



CATHOLIC CHARITY APPEAL
Supporting the work of the Church

Summer 2017 Spotlight: The Apostolate for People with Disabilities

Irma Rodríguez, Director of the Office of the Apostolate for People with Disabilities, remembers one Sunday while attending Mass, she noticed a young boy having trouble sitting still. He was making a lot of noise. Parishioners stared as the two parents of the boy struggled to keep him seated and quiet, clearly concerned they were disturbing others.

Eventually the parents left with their family long before the Mass had ended.

The next time Irma saw the mother at Mass, she was alone. Other times, she would see her with one of her other children, but not the young boy. Sometimes, the father, too, would come alone... not with his son.

Finally, Irma spoke to this family, the Taylors. She met the young boy, Mark, and introduced herself to his parents as the Director of Apostolate for People with Disabilities. She told them she could help them and the family opened up to her. She listened to their stories and heard about their joys and the challenges they face raising a child with autism.

The more Irma listened, the more they talked of their worries and concerns. They spoke of how, even though they wanted to attend Sunday Mass together as a family, they could not. They didn't want to be a disturbance to the other parishioners, many who may not understand the cause of Mark's behavior.

It's families like the Taylors who turn to the Office of the Apostolate for People with Disabilities. It's where Rhode Islanders can get the help they need when a family member is disabled. As a ministry of



Connor Lizotte's Faith Formation through Special Religious Education (SPRED)

the Diocese of Providence, the caring staff and volunteers work hard, every day, to help integrate disabled children and adults into the liturgical experience.

The Apostolate for People with Disabilities allows all individuals within the Catholic Church to be who they are without being afraid of their differences...without being afraid of the way they walk, or the way they talk.

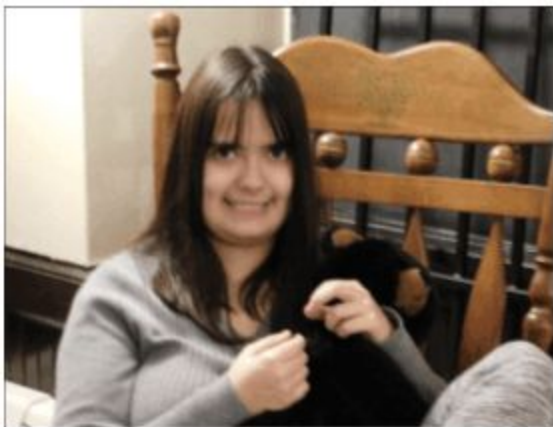
The Taylors received a plan to help Mark participate in the sacramental life of the Church. He soon joined a specialized, symbolic catechesis community in a convenient, neighboring parish where the family could, as they'd hoped, celebrate the Catholic Mass together, as one.

It's donors like you who support the Diocese of Providence through the Catholic Charity Appeal that give individuals like Mark such an amazing gift. The struggles for families like the Taylors will always continue, but it's a joy for them to be able to receive the same opportunity all individuals have to worship God as part of a community.

Irma remembers the day Mark received his First Holy Communion. "The most awesome day! I will never forget the excitement, the pride and the tears of joy of the parents and all of us who were lucky enough to witness such an amazing event in our Church," she said.

Many Rhode Island parents turn to the Apostolate for People with Disabilities, grateful to learn their precious children are welcome in the Church and can receive sacraments. Many of the

individuals receiving help have physical disabilities. But there are also those whose disabilities are not quite as visible. Many have been rejected, segregated, and even abused.



Sarah Hudson, a parishioner
at St. Theresa Catholic Church in Harrisville

The caring people at the Office of the Apostolate for People with Disabilities listen to each person who walks through their door. They prepare persons for sacraments, coordinate monthly signed liturgies for the deaf and hearing impaired, support sacramental access for the blind, and guide individuals through the process of finding a welcoming parish with an understanding pastor.

Office staff also work with pastors and parishioners to facilitate architectural improvements to provide accessibility to all church buildings.

Parents are taught ways that helps them cope with the many challenges they face. Many of the parents are raising their children alone, because divorce rates are so high in families of children with disabilities. That's why all are welcomed into a community where parents can share their own stories and share the experiences of living in similar situations.

The Office of the Apostolate for People with Disabilities encourages an environment throughout the Diocese of Providence that fosters the welcoming of all people, supporting and developing programs that create opportunities for people with disabilities to grow in faith.

By supporting pastors, principals, directors of religious education, catechists, parents, and other caring Catholics within our community, any person with a disability can live out their Baptismal Call according to their God-given talents and capacity.

If you would like to learn more about the Apostolate for People with Disabilities, please contact Irma I. Rodríguez, Director, the Apostolate for People with Disabilities, by calling 401-278-4578 or by emailing irodriguez@dioceseofprovidence.org.