare no expense to accommodate Melissa. Others have quietly (and respectfully) noted that Melissa’s circumstance is a very special case and it seems irresponsible to use limited parish resources on a major project, especially since Melissa only has a few more months of attending Mass with her family.

You are a member of the Immaculate Conception Parish council, what do you say and what do you propose?

Theological Considerations	Canonical Considerations	Pastoral & Practical Considerations
<p>Every individual, precisely by reason of the mystery of the Word of God who was made flesh (cf. Jn 1:14), is entrusted to the maternal care of the Church. Therefore every threat to human dignity and life must necessarily be felt in the Church's very heart; it cannot but affect her at the core of her faith in the Redemptive Incarnation of the Son of God, and engage her in her mission of proclaiming the Gospel of life in all the world and to every creature (cf. Mk 16:15). (St. John Paul II, <i>Evangelium vitae</i>, § 3)</p>	<p>Every person should be welcomed into the worshipping assembly with respect and care. It was the prophet Isaiah who announced the Lord's message: "For my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples."¹⁹³ The bishops of the United States have stated that "it is essential that all forms of the liturgy be completely accessible to persons with disabilities, since these forms are the essence of the spiritual tie that binds the Christian community together."(Built of Living Stones, USCCB 2000, 211)</p>	<p>Full accessibility should be the goal for every parish, and these adaptations are to be an ordinary part of the liturgical life of the parish. (GCSPD 4)</p> <p>Planning for the ramp, lift or elevator for this one parishioner who presents herself affirms the Church's belief in the dignity of each individual and that infirmity or disability does not lessen this dignity or the regard we have for the person. Within the boundaries of any geographic parish there are others with similar needs as 1 in 5 aging adults have serious mobility issues. As a member of the council I would advise both a short term plan that meets this person’s need and a long term full accessibility plan.</p>

2. Baptism, moderate intellectual disability

***** Sacramental Guidelines, §§ 11-14 *****

For about two years, a 19-year-old man named Marco has volunteered several times a week at the food pantry maintained by the parishioners of St. Augustine Catholic Church. Marco wants to be baptized and to become a member of the Church.

Marco has a moderate intellectual disability. He is well-known (beloved, in fact) throughout the local community and especially among the members of the St. Augustine parish. Marco has adequate functional speech, he is able to travel to familiar places in the community and learn basic skills related to safety and health. He functions in daily life with a moderate level of support. He lives in a privately funded, non-religious group home and survives on SSI benefits. Marco has no living relatives, except for the aunt who is Marco’s legal guardian and who visits from out-of-state about twice a year.

You are the director of RCIA and Catechesis at St. Augustine’s, what needs to happen and how do you advise your pastor to proceed?

Theological Considerations	Canonical Considerations	Pastoral & Practical Considerations
<p>The Lord himself affirms that Baptism is necessary for salvation.⁶⁰ He also commands his disciples to proclaim the Gospel to all nations and to baptize them.⁶¹ Baptism is necessary for salvation for those to whom the Gospel has been proclaimed and <u>who have had the possibility of asking for this sacrament.</u>⁶² The Church does not know of any means other than Baptism that assures entry into eternal beatitude; this is why she takes care not to neglect the mission <u>she has received from the Lord to see that all who can be baptized are "reborn of water and the Spirit."</u> (CCC 1257)</p>	<p>The celebration of baptism must be prepared properly; consequently: 1/ an adult who intends to receive baptism is to be admitted to the catechumenate and is to be led insofar as possible through the various stages to sacramental initiation, according to the order of initiation adapted by the conference of bishops and the special norms issued by it; (CIC 851)</p> <p>A person who is not responsible for oneself (<i>non sui compos</i>) is also regarded as an infant with respect to baptism. (<i>This does not apply to Marco who self directs much of his everyday life.</i>)(CIC 851,§2)</p> <p>For an adult to be baptized, the person must have manifested the intention to receive baptism, have been instructed sufficiently about the truths of the faith and Christian obligations, and have been tested in the Christian life through the catechumenate. The adult is also to be urged to have sorrow for personal sins. (CIC 865 §1)</p>	<p>Disability, of itself, is never a reason for deferring Baptism. Persons who lack the use of reason are to be baptized provided at least one parent or guardian consents to it. (GCSPD 11) <i>Requesting Baptism and other aspects of Marco's life indicates that he has use of reason.</i></p> <p>“The Initiation of catechumens is a gradual process that takes place within the community of the faithful.” Adults and children of catechetical age with disabilities should be welcomed into all stages and rites of the initiation process. If the catechumen is of catechetical age, the rites may be adapted according to need. In these cases, catechesis for persons with disabilities must be adapted in content and method to their particular situations. Like others, adults and children of catechetical age with disabilities should normally receive the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist in a single celebration. (GCSPD 13)</p> <p><i>Marco should be accepted into the RCIA process with other adults. During the catechetical parts of the process, Marco's sponsor or catechist could assist in adapting the content and materials in such a way that Marco can readily engage in the process.</i></p>

