

## **§ 750 ACCESSIBILITY FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES TO WORSHIP & PARTICIPATE FULLY IN THE LIFE OF THE PARISH AND COMMUNITY OF FAITH**

### ***Introduction***

*"The same Jesus who heard the cry for recognition from the people with disabilities of Judea and Samaria, 2,000 years ago calls us, his followers, to embrace our responsibility to our own disabled 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. We call upon people of good will to examine their attitudes toward their brothers and sisters with disabilities and promote their well-being, acting with a sense of justice and the compassion that the Lord so clearly desires. Further, realizing the unique gifts individuals with disabilities have to offer the Church, we wish to address the need for their integration into the Christian community and their fuller participation in its life (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Pastoral Statement on Persons with Disabilities, 1978, updated language 1989, paragraph 1.)."*

### **§750.1 Diocesan Accessibility Policy**

**§750.1. Policy.** The parishes, schools, and agencies within the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois shall make every effort to provide accessibility into the life of the Church and the community of faith in accordance with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Pastoral Statement on Persons with Disabilities, 1978, updated language 1989. We are committed to providing a welcoming, accessible and inclusive environment for all parishioners, visitors, volunteers, and employees.

### ***Procedures***

- a) By 2025, all parishes, schools, and agencies within the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois shall provide for basic accessibility in the form of exterior ramps for ease of access to the worship space, seating in the worship space that is wheelchair accessible, and sound systems that accommodate those with hearing disabilities.
- b) The National Catholic Partnership on Disability [NCPD] has developed a program for the planning, design, and development of inclusive facilities and activities which provide access for full participation in all aspects of the parish life: sacramental, catechetical, social, ministerial, and community service. The guide, titled *Opening Doors, Foundational Principles of a Universally Designed Ministry*, is available through NCPD.
- c) We are dedicated to ensuring accessibility for persons with disabilities by identifying, removing, and preventing barriers to promote the rights of all persons and to build and create an inclusive and accessible environment. People with disabilities are given the

same opportunity to access the life of the Church in the same place and in a similar way as others.

d) The Diocese of Springfield in Illinois Office for Pro-Life Activities and Special Ministries is available for training and consultation to all priests, deacons, lay ecclesial ministers, and parish staff on the purpose and application of this policy.

e) All parishes, schools, agencies, employees, as well as priests, deacons, and lay ecclesial ministers within the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois shall adhere to this accessibility policy. The policy also applies to contractors, volunteers and others who provide services in the parishes, schools, and agencies.

***Commentary***

*“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, A Framework of Access and Inclusion, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1998. P. 1. Paragraph 1.)”*

**§750.2 Renovation Accessibility Policy**

**§750.2. Policy.** Any interior renovation or repair to the worship space requires approval from the Bishop, at which time an assessment of the worship space and sanctuary will be done to evaluate the feasibility of additional accessibility modifications.

***Procedures***

a) All parishes, schools, and agencies will consult with the Office for Property, Buildings and Cemeteries prior to performing renovations of interior spaces in order to consider incorporation of accessibility features.

b) The Office for Property, Buildings and Cemeteries will consult with Office for Pro-Life Activities and Special Ministries and Office for Divine Worship and the Catechumenate regarding the renovation, maintenance, and construction of facilities to enhance accessibility.

**§750.3 Communication Accessibility Policy**

**§750.3. Policy.** The Diocese of Springfield in Illinois shall endeavor to communicate with people with disabilities in ways that take into account their disability and communication needs.

***Procedures***

a) We ensure procedures and practices for persons with disabilities are in keeping with the principles of Catholic social teaching, dignity, independence, and inclusion. The

Office for Pro-Life Activities and Special Ministries shall be the point of contact for assistance in determining how best to meet the varied needs of individuals with disabilities.

b) Efforts will be made to insure diocesan information technology and websites comply with federal standards for making web content more accessible for people with disabilities.

***Definitions***

**Accessibility** – “capable of being reached; capable of being used or seen; capable of being understood; easily used or accessed by people with disabilities: adapted for use by people with disabilities (“Accessible.” Merriam-Webster, Merriam-Webster, 2018).”

**Disability** – “any physical, mental, cognitive, or developmental condition that impairs, interferes with, or limits a person's ability to engage in certain tasks or actions or participate in typical daily activities and interactions (“Disability.” Merriam-Webster, Merriam-Webster, 2018).”

“A universally designed ministry moves away from “special” and “separate,” rather creating a church community in which all members interact and participate in the various elements of a life of faith (“National Catholic Partnership on Disability.” NCPD, 2018).”

Contact the Office for Pro-Life Activities and Special Ministries for the links or texts for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops statements and the National Catholic Partnership on Disability guides.