The theme for the annual observance of the *International Day of Persons with Disabilities* by the United Nations General Assembly this year is “*Building Back Better: Toward a Disability-inclusive, Accessible and Sustainable post-COVID-19 World*”.

The Holy Father Pope Francis Message on December 3, 2020 was very encouraging.

Pope Francis said “this celebration is an occasion to express my closeness to those experiencing situations of particular difficulty during the crisis caused by the pandemic. All of us are in the same boat in the midst of a turbulent sea that can frighten us. Yet in this same boat, some of us are struggling more; among them are persons with serious disabilities.

“Along the road of life, we often come across wounded people, and these can include persons with disabilities and particular needs. “The decision to include or exclude those lying wounded along the roadside can serve as a criterion for judging every economic, political, social and religious project. Each day we have to decide whether to be Good Samaritans or indifferent bystanders” (*Fratelli Tutti*, 69).

As for ecclesial institutions, I reiterate the need to make available *suitable and accessible means* for handing on the faith. I also hope that these can be made available to those who need them, cost-free to the extent possible, also through the new technologies that have proven so important for everyone in the midst of this pandemic. I also encourage efforts to provide all priests, seminarians, religious, catechists and pastoral workers with *regular training* concerning disabilities and the use of inclusive pastoral tools. Parish communities should be concerned to encourage among the faithful a welcoming attitude towards people with disabilities. Creating a fully accessible parish requires not only the removal of architectural barriers, but above all, helping parishioners to develop attitudes and acts of solidarity and service towards persons with disabilities and their families. Our aim should be to speak no longer about “them”, but rather about “us”.

“To help our society to “*build back better*”, inclusion of the vulnerable must also entail efforts to promote their *active participation*.

“Before all else, I strongly reaffirm the right of persons with disabilities to *receive the sacraments*, like all other members of the Church. All liturgical celebrations in the parish should be accessible to them, so that, together with their brothers and sisters, each of them can deepen, celebrate, and live their faith”.


Our diocese has a very active office Of the Apostolate with People Disabilities.

See some of our activities this year:
We are Here!

As this year starts with so many challenges and concerns we want to share with you a letter from one of our families. My prayer is that it will give you hope and remind you that Jesus is present with you, ALWAYS. Many blessings for you and your family.

St. Patrick’s Bible Camp 2020
We would like to take this opportunity to thank Irma Rodríguez, all the volunteers, and the St. Patrick’s Parish staff for ensuring that this year’s St. Patrick’s Bible Camp not only happened safely but was an outstanding success. Each July, St. Patrick Church opens its doors in Providence to individuals with special needs who wish to learn about the wonders of God in a loving and fun environment. We are so grateful to Father James Ruggieri for being so welcoming with our family. The camp is rooted in the Catholic tradition and strives to help campers live their Catholic faith. Our son Stephen was thrilled that Bible Camp took place when everything else had been cancelled this year. “Bible Camp is just awesome, and I really loved being an altar boy at mass each day. I was very happy that we had camp. Each day was lots of fun!” Stephen said. Daily, Stephen would work on beautiful crafts, sing fun songs, eat great snacks, and study God’s message.

St. Patrick’s ensured all the families that camp would be safe and follow all the mandates directed by the state to keep everyone protected in the face of the pandemic. We were very happy with the way camp was conducted. We never had a worry and the experience was wonderful for Stephen.

The weeklong camp went off without a hitch and Stephen is already looking forward to next year’s camp. “I can’t wait for July 2021 to get here so we can have camp again,” he said. It meant so much to our family that Stephen was able to participate in an activity that is tremendously important to him. Heartfelt thanks to St. Patrick’s and all the volunteers who made the week so special and meaningful.

Dottie & Mike McNamara
SPRED Catechists came together on August 25, 2020 at St. Patrick Church in Providence for an afternoon of prayer, reflection and discussion. The afternoon started meditating with a question posed, “Who has been with you in your journey during the last few months, since March when the pandemic started, when you were afraid and uncertain of the future. Who or What has helped you to endure these difficult months? We meditated on the question posed with a song by Sister Kathy Sherman, CSJ, familiar to all of us “I am with you” “I am with you on the journey and I will never leave you; I am with you on the journey; always with you.” It was beautifully performed by Sarah Mulholland accompanied by Alex Cuellar exquisite music, enhancing our spiritual awareness of Jesus being with us.

Meditation was followed by many sharing who or what has helped them to endure the last few months filled with so many challenges.

All were invited to a deeper awareness of our journey with Exposition, Adoration and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, by Deacon Eduardo Birbuet. The Holy Rosary was prayed during the Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, meditating on the realities of the coronavirus pandemic, and our role within the mission of the Church.

After the Benediction, the group gathered in the gymnasium at St. Patrick for a discussion of the current challenges to start again our SPRED communities in our parishes. We discussed ways to bring our communities together in a safe manner following diocesan and state guidelines. Father James Ruggieri shared with the group his thoughts and experience running the St. Patrick Emmanuel ministry which feeds the hungry in Providence, bringing to heart the reality of the need of the people in our diocese, physically and spiritually. Father James shared how he felt that we can continue our ministry in our parishes while being safe. He emphasized the importance of what we do for people with disabilities and their families in their parishes and in our diocese. The day ended with Holy Mass celebrated by Father James, in which Father closed the Reflection day with an inspiring homily.

The adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and Holy Mass were both recorded, feel free to watch on St. Patrick YouTube, Vimeo or Facebook.

We were blessed!

MaryLee Newman, Sarah Mulholland, Irma I. Rodríguez
This has been an unprecedented year for all of us. We all have been through so many challenges; some of us lost family members, lost jobs, so many of the daily activities have been disrupted; day programs our people with disabilities participated in are closed, just to mention a few of our challenges. For the first time we did not have our SPRED Retreat, Picnic and trainings; SPRED sessions are delayed. It was devastating not to be able to participate in the Sacred Mysteries and receive the Eucharist. We know that the Eucharist is the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. Eucharist means thanksgiving. We adore Jesus and want to spend an eternity of happiness with Him in heaven. “By his Real Presence in the Eucharist Christ fulfils his promise to be with us "always, until the end of the age" (Mt 28:20). As St. Thomas Aquinas wrote, "It is the law of friendship that friends should live together. . . . Christ has not left us without his bodily presence in this our pilgrimage, but he joins us to himself in this sacrament in the reality of his body and blood" (Summa Theologiae, III q. 75, a. 1). With this gift of Christ's presence in our midst, the Church is truly blessed. As Jesus told his disciples, referring to his presence among them, "Amen, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it" (Mt 13:17). In the Eucharist the Church both receives the gift of Jesus Christ and gives grateful thanks to God for such a blessing. This thanksgiving is the only proper response, for through this gift of himself in the celebration of the Eucharist under the appearances of bread and wine Christ gives us the gift of eternal life.” USCCB

During this difficult time, I think Gratitude is more important than ever. We all have so many things to be grateful for, every day of our lives.

I have some good news to share with you, which I know will give you hope and courage to keep going on your journey, on our journey sharing our lives with people with disabilities. The good news is in this newsletter insert, enjoy it!

Have a blessed Thanksgiving, knowing Jesus is with you, until the end of time.

We celebrate Thanksgiving: to thank God for all the blessings in our lives!

Companions on the journey,

MaryLee, Sarah and Irma

All are invited to join the St. Patrick SPRED Community to participate in Holy Mass every Tuesday at 5:30 pm at St. Patrick Church Providence. Call 278-4578