

October, 2005

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As told in the Gospel of Mark, a man with paralysis was lowered through the roof of the house where Jesus was preaching. Access through the door was very difficult yet; Jesus welcomed and gave comfort to him. We must wonder about those who clustered around the door of that house. Didn't they see the need to share Jesus' presence with those less able? Are we like those who clustered around that door not sharing God's Word and Community with those with disabilities? The Ministry with People with Disabilities compiled these "**Accessibility Guidelines for the Full Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities**" to open "blocked doors" and to build awareness of the accessibility needs of people with disabilities. Following these guidelines will encourage access for all parishioners regardless of their abilities. The accommodations in our parish can provide a more inclusive and more welcoming community and open the doors to Christ for all of us.

In the July 24, 2005 cover story of *Parade Magazine* it was noted that accessibility has improved life for the 54 million Americans with disabilities, but The National Organization on Disability states that a big barrier still remains: churches. The reasons cited for this barrier were physical obstructions, "unwelcoming attitudes," and small print in prayer books. When one in five Americans has a disability, we must reach out to those individuals, and especially to those individuals with disabilities that may be unknown to us in our community.

We cannot assume that persons with disabilities know about the accommodations that we have or will even ask for them. Many older individuals, though they may have diminished mobility, hearing, or sight, may not even consider themselves as having a disability. We must "open doors," be more inclusive, and make everyone feel welcome. These guidelines were set up to help do this and we hope that you will take the time to use them.

We want to thank you for your consideration and for making sure that the people of St. Matthias truly follow the words that we sing: "all are welcome in this place."

Sincerely,  
The Ministry with People with Disabilities

# **The Catholic Community Of Saint Matthias**

## **Accessibility Guidelines For the Full Inclusion Of Persons with Disabilities**

**“Persons with disabilities are not looking for pity. They seek to serve the community and to enjoy their full baptismal rights as members of the Church. Our interaction with them can and should be an affirmation of our faith. There can be no separate Church for persons with disabilities. We are one flock that follows a single shepherd.”**

**- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops,  
*Pastoral Statement of U.S. Catholic Bishops on  
Persons with Disabilities (1978), no. 33.***

# Index

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The Person Is First: Treating People with Respect and Dignity .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Tips for Making Print More Readable.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Guidelines for Increased Hearing And Speech Understanding.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Responding to TTY Calls Using a Relay Service (TRS).....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Accessibility for People Who Use Wheelchairs, Walkers, and Other Means Of Mobility Assistance .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Registration Forms and RSVP's.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>All Announcements, Flyers, Posters and Email Postings.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Checklist of Accommodations.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>References .....</b>	<b>14</b>

Superscript numbers throughout the guidelines refer to the references at the end of the guidelines.

**Note:** Thank you for your consideration in using these guidelines. Please consider copying any page relevant to your event, for example, to give to the organizer, or to give to a guest speaker. **Please contact the Disabilities Ministry if there are any questions or if any assistance is needed,**

# Introduction

**The Catholic Community of Saint Matthias Ministry with People with Disabilities presents these guidelines for the full inclusion of persons with disabilities in our parish community.** They are the suggestions of those representing various disabilities. With these guidelines, the ministry seeks to build awareness of the accessibility needs of people with disabilities, and to bring about their full inclusion in all aspects of our parish community.

**Full inclusion of people with disabilities will create benefits for all members of our parish community.** “The American with Disabilities Act has changed the face of America, moving us toward a more “accessible,” livable society. People who are blind, or deaf, or who use wheelchairs have done a lot to change our society and our environment – and the changes intended to open society for them have had a spin-off benefit for all of us. Their ideas and their insistence on being included are building a more accommodating landscape, a more easily navigated environment, a more welcoming society for us all.”<sup>1</sup> The different accommodations that have been installed at St. Matthias for our members with disabilities reflect this universal access, and create benefits for all members of our parish community.

