

Family Perspectives JOURNAL



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CATHOLIC FAMILY LIFE MINISTERS

Spring 2009 Ministering to Families With Disabilities Vol. 27, #2

On Earth As It Is In Heaven

By Charleen Katra

Thirty years ago, the bishops of the United States called upon each of us to recognize the face of Christ in persons who have disabilities. The 1978 *Pastoral Statement of U.S. Catholic Bishops on People with Disabilities* describes how we can and should include people with disabilities into the full life of the Church.

We know that every Catholic has a baptismal right to be included and educated in their faith. The fact that those words are true does not by itself make the presence of individuals with disabilities a reality in parish life. Currently, 22 percent of any population has a disability. Therefore, the same is true for every parish community. Disabilities may be physical, cognitive, emotional, behavioral, or combinations of these. Knowing this, think about how many individuals with a disability you have observed in your own parish? For various reasons, persons with disabilities are vastly underrepresented in most churches. We know that some disabilities are visible while others are not visible. Yet,

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gospel values call for us to welcome and include all persons, especially those who are marginalized and most vulnerable. Our social justice teachings testify to the dignity of every person being made in the image and likeness of God.

So what's a diocese or parish to do? How can diocesan and parish leaders make a difference? The more church

leaders and faith communities continue to learn about various disabilities, the more likely an attitude of acceptance will increase. Disability ministry is one of genuine hospitality and evangelization. It is an ongoing process that calls forth the gifts of every Catholic to be included so that every-

one is blessed and the body of Christ is complete.

There are many ways we can expand on the significant efforts already accomplished. It is necessary for every Chancery and parish to begin by taking an assessment of their property. To ensure individuals with disabilities have access to full participation, the removal or renovation of any barriers, on exterior or interior structures, need to be made. Parishes can be proactive by including a person who can raise awareness of these issues on staff, councils, or building committees.

Whether it's advocating for a ramp or an automatic door opener for persons using wheelchairs, providing a "buddy" for a student to be included in an existing class, teaching in a multi-sensory approach, offering parent and sibling support groups – all these efforts to include persons with disabilities promote opportunities for conversion. Other barriers, those of the heart, stretch the Christian's commitment and prayer even further. From providing necessary support to observing how challenges are overcome, everyone benefits and grows spiritually.

What's an "Access Parish?"

Another way to promote the presence of persons with disabilities is through the designation of "Access Parishes." Serving as a model for parishes in a regional area (deanery or vicariate), an Access Parish welcomes persons with disabilities into the full life of the church. Resources and training are provided at an access parish to
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2009 marks the 30th anniversary of the U.S. Bishop's pastoral letter on *People With Disabilities*

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FROM THE EDITOR



Are You Normal?

I take it all for granted – my sight, my hearing, my ability to read, walk, even dance. These capabilities are normal aren't they? Well, my son says, "Not everyone can dance." This issue invites you to meet the new normal. For someone who uses sign language to communicate, that's normal and speaking is not. For someone using a wheelchair, rolling is normal. It twists our thinking about what is average, what is good, and what is necessary for a fulfilling life. So many of the stories in this issue remind us that as we adjust our ministries to serve people with disabilities, we ourselves will be ministered to and thus changed. ■

Susan Vogt

(continued from pg. 1)

educate all Catholics regarding the needs of persons with disabilities. Many parishes include students with disabilities in religious education classes, providing volunteers who catechize them with pertinent information about various disabilities so they may best serve the students and their families. As clergy, pastoral, catechetical, and lay ministry leaders in the Church gain knowledge regarding this specialized ministry, the more our parishes will be truly accessible to all.

