

XII. A. PERSONS WITH MENTAL RETARDATION AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES AND SACRAMENT PREPARATION

Every Christian community needs to consider all its members, regardless of ability. Each person is a member of the Church and entitled to dignity and respect. Growth in faith and in faith awareness is as crucial among persons with disabilities as it is with all members of a church community. All persons with disabilities and their families are to be included in parish activities and sacrament preparation processes. “We are a single flock under the care of a single shepherd. There can be no separate Church for persons with disabilities.” (*Welcome and Justice for Persons with Disabilities*, U.S. Bishops Statement no. 1)

All sacramental catechesis is the responsibility of the church community. The community should be made aware of any specialized catechesis that is needed and like all sacramental catechesis the community should be involved in preparation. Even though specialized catechesis may be needed, as much as possible each and every person is to be included in activities and procedures in the church community.

Conversion and evangelization call for personalized and adequate processes. There are many materials and resources to carry out the pedagogical activity for persons with disabilities. It is good to be familiar with *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities*, USCCB. The Office of Evangelization and Catechesis Media Center has access to the most current materials and resources. You may also contact your Religious Education Consultant.

The question of capacity and understanding of sacraments in the preparation process for persons with mental retardation and /or developmental disabilities is frequently asked. According to Canon 913, the candidates should “have sufficient knowledge and careful preparation so as to understand the mystery of Christ according to their capacity, and can receive the Body of the Lord with faith and devotion.” Persons with mental retardation or developmental disabilities may not be able to conceptualize and articulate the difference between the Body of Christ and ordinary food, but they can sometimes appreciate the sacredness of the Eucharistic food in the context of the reverence shown the sacrament by the families and the Church community. Persons with mental retardation and / or developmental disabilities who are suitably prepared and disposed according to their capacity and who are supported by the faith of the family and the church community should never be denied the sacraments. “Catholics with disabilities have a right to participate in the sacraments” and “Parish sacramental celebrations should be accessible to persons with disabilities and open to their full, active, and conscious participation, according to their capacity.” (*Guidelines for the Celebration of Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities* #2, #3)

In the decree, *Quam Singulari*, Pius X stated the requirements for the first reception of Eucharist:

- ❖ the ability to distinguish ordinary bread and wine from Eucharist,

- ❖ the knowledge of the mysteries of faith according to his / her ability,
- ❖ the ability to express some desire to receive Jesus.

The parents in consultation with the pastor can determine the readiness of the candidate for the reception of the sacrament.

All human beings, including those among us with disabilities, have rights in faith communities. A life of dignity and respect includes the right to religious formation, friendship, and spiritual nurturing. “All persons with disabilities have the capacity to proclaim the Gospel and to be living witnesses to its truth within the community of faith and offer valuable gifts. Their involvement enriches every aspect of Church life.” (*NDC*, p. 207) The rights of persons with disabilities are equal to the rights of all others. As a Church, we are accountable to God to protect the rights of all people and to provide spiritual and moral leadership in our community to protect these rights. We exercise leadership by teaching and by example as inclusive communities of faith that use the gifts of all members.