

A Parish that Welcomes Children with Disabilities

Catholics believe that all people are made in the image and likeness of God, and that all the Baptized share in the life and mission of the Church. This includes people from every range of ability. As a parish we are mindful and respectful of families who have children with disabilities. At times due to the behavioral aspects of some disabling conditions, parents seem to sense from some parishioners that their child may not be welcome during the celebration of Mass. Can we work together to change this perception? As a parish community, let us strive to be patient, respectful and helpful to individuals with disabilities and seek ways to assist families so that they can worship together as a family, and we may have the blessing of their presence with us as we become one Eucharistic community of faith.



Inclusion Prayer

Jesus, help us to understand and recognize that each one of us has gifts and challenges. May we see You in each person and may each person see You in us as we work together to bring about Your kingdom. Help us to open our hearts to relationship as we open our doors to be a welcoming and inclusive faith community. Amen.

Resources:

- <https://www.usccb.org/committees/divine-worship/policies/guidelines-sacraments-persons-with-disabilities>
- www.ncpd.org - National Catholic Partnerships on Disability
- www.opdarchphilly.org - Sensory Friendly Mass

Sensory Friendly Mass

WHAT MIGHT I EXPECT ?



*All are welcome.
All belong.*

**OFFICE FOR PERSONS WITH
DISABILITIES & THE DEAF APOSTOLATE**
ARCHDIOCESE OF PHILADELPHIA

WWW.OPDARCHPHILLY.ORG



A Welcoming Approach

Unconditional Love

Everyone desires and deserves our love and support. We must appreciate that we are all a part of our parish community and help each person enter into the Mass as fully as he/she is able. With a little prior planning and reliance on discrete, appropriate support strategies, all of us can enter into the abundant graces of the Sacred Liturgy.

A Quiet Place

A quiet place to go if needed may be provided. An alternate worship space close by where Mass is streamed or is in view can be beneficial for those with sensory sensitivities.

Support

Encourage your fellow parishioners with supportive words during the Sign of Peace or after Mass. Offer assistance and support in a gentle manner.

Families with members with disabilities will usually have a plan to handle issues that may present themselves. Keep in mind that some behaviors may be due a disability.



Possible Accommodations you may experience

Lighting

Light levels may be adjusted. Fluorescent lighting will be avoided if possible. Sections of the Church may be kept dimmer. Some participants may wear dark glasses to assist with light sensitivity.

Noise Levels

Loud sounds including clapping will be avoided. Microphones will be checked to lessen static or unwanted sound. Music will be chosen that is not overly loud or high register. Participants could also use sound blocking headphones or assistive listening devices if needed.

The Order of Service

Those with Autism and IDD are often very literal, and pictures aid their understanding. Explicitly clear instructions are important for their participation. Providing Mass picture guides available at opdarchphilly.org can be used to assist with attention.

Physical Interaction

Many of our liturgical rituals, such as shaking hands, sprinkling water, and using incense may be uncomfortable for those with sensory issues.

Preparing for special rites or arriving early to walk through some of the ritual actions can be helpful. Be mindful that some participants may be uncomfortable with physical contact and some may use discrete fidgets, wiggle or comfort seat cushions to assist them during mass.

Consistency

There is a beautiful order to the Mass that can be comforting to those with sensory needs. Keeping Mass simple and predictable with concrete shorter homilies can make the Mass sensory friendly for all.

