

MASS FOR PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS



A Higher Purpose

Welcome individuals or families who might not normally feel comfortable participating in a regularly scheduled Mass. Councils will sponsor a distinct Mass, conducted annually, for people with special needs.

Overview

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

Chairman Role and Responsibilities

- Working with your pastor, obtain his permission and recommendations on conducting a Mass for People with Special Needs. In coordination with him, set a time and date.
- Recruit others to assist in planning, preparation, and publicity for the event.
- Determine who to invite, what their special needs may be, and how to meet the needs of those who accept the invitation to attend.
- Discuss any necessary physical accommodations or mental, dietary, or other limitations concerning reception of Communion.
- Complete and submit all associated reporting forms to the Supreme Council Department of Fraternal Mission.

Action Steps

1. Working with your pastor, obtain his permission and recommendations on conducting a Mass for People with Special Needs. Determine when this Mass would be most appropriate and schedule it for a certain date and time.
2. Determine who to invite by identifying people with special needs in the parish. Individuals and organizations who can help identify or invite attendees include:
 - 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



3. Build interest for the event and invite people with special needs to attend/RSVP. Promote the Mass for People with Special Needs in your parish through a variety of efforts:
 - Prominently display promotional posters (which can be ordered through Supplies Online)
 - Bulletin announcements
 - Pulpit announcements
 - Posting on your council and parish website / social media pages
4. Determine if the parking areas/doors/church/restrooms/parish hall are accessible. If not, schedule the Mass at an alternative facility that is accessible.
5. Plan accordingly by assessing the need for hearing aids, a sign language interpreter, and signage in Braille, presence of guide dogs, etc.
6. Determine if some invitees may need transportation to/from Mass.
7. Consider how to accommodate people who may have opposite needs, such louder or softer sound/music/lighting, etc.
8. Plan each part of the Mass and invite the choir, readers, ushers, altar servers, Eucharistic ministers to assist in the Mass. In as many roles as possible, invite people with special needs to perform these functions at the Mass.
9. 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.
10. Celebrate the Mass together! At this Mass, be sure to make clear that those in attendance are not just welcome but wholeheartedly encouraged to attend Mass at the parish every Sunday.
11. Following Mass, provide refreshments that meet a variety of dietary needs.
12. Have the council membership director set up a table with brochures and membership documents (including *Prospect Cards #921*). Do not forget that this is a recruiting opportunity!
13. Techniques learned should be incorporated year-round into Masses, the sacraments and other parish activities, so people with special needs will always feel welcome and able to participate.
14. To gain credit for your program, complete the associated reporting forms and submit them to the Supreme Council Department of Fraternal Mission. Remember to retain copies for your council records.