3. Eucharist, feeding tube

*** *Sacramental Guidelines, §§ 22-26* ***

Esther Trujillo has been a member of St. Michael the Archangel Catholic Church since the day of her baptism, which was 87 years ago. Esther is living out her final days among family and friends. She can no longer communicate and does not seem to be aware of what is happening around her. Due to a stroke, Esther is incapable of drinking or swallowing through her mouth, and she is receiving intravenous hydration and nourishment through a feeding tube.

Here is what you need to know about Esther Trujillo: Esther was the first woman to graduate with a law degree from the local university; with her late husband, she raised six children; in her “free-time” she founded and led a non-profit legal service for immigrants; she served four terms on city council; and published a collection of whimsical and witty short stories to mark her 70th birthday. By all accounts, Esther is brilliant, compassionate, tough as nails, and hilarious at dinner parties! To top it all off, for most of her adult life, Esther attended Mass at least three times a week and she developed a profound devotion to the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Those who know Esther, regard her as a living saint.

Esther’s six children have gathered in her final hours. They have asked the extraordinary minister of Holy Communion to place a fragment of the consecrated host in Esther’s feeding tube. Esther’s youngest son, insists that it is perfectly permissible to do so and that in Esther’s final hour she should be directly nourished by the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Christ’s Real Presence in the Eucharist.

The extraordinary minister calls you for guidance, what do you say and what do you propose?

Theological Considerations	Canonical Considerations	Pastoral & Practical Considerations
<p>Can the Blood of Christ be received separate from the Body of Christ?</p> <p>“In the most blessed sacrament of the Eucharist ‘the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained’” (CCC 1374).</p> <p>“The Eucharistic presence of Christ begins at the moment of the consecration and endures as long as the Eucharistic species subsist” (CCC 1377). The full body and blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ is present in each: the consecrated bread and the wine (transubstantiation), as long as these substances retain the appearance of bread and wine. While sacramentally we are to cooperate with the graces we receive, in some of the Eastern Churches of the Catholic Church infants receive Holy Eucharist at Baptism. However, Vatican II's <i>Sacrosanctum Concilium</i> encouraged the faithful to take part</p>	<p>Can Eucharist be received by feeding tube?</p> <p>"Since the full presence of Christ and his sanctifying grace are found in even the smallest piece of the consecrated host or in a mere drop of the consecrated wine, the norm of receiving through the mouth remains the same for those who otherwise use a feeding tube for sustenance, and Holy Communion is not to be administered through a feeding tube." (GCSPD 24; Also see <i>CIC</i> 925). In the 1960's the Holy See reversed prior positions of individual permissions given for such administration.</p> <p>The Guidelines stress, "When baptized Catholics who have been regular communicants develop advanced Alzheimer's or other age-related dementias, there is to be a presumption in favor of the individual's ability to distinguish between the Holy Communion and regular food. Holy Communion should continue to be offered as long as possible, and ministers are called</p>	<p>What sacrament can be received even if unaware?</p> <p>Tube feeding can be done by family members or their designees, as directed by a physician, but otherwise in secular society it is a medical procedure requiring medical orders and administration by certified or licensed persons. Others should not be introducing substances into the tube. Further-more, there is no way to introduce a piece of the host without diluting it in liquid, which changes the sacramental nature of the Eucharist - it no longer is identifiable as the Bread of Christ. Due to the length of the tube, even the Blood of Christ would be dilute and the real presence no longer there when ingested. Real presence only remains when the elements are in the appearance of bread and wine.</p> <p>Usually a person in the condition of Esther is "NPO" (nothing by mouth). Thus, before placing the Blood of Christ on her tongue medical approval is needed. Also, the blood of Christ may only be available from a priest or</p>