The goal of the Access Parish concept is to designate at least one parish in each diocesan region, allowing services and events to become more convenient for a larger number of families. An Access Parish serves to raise awareness and educate others, while modeling ways to enhance parish hospitality and outreach efforts. By building relationships with persons with disabilities and their families, the better the parish is able to meet their needs. Access parishes are sites where conferences and trainings are held highlighting disability ministry best practices. Topics such as, "people first language," understanding autism, sacramental preparation, estate planning, and mental health issues, can be addressed. At other times community building events, such as dinner dances, summer festivals, family retreats and inclusive

liturgical celebrations can be offered. Planning intentional time, especially during festivals and retreats, to specifically meet the needs of siblings, as well as parents, guardians, and care providers, is invaluable. Persons with disabilities may choose to attend a mini-retreat designed to nourish their own spirituality, while their family members are enjoying time in prayer, story telling, music and movement, and arts and crafts. Everyone in attendance enjoys meals together, where friendships are made and maintained through sharing resources, encouragement, and love. The concept of the Access Parish is to provide education and opportunities that will assist faith communities to better live the gospel values of Christian love and social justice.

Everyone deserves to have their spiritual life cared for and nurtured including persons with disabilities. Inclusive opportunities in the church support and enhance the spiritual lives of all. By seeing such individuals through the eyes of Christ and welcoming them into the full life of the church, the parish also ministers to and strengthens the entire family's Catholic identity. As partners with parishes, families are continually encouraged to make their needs known and be present in their faith communities making "on earth as it is in heaven" a reality. ■

Welcome and Inclusion

by Eileen Colarusso and Bill Fleming

As life-long Catholics and long time members of their parish, Kelly and Jamie were both surprised and disheartened to learn that their daughter, Ellen, would not be accepted in their parish's religious education program. The Director of Religious Education explained that, because Ellen had Down Syndrome, the program was not prepared to accommodate her. Eventually, with persistence, a change in personnel, and instructional materials obtained from the archdiocesan office, Kelly and Jamie were delighted that Ellen was not only accepted into the program, but also received the sacrament of Eucharist.

Kelly, Jamie, and Ellen's story is a poignant example of the need for all persons to be welcomed and included in the life of our church. The US Catholic Bishops *Pastoral Statement on Persons with Disabilities* notes, "The same Jesus who heard the cry for recognition from the disabled of Judea and Samaria two thousand years ago calls us, his followers, to embrace our responsibility to our own brothers and sisters in the United States. The Catholic Church pursues its mission by furthering the spiritual, intellectual, moral, and physical development of the people it serves."

The message of the Church is clear—all are welcome. The practical application of that message, by those who carry out the Church's mission, is crucial to the welcome and inclusion of persons with disabilities as part of the Catholic community. As the Bishops noted in the 2005 *National Directory for Catechesis*, "We are a single flock under

Eileen Colarusso is Coordinator for Deaf Ministry and Bill Fleming is Coordinator of Catechesis for Persons with Developmental Disabilities for the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

the care of a single shepherd. There can be no separate Church for persons with disabilities."

Consider a family with two children, one is hearing, the other is deaf. There is no question that the hearing child can be prepared for the sacraments at the appropriate age, but what about the deaf child? Does the parish have access to interpreters? Is there someone who can work with the child to prepare him to receive the sacrament of Eucharist? The deaf child cannot participate in the liturgy or reception of sacraments without some accommodations. The challenge for this family is how to attend liturgy regularly with one son receiving the sacraments, while the other cannot. This is not simply a theological exercise. Consider Sean's family.

Sean is deaf. He also has learning challenges. His access to the sacraments was severely limited. His family did not attend Mass regularly as they felt that Sean was not welcome or included in the celebration of the liturgy, even though the parish they attend has an interpreter. Sean's mother felt he needed more understanding, as well as the opportunity to receive the sacraments, so he could participate fully in the life of the church. Through a religion class at the school for the deaf he attends, a curriculum produced by the National Catholic Office for the Deaf, and a priest who was able to sign, Sean was able to receive the sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist at the same time as his brother. This access to the sacraments enabled the family to return to Church. When the family member with a special need

is ministered to, the entire family is evangelized and may renew their faith and enable them to participate more fully in the life of the parish.

It is important to recognize that the welcome and inclusion of persons with disabilities in our parishes is beneficial, not only to those with special needs, but also to the church community as well. The Bishops note, "The Church must recognize and appreciate the contribution that persons with disabilities can make to the church's spiritual life

and encourage them to do the Lord's work in the world according to their God-given talents and capacity." Or as Kelly puts it, "Ellen is going to teach people how to love who never knew the true meaning of unconditional love."

