



## SAINT CATHERINE CENTER FOR *Special Needs*

### HOW TO PREPARE FOR A MASS FOR PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

People with special needs resulting from physical, emotional, mental, or cognitive conditions are all around us in society, at school, and in our families. It can be challenging for these important members of our society to participate in church due to physical and social barriers—or even anxiety from family members. Celebrating a Mass for People with Special Needs can be the first of many steps toward integrating them into regular weekly or daily Mass and more deeply into all of the sacraments and other aspects of parish life. This Mass sends the message that all of God’s children are welcome and that every person is an integral part of the parish family.

The **Office of Parish & Community Support at Saint Catherine Center for Special Needs** ([www.StCatherineCenter.org](http://www.StCatherineCenter.org)) is available as a resource to assist parishes in planning for these masses, preparing for sacraments, and to provide information and assistance in creating a welcoming, inclusive environment for individuals with special needs.

#### Getting Started

- Talk to your pastor to obtain his permission and determine when would be most appropriate to celebrate a Mass for People with Special Needs
- Schedule the Mass
- Determine whether the church and parish hall, parking areas, doors, and restrooms are accessible for individuals with disabilities. If not, schedule the Mass at an alternative facility that is accessible.
- Create an invitation list, including:
  - Pastor, Faith Formation Minister, other parish and civic leaders
  - Local Special Olympics, The Arc, special education teachers
  - Meals on Wheels, assisted-living facilities, group homes, senior citizen groups, disabled veterans organizations
  - Health advocacy groups for Down Syndrome, Multiple Sclerosis, Parkinson’s disease, Lou Gehrig’s disease, blindness or deafness
- Promote the Mass in your parish through a variety of efforts, stressing that **ALL ARE WELCOME!**
  - Posters
  - Bulletin announcements—include surrounding parishes
  - Announcements at Sunday Mass
  - Posting on your parish website / social media pages

- Assess the need for hearing aids, materials and signage in Braille, presence of guide dogs, etc. Use ASL signer if necessary.
- Determine if some invitees may need transportation to/from Mass.

### **Preparing for the Liturgy**

- Be sure the presiding celebrant knows that the homily should be welcoming and be adapted to speak to children with special needs and their families.
- Have the Gospel modified/simplified for readers with special needs.
- Allow assistive devices such as iPads and headphones.
- Include special needs children/adults in roles such as altar servers, cross bearers, ushers, gift bearers, and readers.
- Involve a youth choir and encourage inclusion.
- Offer low-gluten hosts and wine option for Communion.
- If possible, consider offering the Sacrament of Reconciliation before Mass. Also strongly consider offering the Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, First Communion, and Confirmation) as part of the Mass if there are candidates who are eligible and prepared.

### **At the Mass**

- Station an usher at the door to welcome and show new attendees where the restrooms are and where to exit in case of an emergency.
- Create a welcoming environment if possible, such as low lighting, softer sound and music.
- Encourage attendees to sit in the front and to move around.
- Advise those involved in the Liturgy not to react in a negative way to movement and noises.
- **Celebrate the Mass together!** Make sure that those in attendance know they are welcome and wholeheartedly encouraged to attend Mass at the parish every Sunday.

### **After Mass**

- Following Mass, provide refreshments that meet a variety of dietary needs. Set up a “resource table” with flyers and information from local organizations serving individuals with special needs that attendees can take home. (See the organizations above)
- Solicit feedback from Celebrant(s) and participants for future Masses, prayer services or social gatherings.

### **For More Information**

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**www.StCatherineCenter.org**