<p>in the eucharistic liturgy not "as strangers or silent spectators," but as participants "in the sacred action, conscious of what they are doing, actively and devoutly" (156).</p>	<p>to carry out their ministry with a special patience." Also, such recognition can be "through manner, gesture, or reverential silence rather than verbally." (GCSPD 26, 22); also relevant CIC 913 §2. "The Most Holy Eucharist, however, can be administered to children in danger of death if they can distinguish the body of Christ from ordinary food and receive communion reverently."</p>	<p>deacon who can purify the vessels used to administer. The residual cannot be treated as refuse or rinsed in sink. Administering the sacrament every effort should be made to elicit some sort of recognition, such as some response to "Blood of Christ." Any dubious response may be sufficient. In the absence of any response and in the event that Holy Eucharist cannot be received the family should be counselled on the phenomenal benefits of the Anointing of the Sick (healing grace and forgiveness of sins) and the Apostolic Pardon (blessing - indulgence remitting all temporal punishment: Purgatory). Anointing may be conferred if the recipient has sufficient use of reason to be strengthened by the sacrament, or if the sick person has lost the use of reason and would have asked for the sacrament while in control of his or her faculties.</p>
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4. Eucharist, cognitive impairment

*** *Sacramental Guidelines, §§ 21-22* ***

Juan Santos is forty-three years old and he has a profound intellectual disability. Juan needs continuous care, has severe limitations in self-care, continence, communication and mobility. He was Baptized as an infant, but he has not been Confirmed. Juan does not use formal communication and only communicates through gestures, noises, expressions and behaviors. When he is happy, Juan rhythmically sways his head from left to right (something that appears to be a dramatic ‘no’).

Faithful Catholics from their youth, Juan’s parents have moved several times over the years—and, unfortunately, have remained somewhat anonymous among the sea of parishioners at the three large parishes they regularly attend: St. Joseph Parish, Holy Family, and St. Elizabeth.

It is physically difficult for the Santos family to take their fully-grown son to Sunday Mass—and that difficulty is only compounded by the pain of having to deal with the squeamish gazes and awkward discomfort of rude parishioners. For that reason, Juan’s parents have settled into a rhythm of taking turns going to different Masses on Sundays while the other parent stays at home with Juan. Nevertheless, in defiance of the elitist and snobby attitude of some of their fellow Catholics, Juan’s parents still make a special effort to attend Mass as a family on Holy Days of Obligation.

On those days, the Santos’s approach the Eucharist with their son. Usually, the ordinary and extraordinary ministers simply place the consecrated host on Juan’s tongue and make sure it isn’t spit out. However, over the years Juan’s parents have watched as priests, deacons, and a train of extraordinary ministers have refused to administer the Eucharist to their son. Sometimes because Juan does not extend his hands to receive, other times because Juan’s rhythmic head sway is interpreted as a him saying ‘no.’

You are on the parish council and you’ve just heard Juan’s story. What do you say and what do you propose?

Theological Considerations	Canonical Considerations	Pastoral & Practical Considerations
<p>Particular attention needs to be given to the disabled. When their condition so permits, the Christian community should make it possible for them to attend the place of worship. Buildings should be designed to provide ready access to the disabled. Finally, whenever possible, eucharistic communion should be made available to the mentally handicapped, if they are baptized and confirmed: they receive the Eucharist in the faith also of the family or the community that accompanies them. (Pope Benedict XVI, <i>Sacramentum caritatis</i> 58.)</p>	<p>It is important to note, however, that the criterion for reception of Holy Communion is the same for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities as for all persons, namely, that the person be able to “distinguish the body of Christ from ordinary food,” even if this recognition is evidenced through manner, gesture, or reverential silence rather than verbally. (GCSPD 22)</p> <p>Also, it is important to note that in the Eastern Churches Eucharist is included at infant Baptism: The 1990 <i>CCEO</i> restored the practice of infant reception of Holy Eucharist: canon. 710: “Regarding the participation of infants in the Divine Eucharist after baptism and chrismation with holy myron, suitable precautions are to be taken and the precepts of the liturgical books of the respective Church <i>sui iuris</i> are to be observed.”</p>	<p>Clergy and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion are encouraged to become familiar with the needs of their parishioners. In many instances, simple accommodations can be very helpful, and should be embraced by all at the parish level. (GCSPD 23)</p> <p>Catholics with disabilities have a right to participate in the sacraments as fully as other members of the local ecclesial community. “Sacred ministers cannot deny the sacraments to those who seek them at appropriate times, are properly disposed, and are not prohibited by law from receiving them. (GCSPD 20: CIC 843, §1)</p> <p><i>The Eucharistic ministers could be trained with the assistance of the parents. Other outreach and support could be offered to the parents. Parishioners could become more familiar with ways to engage Juan and his parents.</i></p>

5. Cognitive impairment, Confirmation

*** *Sacramental Guidelines, §§ 13-20* ***

Juan Santos is forty-three years old and has a profound intellectual disability and has not attained, nor is expected to attain the use of reason. Juan needs continuous care, has severe limitations in self-care, continence, communication and mobility. He was Baptized as an infant, but he has not been Confirmed. Juan does not use formal communication (speech, symbols or signs) and only communicates through gestures, noises, expressions and behaviors. When he is happy, Juan rhythmically sways his head from left to right (something that appears to be a dramatic ‘no’).