**What is a disability?** There is no universally-accepted definition of a disability. Some define a disability as “a condition that limits a person’s ability to walk, talk, reason, hear, etc.”<sup>2</sup> However, some simply define a disability as a “body part that works differently.”<sup>3</sup> Under this view, “disabilities are the normal and anticipated outcome of the risks, strains, and stresses of the living process itself. When we think of them this way, they cease to be individual tragedies and become an event to be expected within every family and community.”<sup>3</sup> A disability, like ethnicity, religion, age, gender, or other characteristics, is a natural part of life. Some people are born with disabilities; others acquire them later in life. Some may have a temporary disability or develop one through the aging process. There are those who may have hidden or undiagnosed disabilities, but all of us, with or without disabilities, can find benefits from having a more inclusive, more accessible community.

# The Person Is First: Treating People With Respect and Dignity

**“Words are powerful.”**<sup>3</sup> Our community seeks to treat all people, including people with disabilities, with respect and dignity. However, sometimes we may be confused or unaware of how to respectfully discuss another’s disability.

**To treat individuals with disabilities with respect and dignity, always try to put the person first.** Be aware of using old and inaccurate descriptors, which perpetuate negative stereotypes and reinforce an incredibly powerful attitudinal barrier.<sup>3</sup> This is not about political correctness, but about treating individuals with disabilities as one wishes to be treated: as a whole, complete person.

**Avoid labels.** As stated by Kathie Snow of the “Disability is Natural” website, individuals with disabilities “are people, first. Don’t label them. The only labels they need are their names.”<sup>3</sup> Use “People First Language” and put the person first and make the disability secondary. Describe what a person has or uses, don’t say who a person is.<sup>3</sup> Just as a person uses legs for mobility, a person “uses a wheelchair.” Also say, for example, “She has a disability,” not “she is handicapped.”

**Avoid using the word “handicap,” which perpetuates negative stereotypes.** “There’s a difference between a disability and a handicap.”<sup>2</sup> As mentioned previously, “a disability can be a condition that limits a person’s ability to walk, talk, reason, etc.”<sup>2</sup> In contrast, “a handicap is an **imposed** barrier that restricts a person.”<sup>2</sup> It is an archaic term that invokes negative images and is no longer used in any federal legislation. Handicap’s origin demonstrates its negative imagery: it “is from an Old English bartering game, in which the loser was left with his ‘hand in his cap’ and was thought to be at a disadvantage. A legendary origin of this word refers to a person with a disability begging with his cap in his hand.”<sup>3</sup> Its use perpetuates the stereotype that all persons with disabilities “make up one homogenous group of pitiful, needy people.”<sup>3</sup> In fact, people with disabilities are not all alike, just like people who don’t have disabilities are not all alike.

**Remember, “People First Language” describes what a person has or uses, not who a person is.**

**Examples of “Using People First Language:”<sup>3</sup>**

**Say:**

She uses a wheelchair

He has a physical disability

She has autism

He has a congenital disability

She’s a little person

**Instead of:**

She’s wheelchair bound

He’s a quadriplegic/cripple

She’s autistic

He has a birth defect

She’s a dwarf/midget

**Do not use the term handicapped when describing places that are accessible for individuals with disabilities:** “The ‘handicapped’ descriptor is often used for parking spaces, hotel rooms, restrooms, etc. The accurate term for modified parking spaces, restrooms, etc. is ‘**accessible.**’”<sup>3</sup>

**The Deaf Community:** People who are profoundly deaf and use sign language consider themselves to be members of a cultural and linguistic minority. They refer to themselves as Deaf with a capital “D,” and some may be offended by the term “hearing impaired.” Use the terms “hearing impairment” or “hearing loss” to refer only to people who have hearing loss but communicate in spoken language.<sup>11</sup> American Sign Language, spoken by the Deaf culture, is the fourth most widely used language in our country.

# **Tips for Making Print More Readable**

## **From the American Foundation for the Blind<sup>4</sup>**

### **For both paper and Internet use**

The following guidelines make print more legible for individuals with a visual disability as well as the general public. Therefore, they are important for universal design. **Please consider using them for all announcements, agendas, prayers, email communications, etc.**

**Print Size** – Use large type print, preferably 18 point, but at a minimum, 16 point.

**Font Type and Style** –

- Use easily recognizable, standard Roman or Sans Serif fonts. A good example is Arial. Use **bold type** because the thickness of the letters makes the print more legible.
- Avoid *decorative* fonts, *italics*, and using all CAPITAL LETTERS. These forms make it more difficult to differentiate between letters.