The critical role of Church leadership is to facilitate the process of inclusion.

Parishes need assistance, not only in reaching out to those in the community who have special challenges, but also in recognizing the God-given gifts everyone has, and inviting all to use those gifts to serve God and the church.

St. Paul said in his letter to the Corinthians, "There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone." (1Cor 12:4-6). This diversity of members and functions was created by God. God's intention was not for all to be the same, but for all to be equal, welcomed, and included. God wants the church to be rich in diversity. Each of us is made in God's image and each has a place within the kingdom of God. ■

When the family member with a special need is ministered to, the entire family is evangelized.

The Invisible Minority

By Fr. Gerard Trancone

The Washington DC Archdiocese is a microcosm of God's Kingdom on earth – a mosaic of peoples, cultures, handicaps, disabilities, minorities, and souls in need of the Lord's care, salvation, and reassurance of God's love. For 31 of my 40 years as a priest, I have been blessed to serve one of those minorities – the deaf community – as Catholic Chaplain at Gallaudet University, the only Liberal Arts University in the world designed and instituted for the specific purpose of educating deaf people in their own language. Whether you view deafness as a culture or as a pathology, deaf people are an invisible minority, whose needs are often ignored.

In a crowd, deaf people cannot be singled out by the color of their skin or the shape of their eyes, and yet everyday they are subject to a barrage of ignorance, prejudice and discrimination. They carry no white canes, and yet society in general is blind to their needs. They do not use crutches or wheelchairs, and yet they are crippled by lack of communication. They do not dress in tatters or beg on street corners with cap in hand, and yet they suffer from the poverty of separation from the community at large.

Deafness can be understood as either a pathology or a culture. The former may occur when a deaf child is born to hearing parents, who through no fault of their own, are ignorant of

the world of opportunities open to their offspring. These people seek the advice of "experts," who for the most part, view deafness as a condition to be cured. In this medical model, deaf people are viewed as a minority in comparison to the majority, *by the majority*. The majority see themselves as "normal," and anyone who does not fit their model in every detail is seen as less than "normal."

In a society which searches for the politically correct classification for those who do not fit the "norm," the term "hearing-impaired" has been chosen as the least offensive manner to re-

fer to deaf or hard-of-hearing people. In fact the exact opposite is true, because this term implies that these people are less than "normal."

The culturally deaf see themselves simply as different, nothing more and certainly nothing less. They are a linguistic minority and view themselves in much the

same way as Hispanics or Asians would in relation to the rest of the population of America.

Culture, at its most basic, is the shared language, knowledge, experience, and values of a group. All of this is true for the culturally deaf – especially the language. American Sign Language (ASL) is the visual language which is the glue which holds the deaf community together in the U.S.A.

ASL is not simply a physical code for the spoken word. It is a language unto itself with a complex system of syntactic rules that parallel those found in any spoken language.

In the mid 1700's, Abbe Charles Michel De l'Eppe, a French Catholic

priest, met twin deaf sisters and, with great devotion, learned their language so that they could achieve salvation through his instruction. Our church has been of service to this unique community ever since.

The Synod of Bishops held in Rome in the autumn of 2008 proposed that provisions must be made for deaf people in receiving the Word of God since the usual way presents difficulties. As church ministers, the optimum manner in which we can serve this invisible minority is by learning and using their language in the exercise of our ministry. When this is not possible, then a skilled interpreter must be employed.

Pius XII wrote in his encyclical *Mediator Dei*, "By the waters of Baptism, Christians are made members of the Mystical Body of Christ, the Priest, and by the character which is imprinted on their souls, they are appointed to give worship to God." We have an obligation to the deaf community to see to it, that this dictum is observed. Deaf Catholics of my acquaintance are eager to exercise their priesthood of Jesus Christ to the full extent and character which is imprinted on their souls by virtue of their Baptism. ■

Deaf people see themselves simply as different, nothing more and certainly nothing less. Thus, the term "hearing impaired" is NOT preferred.

Fr. Gerard Trancone has been the Catholic chaplain at Gallaudet University in Washington, DC for 31 years and also is the chaplain for deaf Catholics of the Archdiocese of Washington DC.