Faithful Catholics from their youth, Juan’s parents have moved several times over the years—and, unfortunately, have remained somewhat anonymous among the sea of parishioners at the three large parishes they regularly attend: St. Joseph Parish, Holy Family, and St. Elizabeth.

It is physically difficult for the Santos family to take their fully-grown son to Sunday Mass—and that difficulty is only compounded by the pain of having to deal with the squeamish gazes and awkward discomfort of rude parishioners. For that reason, Juan’s parents have settled into a rhythm of taking turns going to different Masses on Sundays, while the other parent stays at home with Juan. Nevertheless, in defiance of the elitist and snobby attitude of their fellow Catholics, Juan’s parents still make a special effort to attend Mass as a family on Holy Days of Obligation.

On those days, the Santos’s approach the Eucharist with their son. Usually, the ordinary and extraordinary ministers simply place the consecrated host on Juan’s tongue and make sure it isn’t spit out. However, over the years Juan’s parents have watched as priests, deacons, and a train of extraordinary ministers have refused to administer the Eucharist to their son. This is because sometimes because Juan does not extend his hands to receive, other times because Juan’s rhythmic head sway is interpreted as a him saying ‘no.’

You are on the parish council and you’ve just heard Juan’s story. What do you say concerning Confirmation and what do you propose?

Theological Considerations	Canonical Considerations	Pastoral & Practical Considerations
<p>Who can be Confirmed?</p> <p>As for all of the baptized, the parents, or others responsible for the care of a child with a disability, and shepherds of souls—especially pastors—are to see to it that those who have been baptized receive the formation needed for the sacrament of Confirmation and approach it at the appropriate time. (CIC 890 and c. 885 §1)</p>	<p>What are the requirements for administering the Sacrament?</p> <p>In the Latin Church, all baptized Catholics who possess the use of reason (which is about the age of seven) may receive the sacrament of confirmation within the age limits determined by the diocesan bishop, if they are “suitably instructed, properly disposed and able to renew the baptismal promises.” (CIC 889 §1 & 2) However, exceptions include when there is a danger of death or, in the judgment of the minister, a grave cause urges otherwise. (CIC 891 §1 & 2) In the Eastern Churches Confirmation is to be conferred at Baptism. (CCEO 695 §1 & 2) Furthermore, for those who, because of intellectual or developmental disabilities, may never attain the use of reason, Confirmation can be administered any time after baptism and should be encouraged—either directly or, if necessary, through their parents—to receive it. In danger</p>	<p>Does Juan need to make a profession of faith before Confirmation?</p> <p>While parents of children with disabilities are not usually exposed to a denial of baptism, access to Confirmation and Holy Eucharist (addressed, above) may be denied when it would be licit to administer them. Pastors may erroneously require an explicit profession of faith before Confirmation when some signs of agreement with the tenets contained in Baptismal promises would be sufficient. Furthermore, in danger of death any baptized Catholic can be Confirmed. More frequently at issue is the situation in which a child or adult may never achieve the use of reason. Such a person not only has the right to the sacrament, but reception of Confirmation should be encouraged. The gifts of the Holy Spirit should not be denied to those who have a diminished capacity to understand the gifts to which they have a right. Their capacity to benefit from them may be</p>

	<p>of death any priest has the faculty to Confirm. (CIC 883, 3)</p>	<p>greater than we know. Furthermore, in the Eastern Churches Confirmation should be received at Baptism, thus, requiring no use of reason by the confirmand.</p> <p>Persons who because of intellectual or developmental disabilities may never attain the use of reason can receive the Sacrament of Confirmation and should be encouraged either directly or, if necessary, through their parents, to receive it. It is important that they receive the pastoral guidance needed, along with the welcome and embrace of the whole community of faith. (GCSPD 13)</p>
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6. Penance, communication limitation

***** Sacramental Guidelines, §§ 28-30 *****

Veronica is twenty-six years old. She is Deaf. Veronica was raised Catholic, by hearing parents—Baptized, Confirmed, First Communion—but never felt fully connected to the Church. She attended parish religious education without interpreters or catechist who could sign. The diocese does not have Deaf Ministry. She made her first Confession to a priest who had very limited use of Sign Language.