**Use of Color** – The use of different colored lettering is difficult to read. If you must use color, dark blues and greens are the most effective.

**Paper Quality** – Avoid using glossy finish paper like that typically used in magazines and some journals. Glossy pages create excess glare.

**Leading (the space between lines of text)** – The recommended spacing between the lines of text is 1.5, rather than single space. If you are unable to use 1.5 spacing, use double space. When reading single-spaced text, many people with a visual disability have difficulty finding the beginning of the next line.

# Guidelines for Increased Hearing and Speech Understanding

Many individuals with hearing disabilities are unable to fully participate in religious and social events, or attend lectures, talks, or large meetings within the parish community, because they have difficulty hearing or understanding the public speakers. This can be very frustrating for them. However, a few simple steps by event planners can greatly alleviate this problem. **Please consider using these guidelines when planning all religious and social events within the parish community.**

## Events for the general public:

**Assistive listening system:** This should always be available and publicized. This system uses Assistive Listening Devices (ALD's) that improve sound clarity and amplification while blocking background noise. The small pocket size receivers are part of the sound system and can be used with or without hearing aids by the use of neck loops and earpieces. They are located in the sacristy in the front of the church in a marked cabinet. For use in the Parish Meeting Room, and cafeteria, portable transmitters and receivers are located in the grey electrical equipment cabinet in the wall of the cafeteria and marked with a sign.

**Speakers Should Face the Audience and Stay Up Front:** People with hearing disabilities **read lips**. When you are walking down the aisles or turning away from the audience, people with hearing disabilities cannot see your face, miss what you are saying, and can lose the train of thought that you are presenting.

**Reserved Seating in Front of the Speaker:** Please make available reserved seating for people with hearing disabilities for special religious and social events, meetings, lectures, and talks. This will enable people with hearing disabilities to read lips.

**Please designate a host to welcome and help those who request or need assistance.** Be sure that they are aware of the location of the ALD's and of the reserved seating.

**All Speakers Should Use the Microphone:** Always have a microphone available and have **all** speakers use it. Even if your voice projects, please do not assume that you can be heard and understood.

**Repeat Questions:** During a question and answer session, always repeat the question for the benefit of the whole audience.

**Programs and Agendas:** By allowing people to follow along, the use of programs or agendas benefits the whole audience.

**Closed Captioning:** When showing videos or television, please use closed captioning.

### **Guidelines for the Deaf and people with hearing loss**

**For these events, the N.J. Department of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Advisory Council recommends that “the following forms of communication access should be provided and publicized without special request:”<sup>5</sup>**

**Qualified sign language interpreters:** Call the parish office for the name of the contact person for a sign language interpreter.

**Assistive listening system:** See previous description.

**CART (Computer Assisted Real-time Transcription):** This system is the instant translation of the spoken word into text and is sometimes called real-time captioning. A CART captioner uses a stenographic machine, a laptop computer, and specialized software to transcribe spoken words which are then projected onto a wall or screen. It is used primarily for live events. CART is mentioned specifically in the Americans with Disabilities Act as an accommodation that can provide effective communication access. It is often the accommodation preferred by people with hearing loss, and by those who have been late-deafened.<sup>6</sup> Call the parish office for the name of the contact person for a CART captioner.

# **Responding to TTY Calls Using a Relay Service (TRS)**

**TTY's are also called Telecommunication Devices for the Deaf (TDD) and text telephones.** Deaf people (and some people with hearing impairments) use these terminals for two-way text conversation over a telephone line. Text telephones are abbreviated as "TTY" in the U.S. because they originated in technology used for teletypewriters which used to be used by reporters filing their news reports.<sup>7</sup>

**A Telecommunications Relay Service (TRS) provides a bridge between people who communicate by voice only and those who communicate by TTY.** TRS is designed to allow real-time conversation by providing third-party assistance at no cost to the users. A trained Communication Assistant (CA) speaks the words typed by a TTY user, and types the words spoken by a voice telephone user.<sup>8</sup> The CA's complete extensive training on equipment and on reading scripts. They are also required to abide by complete confidentiality and privacy rules.

**If you should receive a call through a TRS, please have patience and don't hang up.** The Deaf person is typing the message to a CA, who in turn is reading it to you. The CA is then typing your response back to that person.

