

”Do not neglect hospitality, for through it some have unknowingly entertained angels.”

*Hebrews 13:2*

## WHAT IS A DISABILITY?

- ◆ A disability is defined as difficulty seeing or hearing, moving the body, or understanding everything quickly.
- ◆ It is a physical or mental impairment, which limits one or more of a person’s life activities.
- ◆ It can be visible or invisible.
- ◆ It can be from birth and/or it can come with age. Approximately one out of five people lives with some type of disability.
- ◆ Types:
  - Mobility Impairment
  - Blind or Vision Impairment
  - Deaf or Hard of Hearing
  - Intellectual/Developmental
  - Learning
  - Mental Health

Sources of information for this brochure include the following:

“Pastoral People,” newsletter from the Diocese of Buffalo

Ralph Beland, Diocese of Venice

NCPD

Pathways Awareness Foundation

For more information please contact:

Sr. Janice Marie Johnson, RSM  
Director, *Office for Ministry with Persons with Disabilities*

Catholic Life & Evangelization

900 S. Woodward St.

Allentown, PA 18103-4179

[www.jjohnson@allentowndiocese.org](mailto:www.jjohnson@allentowndiocese.org)



# Ministers of Hospitality

**What do you say  
when you meet a  
person with a  
disability?**

**How about “Hello?”**

**Basic Guidelines  
for Ushers and Greeters**

*Office for Ministry with Persons  
with Disabilities  
Catholic Life & Evangelization  
Diocese of Allentown*

## BACKGROUND

In their Pastoral Statement on Persons with Disabilities, the U.S. Catholic Bishops urged that “the Church must do all in its power to help ensure persons with disabilities a secure place in the human community, so it must reach out to welcome gratefully those who seek to participate in the ecclesial community. Most of us want to be welcoming to people with disabilities and their families, but, we often do not know what to do or we fear doing the wrong thing! As a result, we can appear to be inhospitable when in fact we just lack confidence and certainty.

This brochure will provide suggestions to Ministers of Hospitality of what to do and what behaviors to avoid. Since ushers and greeters often represent that first personal contact on behalf of a parish, they have the unique opportunity to welcome and often recognize and acknowledge the gifts of a parishioner with a disability.

The following guidelines are provided to help Ministers of Hospitality make a parish more welcoming to persons with disabilities and their families.

## GENERAL GUIDELINES

- ◆ What do you say when you meet a person with a disability? How about “Hello?” A warm smile and a friendly conversation are very welcoming.
- ◆ Speak directly to the person. Do not treat a companion as an intermediary.
- ◆ Offer assistance, but accept a “No, thank you.”
- ◆ Seat the person with family and friends. Having pew cuts allows flexibility in seating those using wheelchairs or walkers.
- ◆ Ask where s/he would like to receive communion and inform the Eucharistic Minister.
- ◆ Feel comfortable using words like see, walk, listen with persons with disabilities.
- ◆ Use people-first language as “persons with disabilities” NOT “the disabled” or “handicapped.”
- ◆ Invite a person with a disability to share in the ministry of hospitality.
- ◆ Know the location of a phone, first aid kit, assistive listening device and accessible restroom.

## SPECIFIC SUGGESTIONS

- ◆ Do not take hold of a person using crutches, a walker or a white cane unless s/he asks for assistance.
- ◆ Do not move a wheelchair, walker or crutches out of reach of the person using them.
- ◆ When in conversation speak moderately loud, shouting makes speech less intelligible.
- ◆ Have pen and paper at hand when you know a parishioner is deaf.
- ◆ When greeting a person with a visual impairment, identify yourself.
- ◆ Give directions and explanations clearly and simply.
- ◆ Be patient, let a person talk at his/her own pace.
- ◆ Offer the parish bulletin whether you think a person can read or comprehend it.
- ◆ Be aware of the fact that children with intellectual/developmental disabilities may be sensitive to “stranger awareness.” Consult their parents before initiating contact.