POSITIVE WAYS TO MINISTER TO PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

BASIC TIPS
• Provide barrier free access to your school, church, altar and restroom
• Offer assistance if a person appears to need it
• Ask how you can help before you act
• Be sensitive about personal contact, equipment is a part of their personal space
• Speak directly to the person, not to their companions or interpreters
• Don’t assume what he/she can or cannot do
• Sit, in order to be at eye level when speaking with a person using a wheelchair
• Try to see the wholeness of spirit underneath physical appearances or unexpected behaviors
• Encourage people with disabilities to participate in a full range of parish activities
• Support families of persons with disabilities for they experience stress and isolation

LANGUAGE TIPS
• Use “people first” language
  o Say “person with a disability” rather than “disabled person”
  o Say “wheelchair user” rather than “confined to a wheelchair”
    (A wheelchair allows a person to participate in society; it is liberating, not confining)
• Saying “It was good to see you” to a person who is blind is perfectly acceptable
• Avoid negative words such as “victim” or “sufferer”

TEACHING STRATEGIES
• Speak clearly, using simple words
• Offer a consistent and structured schedule
• Use concrete, rather than abstract concepts
• Don’t talk down to persons with disabilities
• Involve as many of the senses as possible in presenting information
• Be patient and allow the person to take their time to respond
• Signs and pictures are great aids to understanding spoken words
• Lesson plans need a variety of tasks, consisting of shorter lengths
• Provide instructions in a small step by step approach
• Art and music are positive additions to lessons that promote learning
• Ask a person to repeat their words, don’t pretend you understood them
• Utilize peer tutors or buddy systems for needed assistance
• Relate information to the experiences and interests of the students
• Provide clues or hints for remembering new information
• Allow students to demonstrate acquired skills and knowledge in a variety of ways
• Pray, plan and prepare; then practice, review and repeat, repeat, repeat!
• Give what you naturally give to all the students – our love, praise, acceptance and especially, your faith

“We can do no great things; only small things with great love.”
- Mother Teresa