Check our website:
www.NACFLM.org

Lessons from Scripture about Disabilities

By Joseph White, Ph.D.

If we haven't had much experience with persons with disabilities, or if we have little information about disability issues, we may feel overwhelmed by the idea of adapting our parishes and ministries for individuals who need special accommodations. One primary source of guidance lies in our relationships and conversations with individuals with disabilities and their families. We should not presume to know the needs of individuals with disabilities – we should ask. Another source of guidance can be found in Sacred Scripture, in the life of Christ and in the early Church, as Jesus and the early Christians spread the word, both in preaching and in action, that everyone is welcome in God's kingdom.

We should not presume to know the needs of individuals with disabilities. We should ask.

Everyone Has Strengths and Areas of Need

St. Peter was impulsive. At times he was inattentive to Jesus and likely to speak or act without thinking things through. Yet Jesus chose Peter for his gifts of leadership, his boldness, his ability to get others' attention, and he remains one of the greatest saints in our history. It is a fact of human existence that we all have gifts, talents, and areas of strength, and we all have areas of need – things we could use extra help with, or areas in which we are not skilled. Some areas of need are more visible to us than others, but persons

with disabilities are also people with strengths, talents, interests and gifts.

Do Not Be Afraid

Many people do not approach or welcome persons with disabilities because they are afraid – perhaps afraid of encountering an obvious need in another, or afraid of their own lack of knowledge and expertise. Likewise, persons with disabilities and their families sometimes do not come forward to fully participate in our parishes because they themselves are afraid – afraid of being told they cannot be accommodated, afraid of being misunderstood or rejected, or afraid of inconveniencing others. The most often repeated admonition in Scripture is "Do not be afraid." God calls us to love, commu-

nity, and unity. God calls us to meet the needs and appreciate the gifts of persons with disabilities. Let us not turn our backs in fear.

Go Out of Your Way to Help Others Meet Jesus

In Mark 2:1-12, we read the story of a person with physical disabilities whose friends want him to meet Jesus. Jesus is speaking in a house and the crowds are so great that the men cannot even get their friend, whom they are carrying on a mat, in the door. They take him to the roof, cut a hole in the roof and lower him through. As ministers in the church, we too should be committed to do the unexpected, the inconvenient – even the radical – to ensure that everyone has a chance to meet Jesus.

Help Others Understand

In the Acts of the Apostles, St. Phillip encounters an Ethiopian who is traveling through the desert. He is reading passages of prophecy that are related to the Messiah but, lacking both the context of Jewish tradition and the knowledge of recent events concerning Jesus, he is unable to make sense of what he reads. Phillip offers to help, and after some study and discussion, the Ethiopian responds to the gospel message by being baptized. Are we, like Phillip, willing to take extra time to help persons who have difficulty understanding our message because of a disability? Are we willing to work one-on-one with them, if necessary, to ensure that they too may respond to the gospel? Likewise, we should help our brothers and sisters in the parish as a whole grow in their understanding of persons with disabilities – their needs and their gifts. ■



Dr. Joseph White is a Clinical Psychologist and Director of Family Counseling and Family Life in the Diocese of Austin. He and his wife, Ana, are authors of Catechists for All Children (Our Sunday Visitor), a guide for catechists on meeting special needs in religious education.

Now Showing: GOD IS LOVE

By Madonna Wojtaszek-Healy, Ph.D.

I was standing in the doorway of a theatre where a community production was about to open its doors for the evening's performance. The man in charge of seating called out to those gathered in the lobby that large groups and people with special needs would be seated first, so they should come forward. A caretaker with a large group of people, who also happened to have disabilities, approached the door. She protectively draped an arm around one of her charges, a very thin, middle-aged woman with mental retardation, whose eyes shown bright with excitement. The man put up his hand and stated that he would bring everyone into the theatre as soon as he was told to do so by the directors. The woman reached out and grabbed his hand. He folded his thumb around her slender fingers and asked gently, "What's your name, Sweetheart?" The woman appeared to be non-verbal, but her caretaker answered for her, "Charlene." "Well, Charlene, we'll just stand here and hold hands until it's time to go in," he said with tenderness. As the wait continued and more people pushed forward, anxious to be seated, Charlene got caught up in the moment, withdrew her hand from his, and began to clap his hand with hers.