After many years away, Veronica is attempting to reconnect with the Catholic Church. Veronica has asked about the parish having American Sign Language Interpreters at Mass.

Veronica would also like to bring an ASL interpreter she knows with her into the confessional. However, her parish priest feels uncomfortable with the arrangement.

Theological Considerations	Canonical Considerations	Pastoral & Practical Considerations
<p>It is in the Church, in communion with all the baptized, that the Christian fulfills his vocation. From the Church he receives the Word of God containing the teachings of "the law of Christ." From the Church he receives the grace of the sacraments that sustains him on the "way." (CCC 2030)</p> <p>"In virtue of their rebirth in Christ there exists among all the Christian faithful a true equality with regard to dignity and the activity whereby all cooperate in the building up of the Body of Christ in accord with each one's own condition and function."(CCC 872)</p> <p>...the Church owes persons with disabilities her best efforts In order to ensure that they are able to hear the Gospel of Christ, receive the sacraments, and grow in their Faith in the fullest and richest manner possible. (NDC 49)</p>	<p>Pastors of souls and other members of the Christian faithful, according to their respective ecclesiastical function, have the duty to take care that those who seek the sacraments are prepared to receive them by proper evangelization and catechetical instruction, attentive to the norms issued by competent authority. (CIC 842 §2)</p> <p>No one is prohibited from confessing through an interpreter as long as abuses and scandals are avoided and without prejudice to the prescript of can. 983. (CIC 990)</p> <p>The interpreter, if there is one, and all others who in any way have knowledge of sins from confession are also obliged to observe secrecy. (CIC 983 §2)</p> <p>When neither a priest with signing skills nor a sign language interpreter is available, Catholics who are deaf should be permitted to make their confession in writing or through the use of an appropriate portable electronic communication device that can be passed back and forth between the penitent and confessor. The written or digital materials are to be returned to the penitent and properly destroyed or deleted. (GCSPD 30)</p>	<p>Parish sacramental celebrations should be accessible to persons with disabilities and open to their full, active, and conscious participation, according to their capacity. Pastoral ministers should not presume to know the needs of persons with disabilities, but should rather—before all else consult with them (GCSPD 3)</p> <p><i>The provision of an American Sign Language Interpreter for Sunday Mass and other Sacraments should be considered. Canon Law permits the use of interpreters for the reception of confession as well as using writing.</i></p> <p>Catholics who are deaf should have the opportunity to confess to a priest able to communicate with them in sign language, if sign language is their primary means of communication. They may also confess through an approved sign language interpreter of their choice. (GCSPD 30)</p> <p>Note that the (GCSPD 29) indicates that the penitent may be permitted to to make their confessions using the communication system with which they are most fluent.</p> <p><i>The pastor could also assist in locating priest in nearby diocese who know American Sign Language. The parishioner could also be assisted through the efforts of the National Catholic Office for the Deaf and the International Catholic Deaf Association-US.</i></p>

7. Matrimony and openness to life.

***** Sacramental Guidelines, §§ 42, 43, 44, 45, 46. *****

Lindsay, 23 years old, and Evan, 25 years old, met in a group home for persons with cognitive developmental disabilities. Evan has a communication impairment and also, while understanding what is said to him by signing, has some expressive aphasia and at times uses response cards in expressing himself. Lindsay is a teacher’s aid in a Pre-K for children with disabilities. Evan works at a McDonald’s as a table clearer, and both are valued employees. They wish to marry. Couple and their parents have met with the pastor; the parents are supportive but insist the couple not have children. The following are points for consideration.