## **Protocol for receiving a TTY call:**

- 1. When receiving a TTY call you will hear an operator say "This is Communications Assistant number XXX."** You may also hear "please hold on." The CA may or may not ask if you have ever had a relay call and may or may not explain the protocol to you. You can also ask the CA for protocol directions on how to respond.
- 2. Respond directly to the TTY user's greeting and other statements.** The CA will type your response back to the TTY user; there is no need to instruct the CA to "tell him" or "tell her." However, after speaking your response, say "go

**ahead.”** This allows the TTY user to understand that you have finished your thought and that they should now respond.

**3. The CA will relay the TTY user’s typed response back to you aloud.**  
Please have patience as both the CA and the TTY user must type all responses.

**4. Continue this process throughout the duration of your call.** If you should be ready to hang up before the TTY user, say **“SK” (stop keying)** or **“signing off”** and then hang up.

## **Accessibility for People Who Use Wheelchairs, Walkers, and Other Means of Mobility Assistance**

People who use wheelchairs require accommodations to increase their mobility. We are fortunate that our parish is fairly accessible with ramps, an electric door, a lift (elevator), an accessible bathroom, and accessible parking spaces. However, the use of some of these is not always available. **To increase the availability of our accessible features, please ensure that these recommendations are followed:**

**Unlock the electric doors for all masses, special religious services, and events held in the church:** The electric doors are located in the Church's breezeway entrance and are accessible by using the ramp to the breezeway. To ensure the availability of the electric doors, **it is important that they are unlocked**, so when the push pad is activated the doors will open. The doors are heavy so this feature also benefits any person who would otherwise have difficulty opening them.

**Welcome all persons who enter the Church, Parish Meeting Room (PMR), or the cafeteria using a wheelchair:** Be sure that they are aware of the availability of space for them. In the Church, this space is in the front where the chairs are located. Offer assistance to those using any form of mobility or adaptive equipment but never touch the equipment unless asking first and never move the equipment outside the person's reach.<sup>9</sup>

**Before serving Communion to the rest of the congregation, Eucharistic Ministers should first serve both species of Communion to any person using any mobility or adaptive equipment in the chair area or in the front rows.** Otherwise, individuals using mobility equipment may wonder whether they should go up to receive Communion. This process will help to keep the flow of people moving. Ushers can notify the Eucharistic Ministers of others with mobility impairment in the church after the rest of the congregation has been served.

**Ensure the availability of the chair lift (elevator) for all events being held in the PMR or cafeteria:** This is located at the far end of the new section of the school. Prior notification for its use is needed and can be done by contacting the parish office. Also, make sure that the door at the far end of the building is unlocked. This feature also benefits people who use forms of mobility assistance other than a wheelchair.

**Ensure the availability of the accessible bathrooms for all events in the Parish Meeting Room or cafeteria:** These are located on the first floor of the school and the ground floor of the new section of the school. Prior notification for use is needed and can be done by contacting the parish office. This feature also benefits people who need other types of assistance for mobility.

**Use wider spaces between tables:** The use of wider spaces between the tables in the cafeteria, and especially in the PMR, would enhance the mobility of those in wheelchairs. A minimum of six feet is required for a wheelchair to safely turn completely around. In the PMR, an alternative and mobility-friendly set-up would include a table layout with a center aisle, rather than just staggered tables. This spacing also benefits people who need other types of assistance for mobility such as walkers.

**Stand a few feet away when talking to a person in a wheelchair:** As a courtesy, prevent strained necks by standing a few feet away when talking to a person in a wheelchair. For long talks, it's best to find a place to sit down.<sup>9</sup>

**As a reminder do not park in accessible parking spaces:** It is illegal to park in accessible parking spaces unless you have the required permit.

**Please be aware that guests may not know about our parish's accessibility features, like the electric doors:** Hosts, ushers, and people, generally, should always be attentive for guests who may need assistance entering our church.

# Communication Forms

The suggestions and questions below can provide helpful information in planning for appropriate access.<sup>10</sup> **Please add these to announcements or advertisements** of religious and social events, meetings, lectures, and talks. **Also include them on registration forms** for the various programs and activities offered in the parish and the school.