Madonna Wojtaszek-Healy is an educational consultant and Vice President of Rooted in Love, Inc. As an Educational Psychologist she is the author of The ABC's of A.D.D. for Catechists and the storybook, The Day that Matthew Changed. She is the mother of several children with special needs.

"Well, I can always use a hand," the man joked with her. She beamed at him. I felt myself beaming at him. I witnessed the communion of two human spirits, a moment of God's presence for them and anyone fortunate enough to be close enough to experience the interchange.

I had to wonder, if this group of people with disabilities entered a church (and not a theatre), would Charlene have received the same loving welcome? Would the ushers there or other members of the congregation have allowed her to clasp their hands without pulling away or discouraging her? Would she have been addressed with tenderness or uneasiness? I have no doubt that some would think to themselves that people who inappropriately touch others have

no place in public settings, where they make others feel uncomfortable. I've heard people say this. Those of us who work in ministry with the disabled know that church is especially the place where people like Charlene should be welcomed. Why? Because they are part of the Body of Christ, and we would not be complete without their presence among us.

Many Catholics do not realize that inclusion of people with disabilities in our communities, religious or civil, is part of the body of social justice teachings of our faith tradition. Our "pro-life" teachings extend beyond pregnancy and birth. Pope John Paul II and the U.S. bishops have issued statements that persons with disabilities have the same dignity and, therefore, the same "rights which enable the individual

with the disability to achieve the fullest measure of personal development of which he or she is capable." Furthermore, they state, "Parish liturgical celebrations and catechetical programs should be accessible to persons with disabilities and open to their full, active and conscious participation, according to their capacity."

www.usccb.org/doctrine/disabilities.htm

It is the responsibility of all Catholic Christians to pray for the grace to be able to wholeheartedly welcome persons with disabilities into their parishes and into their lives. May every "Charlene" who enters your parish community bring you closer to experiencing God's loving presence in the Body of Christ. ■

A version of this article was first published in the Diocese of Joliet catechetical newsletter.

If this group of people with disabilities entered a church, would Charlene have received the same loving welcome?

UPCOMING ISSUES

Summer 2009 Theme:

Single Again Ministries

Submission deadline: 5-15-09

Fall 2009 Theme:

Pastoral Initiative on Marriage

Submission deadline: 8-15-09

To submit an article for consideration, contact Susan Vogt, editor:

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MINISTER SPOTLIGHT

Jim Healy, Ph.D.



- **Title:** Director, The Center for Family Ministry, Diocese of Joliet, Ill.
- **What do you actually do?** This sounds like what my brothers ask me! I run marriage and family programs, am a consultant to clergy, deacons, and staff, train volunteers, administer the office, speak, and write, respond to phone calls, and otherwise try to keep up with my associate director, Desiree Marciani.
- **How long have you been in family ministry?** 25 years. I started with a quarter time position in 1984 and the next year went full time.
- **My own family:** This June, Madonna (that's really her name; this isn't a fantasy) and I will celebrate our 25th anniversary. (See opposite page for her article.) We have four children, two of whom have Asperger's Syndrome, which is on the light side of the autism spectrum.
- **Best part of my job:** Driving home from a talk or a presentation and feeling so grateful and blessed that I have been allowed to do this work.
- **Most challenging job:** The scheduling. We work so much with volunteers, and when are volunteers free? Evenings and weekends.
- **Trends I've noticed in family ministry:** Some are emphasizing teaching skills, some are emphasizing teaching theology, and some are emphasizing community-building events for families. That's all fine, so long as overall, people have access to the vision, to skills, and to support.
- **Resources I find most helpful to my ministry:**
1. *Gratitude, the Heart of Prayer* by Brother David Steindl-Rast
 2. The entire school of Positive Psychology
 3. The RAM scale from *How to Avoid Marrying a Jerk*
 4. The work of John Gottman
- **A funny thing that happened to me in ministry was:** For years, my idea of hosting a meeting was pretty Neanderthal. I would buy a gallon bag of white popcorn, throw it in the middle of the table and people would help themselves. Then my associate directors and secretaries got after me. They taught me about nice snacks, prayer tables, individualized settings, using fabrics and colors. My hosting skills are now Cro-Magnon.
- **Who mentored you in family ministry?** Maureen McNamara and her extraordinary spiritual insight, Valerie Dillon with her humor, initiative, and toughness, Fr. Darryl Furlong (author of *The Ministry of Listening*), and Mark Mogilka for his planning skills and sense of fun. Thank you, Region VII!
- **A lesson I've learned:** Don't judge an event until it's over. Resist judging it at all in human terms. God uses us in ways we never realize.
- **My ministry would be easier if:** I trusted God more continuously and let go of the control button.

