

PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD: Making Space for People with Disabilities**Physical Access for People with Vision, Hearing, and Mobility Impairments**

- Describe yourself and your classrooms and images you use out loud
- Provide carved icons for veneration
- Provide Braille Divine Liturgy (Available on Orthodox Marketplace)
 - Provide music stand for holding the Braille book, as it's quite large
- Captions on videos
- Hearing devices
- Prayer books, service bulletins with that day's hymns (Explore resources on Antiochian.org) so HOH people can follow
 - E-Bulletins are a good option, too, especially if your church has wi-fi so people can access the electronic bulletin when they arrive
- Provide music stands so people can rest their booklets on the stand to follow along
- Look at people when you speak to them

- Ramps (even temporary ramps used with supervision)
- Electronic door openers
- Bathrooms large enough for a chair or scooter, with handrail
- Open spaces for wheelchairs in the main part of the church (not only at the back)
- Pews or chairs for resting
- Don't move someone unless they ask you to do so

Physical Access for People with Disabilities that affect Learning, Coordination, and Attention (Invisible Disabilities)

- Pews in a quieter part of the space (not right by a loud speaker blaring miked voices)
- Room to wiggle and move
- Space where they won't be bumped
- Church bag with quiet sensory toys (connected to action prayers; eg, sensory strings and untying the knot of sin) and books, plus sensory-regulation tools like noise-buffering earmuffs and sunglasses or tinted glasses, chewable prayer ropes or crosses, visual schedule of the Divine Liturgy
 - ATTENTION sometimes requires these supports. By helping regulate ATTENTION, young people are able to regulate their BEHAVIOR.
- Spaces that teach
- Action prayers (See post on Nurturing Independent Prayer on my website summerkinard.com)
- AAC communication aids, story sequences, visual schedules, prayers, and safety reminders

Physical Access for People with Food Allergies or Feeding Differences (feeding tubes, medical diets, etc.)

- Label ingredients in foods at potlucks
- Separate out allergen-safe foods.
 - For instance, if you have members with nut and wheat allergies, have a small nut-free table or counter area and a small gluten-free table/counter area.
 - If you have members with egg allergies, set apart an egg-free area at Pascha.
- Provide No Food tables at coffee hour with puzzles or crafts (knitting, sticker art, peg doll coloring with markers) or sensory bins (kinetic sand, peg dolls, putties) so everyone can socialize (Silly Putty is allergy-safe, but NOT Playdoh, as it's made of a common allergen!)
- Small group gatherings for evening walks at parks with sidewalks where the focus is on conversation, presence, and the beauty God created rather than on eating or drinking
- Encourage parishioners with wheat allergies or celiac to talk with the priest ahead of time to find a safe manner of receiving Holy Communion, which our faith teaches us is BOTH fully bread and wine AND fully the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.
 - Experiences vary with those diseases, and allergic reactions do not signify a lack of faith. Someone who desires Christ so much that they would risk their life to partake ought to be cared for and provided for in a spiritually and physically merciful way.
 - While every priest has discretion and these options should only be seen as examples to consider, not prescriptions, here are some of the ways of receiving that have been told to me by various people who suffer from extreme (anaphylactic) allergies and severe celiac disease:
 - Communing hospital-style, with the spoon touching the lips but not passing into the mouth
 - Communing with a tiny amount of Blood (wine) from the side of the cup in which the Body (bread) has been well mixed
 - Communing with a spoon of the Blood from a second chalice that contains only a small crumb of the Body and therefore has very little allergen
- Provide an office or classroom space and kitchen access for feeding tube needs to be met with dignity and safety

Physical Access for People Who are Immunocompromised

- Many children as well as adults are immunocompromised, which means that their bodies are unable to fight off illnesses so that any pathogen exposure can be extremely dangerous to them.
- Outdoor gatherings and events to minimize exposure to pathogens
- UV & HEPA filters in all classrooms to minimize respiratory pathogen exposure
 - For most classroom sizes, only one filter is adequate to clean the room air every ten minutes
 - Filters often cost around \$40
- Wear masks around people who are immunocompromised

- Though vaccination is personal and complicated, having fully vaccinated adults teach classes with immunocompromised students is a helpful way to make space for children who are immunocompromised.
 - If vaccines are a controversial subject in your parish and some teachers are not vaccinated, consider asking them to teach ages 12+ until the pandemic is over, for the safety of younger children and their immunocompromised families
- If wearing masks inside is not something the community desires, have monthly or quarterly outdoor events like walks, park visits, Bible story games, camping, or outside lemonade/caroling where immunocompromised families can safely attend.
- Encourage parishioners to stay home if they feel ill so that they do not expose immunocompromised members (or their immunocompromised family members at home) to illnesses (whether that be a stomach bug or a seasonal illness).
- Consider a monthly traveling church school with masked, well, vaccinated teachers who will come to a home with materials to go through a lesson and teach parents how to build on the lesson that month.