## Registration Forms and RSVP's

**When using registration forms and RSVP's, please add the following text** (when registering children, please request information on the parents as well as the child):

“Please check any of the following that would enhance your (and your child’s) full participation.

- Assistive Listening Device
- Reserved front row seating
- Closed Captioning
- Wheelchair accessibility
- Large Print
- Food Allergies – please list
- Special accommodation(s), please specify

If you would like to discuss your needs privately, please let us know. Note below the best time to contact you and your preferred mode of communication i.e. phone, e-mail, etc.”

## **All Announcements, Flyers, Posters and Email Postings**

**As a sign of invitation and welcome when publicizing an event, the appropriate access symbol indicating the available accommodations should always be included.<sup>10</sup> Please include the written description along with the symbol.** (The symbols can be accessed from the Parish Website at [www.stmatthias.net](http://www.stmatthias.net), on the Internet, or from the parish office via e-mail):



Wheelchair Access



Assistive Listening for Individuals with Hearing Loss



Large Print Available



Sign Language Interpreter

**In a visible place on the announcement, etc. also add the following:**

“Please call (contact number) if there are any other accessible accommodations needed.”

**Please Note:** When emailing notices of an event, it is easier to read a flyer created in **Word** or **Adobe Acrobat** rather than a scanned, preprinted flyer. Consider using the **Tips for Making Print More Readable** found on page 4.

# Checklist of Accommodations

**If you are planning an event, the following is an easy checklist of the accommodations necessary for full inclusion of all people, with and without disabilities. More detailed information on each accommodation is available in the guidelines.**

**For all paper and email postings, please:**

- ✓ Use either standard Roman or sans serif font minimum 16 point
- ✓ Use non-glossy paper
- ✓ Use 1.5 or double spacing
- ✓ List accommodations & access symbols
- ✓ Avoid decorative fonts, italics, all capital letters, & different colored lettering

**Is your event for the general public? If so, please remember the following:**

- ✓ Provide an assistive listening system & closed captioning
- ✓ Provide reserved seating in front of speaker & a host for assistance
- ✓ Speaker should face the audience, stay up front & use a microphone
- ✓ Have questions repeated in a question-answer session
- ✓ Written programs or agendas are helpful

**Is your event for the Deaf and people with hearing loss? If so, the following should be available:**

- ✓ All of the above accommodations available for general public events
- ✓ Qualified sign language interpreters & CART

**Is your event in the church? Please remember to:**

- ✓ Unlock the electric doors
- ✓ Welcome all persons using adaptive equipment and offer to help
- ✓ If serving communion, offer it first to those using adaptive equipment

**Is your event in the Parish Meeting Room or cafeteria? Please remember to:**

- ✓ Welcome all persons using adaptive equipment and offer to help
- ✓ Ensure the availability of the lift/elevator
- ✓ Ensure the availability of the accessible bathrooms
- ✓ Use wide spaces (6 feet) between tables

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**Note:** Excerpts from "Important for everyone - - Behind the disability rights question" used with permission from The Providence Journal Company. Excerpts from "People First Language" used with permission from Kathie Snow. Visit [www.disabilityisnatural.com](http://www.disabilityisnatural.com) to read the entire article.

## Opening Doors to Christ

God, bless those who open doors:  
with faith, with love, with knowledge,  
assuring that all your people may worship here.

God, bless those who welcome all your people  
to the celebrations and obligations  
of membership within your Church.

And, God, bless those who feel excluded.  
Give them faith, love, and the knowledge  
of your welcome.

Open our hearts  
to move swiftly within your grace;  
to hear your message in silent words;  
to glimpse your glory beyond our sight;  
to find your wisdom in simple truths;  
to accept our weakness in your strength.

Let us join Christ  
in flinging wide the doors that separate us,  
one from another.

Amen.

Prayer for the Diocese of Metuchen Jubilee Day 2000  
for Persons with Disabilities

These guidelines were compiled in 2005 by **The Ministry with People with Disabilities of the St. Matthias Parish Community**. Members who contributed to this effort are Sister Anita Kuchera, Claire Gatarz, Emily Gatarz, Carolyn Lance, Denis McGrath, Carol Ann Norland, Jeanine Valenti, Angela Whitehead, and a special contribution by Christina Norland Audigier.