FOUNDATIONS

The Newsletter for Newly Married Couples

*The wedding bells have faded.
The gifts have been unwrapped
even if the thank-you notes
haven't all been sent.*

*The honeymoon is over.
But where is the newly married couple?
Often not in church,
at least not regularly.*

Newly married couples are notoriously difficult to attract to church programs. And even fewer read the diocesan paper or feel they have time to go to a marriage enrichment program. So, do we give up?

No, we go where they are – to their home. That's the beauty of "ungathered ministry." We can let the *word* touch them even when they aren't coming to us.

That's what FOUNDATIONS is all about. Your diocese or parish can minister to newly marrieds even if you can't put on a full-fledged program.

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Progress and Challenges in Ministering to People with Disabilities

By Marsha Rivas

Family life has changed over the 30 years since the US Bishops wrote the first pastoral directives concerning people with disabilities. In many ways, life is better for individuals with disabilities in the 21st century thanks to advances in medical care, laws, and technology. People with disabilities are no longer considered *sick*, just *different*; and are treated like other minority cultures that require and deserve accommodations for equal access to a full life.

Disabled people, however, still have to fight for their legal and God-given rights while the cost of care and adaptive equipment, which enable individuals and diminishes handicaps, may be unaffordable. Families make heart-wrenching choices regarding who provides care for loved ones during and after the parental lifespan. Parents who delegate custodial care of their children to paid caregivers or to other family members never let go of the burden of responsibility.

Education and faith formation bring issues of inclusion. Exhausted from advocating for their children in the school systems, parents may hesitate to present challenges to pastors and catechists. Parents of children with disabilities often take on the role of catechist or teacher's aide themselves to ensure their child's inclusion in religious education.

Parents of deaf children face diffi-

cult decisions regarding health and education. The professionals vacillate between recommendations of oral communication and sign language. Medical break-throughs like the cochlear implant pose the ethical question, "If deafness is truly a cultural difference rather than a disability, why would we try to fix it?"

Similar to second-generation immigrants of non-English speaking parents, hearing children of deaf parents may be thrust into adult roles of interpreting.

Sunday celebrations of the Eucharist may find families split taking turns staying home with their teen with autism who cannot sit quietly during Mass. Absent in the pews may also be non-drivers

with no family to give them a ride to church, or middle school aged siblings with developmental disabilities who haven't been fully initiated to their Faith because of misconceptions. (See *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities* for Episcopal guidelines.)

All families need a supportive, inclusive parish. Families living with disability, especially, look to the church for the pastoral care of the Good Shepherd.

For more information on ways to include families with disabilities in parish communities, contact the National Catholic Partnership on Disability, www.ncpd.org; the National Apostolate for Inclusion Ministry, www.nafim.org; or the National Catholic Office for the Deaf, www.ncod.org. ■

Sunday Mass may split families as parents take turns staying home with an autistic child who cannot sit quietly.

MEMBERS SPEAK

Ministering to Families with Disabilities

Faith & Light groups, begun by Jean Vanier, involve core members (those with developmental delays), family members, caretakers, and friends. We meet as equals to share faith, pray, and celebrate with food and activities. While we enlarge core members' circle of friends, they enlarge our hearts!

Susan Stith

Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown, Pa.

This is truly a "Jesus Ministry" which brings me to a deeper understanding of how much God loves me. I am given the blessed opportunity of witnessing the love families have for their special members, realizing that God cherishes me just as these families cherish their members with special needs.

