

USER'S GUIDE FOR

Salt
AND
Light

CHURCH, DISABILITY,
and the BLESSING OF
WELCOME *for All*

MAUREEN PRATT

DEAR READER,

Greetings in Our Lord, Jesus Christ, and thank you for your interest and dedication in working with persons with disabilities so all will be welcome in the body of Christ!

Since its publication in Fall 2018, *Salt and Light: Church, Disability, and the Blessing of Welcome for All* has become a key resource for individuals and pastoral programs in disability ministry. I am very grateful for the awards and attention the book has been blessed with, but most especially delighted at the role it plays in furthering understanding, acceptance, and opportunities for persons with disabilities in our Church communities: a pastoral resource is hardly effective if it does not find use in the daily life of an individual or faith community.

As you consider how you and your faith community might benefit from the information included in *Salt and Light: Church, Disability, and the Blessing of Welcome for All*, I would like to offer some ways to take what is on the page and use it to bring about full welcome through your ministry.

Salt and Light: Church, Disability, and the Blessing of Welcome for All has three key components: practical information about disability in our society and Church teaching; pastoral

considerations that affect how welcoming a faith community is and can be; and personal points of reflection and meditation to deepen understanding of how our individual attitudes and preconceived notions of disability might affect how we extend welcome to persons with disabilities.

A good starting point for using *Salt and Light* is to ***discuss among your parish ministry leaders the practical facts on disability***, statistics, and ecclesial information included in the book. For example, talk about the demographics of your parish (ages, presence of the disabilities you know about now) in light of those facts presented and the ways that you currently allocate your resources. It can be surprising for ministry leaders to learn that the greatest prevalence of persons with disabilities is among people ages 50+; parishes that emphasize working with children with disabilities might not be adequately aware of another, very large population of persons with disabilities, a “hidden-in-plain-sight resource” that could be engaged more actively in the daily life of the parish. It can also be refreshing to know that you don’t have to “reinvent the wheel” in providing awareness-raising resources for your

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parishioners. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and National Catholic Partnership on Disability, as well as other diocesan ministries listed in the book, have developed documents and other resources on their websites for extending welcome and opportunity to persons with disabilities in terms of reception of the sacraments and other Church teaching.

Next, ***take a multi-ministry pastoral look at how your parish reaches and engages with persons with disabilities*** of all ages and types (physical, emotional, psychological) and form action points to improve where needed. Start by asking key questions:

- ? Is the “messaging” in the parish bulletin, on the website, and elsewhere for all ministries welcoming to all?
- ? Is your physical plant completely accessible (from the altar to the parking lot)?
- ? Are there people who used to be active in the parish who are sitting on the sidelines or absent because of health or other challenges?

Be sure to include persons with disabilities in these assessments; often, they are aware of issues even architects or other “experts” overlook.

A pastoral commitment to full welcome cannot be accomplished without ***personal understanding and awareness of attitudes toward suffering and other life challenges***. For this reason, I included prayers and points of meditation with each of the chapters of *Salt*

and Light and suggest that the parish ministerial efforts be punctuated by time for common and individual reflection. Forming a personal and parish vocabulary is important, too, because much of our attitude of welcome comes through in the words we use. For example, the term “special needs,” used often in talking about education with children or adults with learning or other disabilities, is less comprehensive than “disability ministry,” which extends to adults with other types of disabilities (physical, for example, or those brought on by aging). The more time we spend in prayer and honest assessment of how we feel about disability, and expressing those feelings, the more eloquent we will be in ministry to and for all.

I hope that this brief user’s guide will help in framing your approach to disability ministry and the uses of *Salt and Light: Church, Disability, and the Blessing of Welcome for All* within it. As I work with dioceses across the United States, I will undoubtedly be able to share more ideas about ways the book can be helpful. And I welcome your thoughts, too—please keep my email handy and write whenever you have a question or need clarification (or have a prayer request as your work progresses): **maureen@maureenpratt.com**.

May your efforts be blessed with joy, and may your parish communities grow in love, light, and welcome for all!

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