Theological Considerations	Canonical Considerations	Pastoral & Practical Considerations:
<p>Who has the right to marry? “The intimate community of life and love which constitutes the married state has been established by the Creator and endowed by him with its own proper laws. . . . God himself is the author of marriage.’(<i>Gadium et spes</i>, GS 48 § 1.) The vocation to marriage is written in the very nature of man and woman as they came from the hand of the Creator. Marriage is not a purely human institution despite the many variations it may have undergone through the centuries in different cultures, social structures, and spiritual attitudes. These differences should not cause us to forget its common and permanent characteristics. Although the dignity of this institution is not transparent everywhere with the same clarity, (GS 47 § 2) some sense of the greatness of the matrimonial union exists in all cultures.” (CCC 1603) "God who created man out of love also calls him to love the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being. For man is created in the image and likeness of God who is himself love. (Gen 1:27; 1 Jn 4:8, 16.) Since God created him man and woman, their mutual love becomes an image of the absolute and unfailing love with which God loves man. It is good, very good, in the Creator's eyes. And this love which God blesses is intended to be fruitful and to be realized in the common work of watching over creation: 'And God blessed them, and God said to them: 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it.'" (Gen 1:28; cf. 1:31.)" (CCC 1604). "All can</p>	<p>What are requirements of the couple? Must possess sufficient use of reason, be free of any grave defect of discretion affecting their judgment about the rights and duties to which they are committing themselves; have the mental capacity to assume the essential obligations of the married state; and free of causes of a psychic nature impacting their ability to assume the essential obligations of marriage. (CIC 44; CIC 1095) Understand marriage is a permanent, exclusive union open to children: “For matrimonial consent to exist, the contracting parties must be at least not ignorant that marriage is a permanent partnership between a man and a woman ordered to the procreation of offspring by means of some sexual cooperation.” (CIC 1096 §1.) It is this latter provision that creates difficulty even if practicing natural methods such as fertility awareness (periodic abstinence). “If, however, either or both of the parties by a positive act of the will exclude marriage itself, some essential element of marriage, or some essential property of marriage, the party contracts invalidly.”[<i>Code of Canon Law</i>, c. 1101 §2] Pastoral judgment is to be exercised on an individual basis; consultation with diocesan personnel involved with disability issues, and canonical, medical, and other experts. (GCSPD 44)</p>	<p>How are vows received? Obligations of Christian community and pastor for support of couple? Medical and canonical opinions should be sought in determining the presence of any impediment to marriage. Couple to discuss the sacrament of matrimony with their families and pastors, assisting couple to understand the commitment they are making. (GCSPD 44) Inclusion of persons with disabilities in marriage preparation programs, including sponsor couples and programs aimed at assisting and nourishing married couples in leading holier and fuller lives within their families. (GCSPD 43) Diocesan policies are needed: consultation with those of proven experience and expertise in understanding the emotional, physical, spiritual, and psychological needs of persons with intellectual disabilities. (CIC 1064; GCSPD 43) Pastoral care of those receiving the sacrament of matrimony does not begin at the time of the marriage preparation or end at the time of the marriage regardless of the presence or absence of a disability. It extends throughout the lives of the Christian faithful including the couple and involves the entire ecclesial community, which bears witness to the fact that the matrimonial state may be preserved in a Christian spirit.(CIC 1063) Contraception for the purpose of avoiding pregnancy is against natural moral law (<i>Humanae vitae</i>), but does not invalidate marriage consent unless the intent is to avoid children all of married life, even if the method used is periodic abstinence. Pastoral care is needed in addressing this issue and the marriage may have to be delayed until this issue is resolved (depending on how the pastor acquires the information: if heard in confession it is absolutely forbidden for the priest to act on it, or even approach anyone, not even the individual revealing it outside of</p>

<p>contract marriage who are not prohibited by law.” [<i>Code of Canon Law</i>, c. 1058] Cognitive disability does not necessarily constitute an impediment to marriage; however, the parties must meet the requirements of canon law. Thus, couples with intellectual or developmental disabilities who believe they are called to the vocation of married life should be encouraged to discuss the sacrament of matrimony with their families and pastors. (GCSPD 44)</p>		<p>confession.) (CIC 983) Sacramental Adaptations: Marriage consent is through verbal exchange vows. "Those being married are to express matrimonial consent in words or, if they cannot speak, through equivalent signs."(CIC 1104 §2.) Deaf are to be offered the opportunity to express their matrimonial consent in sign language, if sign language is their primary means of communication. (GCSPD 45; Code of Canon Law, c. 1104 §2.) Other options exist such as the use of a sign language interpreter whose trustworthiness has been certified by the pastor. "A marriage can be contracted through an interpreter; the pastor is not to assist at it, however, unless he is certain of the trustworthiness of the interpreter." (GCSPD 45; CIC 1106) Not only the priest or deacon witnessing the marriage must understand the consent, but the two witnesses to it. Also, those who are nonverbal or have minimal verbal communication ability should be offered the opportunity to express their matrimonial consent using the communication system with which they are most fluent. (GCSPS 45)</p>
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