Mary Anne Russo

*Ministry with Persons with Special Needs
Diocese of Rockville Centre, NY*

In calling mothers to come together monthly around the challenges they face on a daily basis, a spiritual direction group has provided them with a positive, even sacred outlook on how God is speaking to them through their child(ren). In a sense of trust and confidentiality, the women gain support and explore the giftedness and blessings each child brings to their family, rather than allowing the challenge itself to consume them.

Mary Boespflug

National Director, MOMS

Ellen and Mike lead Evenings for the Engaged sessions in their San Diego home. "We don't have accessibility issues to deal with regarding Mike's wheelchair. This is a ministry that we can do together. Mike's multiple sclerosis has strengthened our 20-year marriage and inspires the engaged."

Deacon Ralph Skiano

*Office of Marriage & Family Life
Diocese of San Diego, Calif*

Marsha Rivas is Director of the Office of Equal Access Ministry for the Diocese of Toledo, Ohio.

THE PRESIDENT SPEAKS

Cultivating Gratitude in Difficult Times



William F. Urbine, D.Min.
Director, Office of Family Life Ministries
Diocese of Allentown

As NACFLM members we have much to be grateful for, even if we are struggling on the home front or in the workplace. Being grateful may not eradicate our anxiety, but it should give us perspective. Truly, we have been given a vision of marriage and family that transcends the good and bad times. We are committed to strengthening marriages and families. Today's challenges will not stop us, rather they will reinforce our desire to be of assistance. This is a time where unceasing prayer along with action is needed.

In mid January, my wife Chris and I had the opportunity to be part of the USCCB's delegation to the international **Sixth World Encounter of Families** in Mexico City from January 13-20th. It was truly a rich experience of celebrating the values of marriage and family in solidarity with each other. Over 80 countries were represented. We came away with a sense that our church is very vital and alive and committed to the promotion of marriage and family. There were rich talks and sharing about all aspects of marriage and family life. There were two keynoters from the U.S. – Helen Alvare, the former spokesperson for the USCCB and Carl Anderson, the president of the Knights of Columbus. In addition, there were numerous occasions to

join in liturgy. Gathering with people from around the world to worship together helped me truly appreciate the fact that we are a one, holy, catholic and apostolic church.

A highlight was participating in the celebration of the Mass at the Basilica shrine of St. Juan Diego. Seeing the cloak of roses was a moving experience. We came away with a renewed sense of hope for the church, and certainly a recommitment to the rosary and devotion to Mary.

This year's annual conference in late June should be excellent. By now you should have received our brochure. I strongly encourage you to join us in St. Paul and also to work hard at securing the commitment of others in your diocese to attend. Be creative in securing funding for this event. Market, market, market! It will be spectacular, and as always we thank God for the gifts and talents of our membership who have assisted us in the planning of it.

We have much to offer each other, even while recognizing the gifts already being shared. For, it is through our NACFLM mission that we "join together to be a prophetic voice for family in Church and society, to foster professional development, and to provide mutual support for those who minister with families." As always, you pray for my family, and I'll pray for yours. ■

Deacon Bill Urbine

MEMBERS SPEAK:

MINISTERING TO FAMILIES WITH DISABILITIES

The Family Life Institute Parish Inclusion Ministry of Catholic Charities Maine helps to nurture caring, inclusive church communities where people of all abilities can participate fully in parish life. We sponsor a *Bishop's Mass In Honor Of Persons with Disabilities* to affirm families with physical, mental, or emotional challenges. We also support a catechetical program for those with special needs.

Bill Wood
Catholic Charities Maine

This past year we had seven deaf couples come forward for the Sacrament of Marriage. We interpreted the Engaged Encounter for our deaf couples integrating them into the larger group. To close the weekend, we had all the couples join us for Sunday liturgy, where everything is in Sign Language, with a voice interpreter for hearing people. Not only do our couples benefit from sharing the En-

gaged Encounter presentations, but also the other couples get to see our deaf community participating in Mass in leadership roles.

Rev. Leonard R. Broniak, C.Ss.R.
Office of Deaf Ministry
Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, Tx.

