

HEARING LOSS GUIDE FOR CATHOLIC CHURCHES IN THE DIOCESE OF MADISON



Catholic parishes in the Madison Dioceses have strived to adhere to Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) regulations for those with mobility challenges. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 1 in 4 adults in the United States have some type of disability. 12.1% of these have mobility issues such as walking and climbing stairs; thus, it is certainly admirable that churches have provided for such individuals.

However, parishes also need to understand that according to the (CDC) and the Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) about 1 in 8 people the U.S. or 13% of Americans over the age of 12 report some degree of hearing loss. The ADA protects people with disabilities. It considered certain medical conditions to be disabilities if it limits people's ability to do everyday activities. Hearing loss is one such condition, but the level of loss factors into whether it's a disability under federal law.

The intent of this guide is to make parishes aware of the need to accommodate those physically challenged members who struggle with hearing loss. Just as parishes need to assist those with mobility issues so that these individuals can fully participate in the Eucharist and other parish activities, so should they also work to assist with the greater number of those with hearing-impairment.



OUR ROLE

The Apostolate for Persons with Disabilities is able to assist your parish in:

- 1) identifying what needs your parish has in hearing accessibility
- 2) Developing a plan to address accessibility needs
- 3) Assist in training and funding accessibility projects.

Age

Age is the strongest predictor of hearing losses. The National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders states that approximately one in three people in the U.S. between the ages of 65 and 74 has hearing losses, and nearly half of those older than 75 have difficulty hearing.

As we know from the Into the Deep analysis, the demographics of the faithful are older, therefore, hearing loss accommodations are important to pay attention to.

Veterans

HHLAA states that hearing issues are the most service-connected disability among American veterans. 2.7 million veterans receive either disability compensation for service-related hearing loss or treatment for hearing issues.

What about hearing aids?

It is important to note that while hearing aids can help to make hearing easier, they do not always solve the problem. Unfortunately, even state of the art devices provides only limited benefit for understanding speech in noisy situations or places where sounds can bounce about such as many of the large, high-ceiling churches of the diocese. Thus, many hearing loss individuals will complain that "I can hear you, but I can't understand you". Hearing devices will make the sound louder but not necessarily clearer.



Risk factors

This impairment is simply not an inconvenience. According to the National Institute of Health, hearing losses impedes communication, leads to social isolation, and has been linked to an increased risk of cognitive decline and mortality. In fact, a recent commission identified hearing loss as the most important modifiable risk factor for dementia.



THREE TYPES OF HEARING LOSS WHICH CORRESPOND TO THE CAUSES OF THE LOSS



Conductive hearing loss: in this hearing loss, something keeps sound from passing through the outer ear (ear canal) or middle ear. Causes include: earwax build-up, fluid in the ear, ear infections, swimmers' ear, something stuck in the ear and conditions present at birth that affect how babies' ears are formed. Treatment includes medications, surgery and other medical procedures.

Sensorineural hearing loss: this loss happens when something damages the inner ear over time. Causes include aging; illnesses such as heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke or diabetes; being hit in the head; noise-induced hearing loss and congenital infections. Treatment is usually management through hearing aids and cochlear implants.



Mixed hearing loss: results in a combination of conductive and sensorineural hearing loss. Treatment depends on the specific issues affecting the outer, middle and inner ear.

CLASSIFICATION OF HEARING LOSS IS BASED ON THE DEGREE OF THE LOSS WHICH DEPENDS ON HOW LOUD SOUNDS NEED TO BE FOR A PERSON TO HEAR THEM. ACCORDING TO THE AMERICAN SPEECH-LANGUAGE-HEARING ASSOCIATION THE DEGREE OF LOSS ARE:

NORMAL

MODERATELY SEVERE

SLIGHT

SEVERE

MILD

PROFOUND

MODDERATE

WHAT TO THINK ABOUT

IS THERE A PLACE FOR ELDERLY AND THOSE WHO HAVE HEARING IMPAIRMENTS TO SIT NEAR THE FRONT?

- SITTING SOMEWHERE WHERE SOUND IS DIRECTED AND/OR PEOPLE CAN READ LIPS CAN HELP GREATLY.
- THERE ARE PROBABLY AREAS IN YOUR CHURCH WHERE THE ECHOS OR DESIGN FEATURES IMPACT AUDIO.
- WHEN A SPEAKER OR PRIEST MOVES AROUND DURING A TALK OR HOMILY CAN MAKE IT HARD FOR LIP READERS.
- A HEADSET/PODIUM/ANY MODE THAT PROVIDES A CONSISTANT DISTANCE AND SOUND IS PREFERED TO A HANDHELD MICROPHONE.
- PROMPT LECTORS, SPEAKERS, PRIESTS, ETC ADJUST THE MICROPHONE BEFORE THEY BEGIN READING AND TO READ SLOWLY (WHICH CAN BE ACHIEVED BY STOPPING AT PERIODS AND PAUSING AT COMMAS

IS INFORMATION THAT IS COVEYED VERBALLY, SUCH AS SONG NUMBERS, READINGS, AND ANNOUNCEMENTS, ALSO AVAILABLE IN WRITTEN FORM?

- FOR THOSE WITH CERTAIN TYPES OF HEARING LOSS, WORDS BEING SUNG, ACCOMPANIMENT, OR ACCENTS CAN MAKE THEM DIFFICULT TO HEAR OR UNDERSTAND, SO TO FULLY PARTICIPATE, PEOPLE NEED ACCESS TO THE WRITTEN WORDS OF THE SONG.
- ANNOUNCING THE SONG NUMBERS BEFORE EACH SONG IS USING A MEANS THAT THOSE WITH HEARING LOSS MAY STRUGGLE TO HEAR, PROCESS, OR UNDERSTAND.
- ANYTHING THAT IS SUNG DURING MASS, INCLUDING CHANTS BY THE PRIEST, WOULD BE HELPFUL TO BE WRITTEN OUT. HAVING MAGNIFICATS OR PEW BOOKS WITH MASS PARTS WRITTEN OUT ARE WAYS TO DO SO.

IS THERE ALWAYS A FACE TO FACE CONFESSIONAL OPTION AVAILABLE?

- MANY PEOPLE RELY ON LIP READING TO FULLY UNDERSTAND AND PROCESS WHAT IS BEING SAID.
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ARE THERE HEARING ASSISTIVE DEVICES AVAILABLE?

- HEARING DEVICES COME IN A VARIETY OF OPTIONS, PRICE POINTS, AND TECHNOLOGY FEATURES. PLEASE CONTACT THE APOSTOLATE TO DISCUSS WHAT WOULD BE BEST FOR YOUR SITE AND CONNECT WITH THOSE IN THE PARISH WHO WILL BE USING THE TECHNOLOGY TO DISCERN THE BEST POSSIBLE FIT.
- SOME OPTIONS ARE: INSTALLED HEARING LOOP (THINK ABOUT DURING RENOVATIONS, WORK WITH T-COILS IN HEARING AID), PERSONAL LOOPS (REQUIRE USER TO HAVE CORRECT EQUIPMENT), OR BLUETOOTH SYSTEMS.