



Tips for Welcoming People with Disabilities at Mass

What to Expect - Before Mass

More late arrivals than usual

More traffic / vans than usual

Groups of guests with disabilities
arriving from group homes or organizations

Requests for gluten-free Hosts,
assistive listening devices, worship aids,
special or ASL seating,
other accommodations.

A tendency for persons with disabilities
to sit in the back pew of the church or
off to the side ("out of the way").

What to Expect - During Mass

More coming and going; more breaks;
wandering; leaving early.

What to Do

Be patient and maintain a welcoming spirit.

Use traffic cones to designate areas where cars and vans
can pull over close to the church entrance to unload
passengers. Schedule an usher/greeter to welcome and
assist these guests.

Expect greeting and seating to take additional time.
Schedule an additional usher (or recruit a friendly
Mass-goer) to assist.

Develop a plan with your pastor for providing the
accommodations you offer (especially a Communion
procedure for those who need a low-gluten Host). Train
Eucharistic Ministers and ushers in this plan so they can
provide everything and direct people smoothly. Consider
a Reserved Seating section up front if your attendance
warrants it.

Invite/encourage these guests to sit up front.
Escort those who wish to do so. Don't press; some
may prefer to stay in the back or near a bathroom or
exit. But others may simply need the invitation to sit up
front. Sitting up front will enhance their connection to
the Mass and to the rest of the congregation. It may also
help with Communion.

What to Do

Be patient and maintain a welcoming spirit. Some
guests are just beginning to learn how to attend Mass
and are not yet able to participate. Sensory differences,
attention deficit, and other issues can make it difficult
for someone to sit through a whole Mass.

See reverse.

What to Expect - During Mass (cont.)

Delayed or no response (to a greeting, to putting money in the collection basket, to lining up for Communion, etc.)

More noise (calling out, speaking loudly)

More movement
(flapping, tapping, stomping, etc.)

Special circumstances at Communion

What to Do

Give more time to respond. A person with a disability may take 10 or more seconds to respond to cues. If they do not respond to a greeting or let go of the money to put in the basket, let it go. With time and repetition, their participation should increase.

Be patient and kind. Focus on the blessing of the guest's presence. Ignore the sound if it is behind you or across church. If the person is very near you, a reassuring smile to the parent or caregiver may be appreciated.

See above. These are sensory-seeking behaviors that persons with disabilities may engage in for self-regulation. Allow parents or caregivers to address any behaviors.

Plan the Communion procedure with your pastor, keeping in mind both those worshippers who line up as usual and those who need to be served in their pew. It is helpful to designate one Eucharistic Minister to "float" throughout the church (with an usher's guidance) and serve individuals in their pews. If a Eucharistic Minister is uncertain about whether an individual wishes to receive Communion and/or is physically capable of consuming a Host, ask the parent or caregiver. Some individuals may not be able to consume an entire Host. Eucharistic Ministers who float may need additional training.

What to Expect – After Mass

Slower departures

What to Do

Take the opportunity to meet/greet guests (there may not have been time before Mass to do so) and thank them for attending. Assist people as needed to cars/vans.

In general:

- *Any unexpected situation can be handled with kindness, patience and courtesy.*
- *Every parish will have different worshippers, needs, challenges and opportunities.*
- *Treat any unexpected needs or problems as lessons for future improvement.*