RESOURCES

More on Disabilities and The Best of the Rest



William F. Urbine, D.Min.
Director, Office of Family Life Ministries
Diocese of Allentown

A family perspective demands that we not leave any one out. After all, we are family to all God's people. So, how familiar are you with the **National Catholic Partnership on Disability** (NCPD) www.ncpd.org/resources? It was established in 1982 to implement the 1978 Pastoral Statement of the U.S. Catholic Bishops on *People with Disabilities*, which calls for full inclusion of all persons with disabilities in the church and in society. The NCPD publishes an electronic newsletter on the first Friday of each month, offers various information resources, and presents Catholic perspectives on disability issues.

Many dioceses are very active in their efforts to support persons with disabilities. For example, the Diocese of Pittsburgh's **Catholic Department for Persons with Disabilities** offers a well developed website with a range of valuable resources for pastoral ministry. See www.diopitt.org/education/dpd.

For couples desiring to grow deeper in their relationship, I recommend Tony Garascia's **The Honeymoon Habit – Lessons for Renewing Romance and Reconnecting with Your Spouse**. (2008, *Booksurge*) Tony is a licensed clinical social worker, a marriage and family therapist, and a member of the NACFLM Journal Commission. He takes the four images of lover, partner, companion, and friend and helps the reader see how they can rekindle the relationship energy in these areas.

Scott Stanley, a key researcher on commitment and communication, provides a new blog entitled **Sliding vs. Deciding** (www.slidingvsdeciding.blogspot.com). He writes "This blog is about relationships – especially about marriage and romantic relationships. Most of the entries contain small insights about how relationships develop, or about what makes or breaks relationships over time."

One of the many websites to sustain our faith and to help us grow personally is <http://concordpastor.blogspot.com>. While not specifically focused on the family, Fr. Austin Fleming's, **A Concord Pastor Comments**, affords many opportunities to pray and reflect on God's word in today's world. I am particularly grateful for his Monday Morning Offering each week. I have often (with permission) used these prayers for small faith sharing groups.

The **National Healthy Marriage Resource Center** (NHMRC) is a clearinghouse for high quality, balanced and timely information on marriage. It provides resources for experts, policymakers, the media, marriage educators, couples, individuals, and program providers. Go to www.healthymarriageinfo.org. Click on "About Us."

Check out www.TwoOfUs.org. It helps get people talking about the complexity of healthy marriages and provides tools and tips for making relationships work during challenging times. This beautiful interactive website, developed by NHMRC, provides people with relationship resources. It especially reaches out to young adults who are the group most likely to be considering marriage for the first time and most likely to use an online resource. (Adapted from *Smart Marriages -2/26*).

Now, on to a hard topic. **First Tears Over The Loss of Your Child** by Linda Anderson (ACTA, 2009, www.actapublications.com) is a collection of reflections to help those who have lost a child realize that they are not alone. The suggestions are poignant and afford some hope in dark times. There are some fine reflections on grieving as a couple in this volume.

I recently received some suggested resources from the U.S. Bishops conference about same sex unions. They are: **One Man, One Woman: Marriage and the Common Good**. This is a thirteen-minute video available through the Newark, New Jersey archdiocese. It can be accessed at <http://saintmaxworldwide.org>. Also, check out the **Diocese of Portland Maine's Marriage Initiative** on their website, www.mainemarriageinitiative.com. Please let me know what your own diocese is doing in this area and I will share it with our readers.

www.ForYourMarriage.org a key component of the USCCB's multi-year effort to promote the married life has some exciting new additions. The site was launched in June 2007 and now sports a new look and content. The page also is available on the social networking sites Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and the bookmark site, Delicious.

This is your column. Let me know what you're reading and finding helpful (wurbine@allentowndiocese.org). As always, you pray for my family, and I'll pray for yours. ■

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NACFLM MISSION STATEMENT:

In response to God’s word revealed through all generations and impelled by our belief
in the intrinsic sacredness of family life, we the members of the

National Association of Catholic Family Life Ministers

join together to be a prophetic voice for family in church and society,
to foster professional development,
and to provide mutual support for those who minister with families.