

Local News

	Monroe County																				Livingston County									
	St. Elizabeth	St. Ann	St. Anthony	St. Charles	St. Joseph	St. Lawrence	St. Mark	St. Michael	St. Patrick	St. Peter	St. Raphael	St. Rose	St. Vincent	St. Ignace	St. Francis	St. Ann	St. Joseph	St. Lawrence	St. Mark	St. Michael	St. Patrick	St. Peter	St. Raphael	St. Rose	St. Vincent	St. Ignace	St. Francis			
church parking lot	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		
ramp/lift/flat	R	R	3	•	L	F	L	F	L	F	L	F	L	F	L	F	L	F	L	F	L	F	L	F	L	F	L	F		
doors (32")	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		
seating	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		
hearing device	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		
restrooms	1	1	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		
hall ramp/flat	2	6	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		
doors (32")	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		
restrooms	1	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		
rectory ramp/flat	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		
doors (32")	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		
restrooms	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		

- 1 - fewer than two grab bars
- 2 - too narrow for side-transferring
- 3 - connected to accessible building
- 4 - steep ramp
- F - flat
- 5 - portable ramp available
- 6 - accessible school used for functions
- 7 - one step
- 8 - elevator
- R - ramp
- L - lift
- 9 - ramp not near main parking lot
- 10 - building
- 11 - single lift chair at rear of church
- 12 - ramp to lower level, upper level requires negotiating curb
- 13 - adjacent gym has accessible restrooms

This modified version of the chart produced through updated parish accessibility study lists parishes in Monroe and Livingston counties, indicating facilities for the disabled.

Updated study measures gains in parish accessibility

By Lee Strong

Catholic churches in Monroe County are more accessible to the disabled today than they were two years ago, according to the results of the Accessibility Survey Update of the Catholic Charities Ministry with the Disabled.

But for those who conducted the update and the surveys that preceded it, the change in attitude that has taken place at parishes is more significant than the increased number of ramps, loop systems and accessible bathrooms.

"People used to say, 'Why should we spend money (on accessibility) if there aren't many people who come here who use it?'" said John Belanger, a staff member at the Center for Independent Living.

Now, "priests and parishes are becoming more aware there is a need," added Belanger, who assisted in the study. "Priests have started going to parish councils to get money for ramps. We just hope they'll keep it up."

Survey results indicate that many parishes have made an effort to become more accessible to the handicapped since the ministry office released the results of its preliminary survey in 1985. According to the survey update, 76 percent of Monroe County's 72 parishes now have lifts, ramps or doors at ground level, as opposed to 69 percent in 1985. Accessibility of parish halls increased even more, from 29 percent to 46 percent.

In addition, the survey shows that 90 percent of church parking lots are accessible; 72 percent of churches have seating arrangements for the disabled; and 90 percent of churches and 82 percent of church halls have doors wide enough to admit people in wheelchairs.

While the survey shows signs of improving conditions for the disabled, it also points to areas needing improvement.

Only 18 percent of churches, 17 percent of parish halls and 4 percent of rectories have accessible bathrooms. Although 68 percent of

rectory doors are wide enough to admit wheelchairs, only 14 percent of rectories have ramps enabling disabled people to reach those doors. And for the hearing impaired, just 21 percent of the Monroe County parishes provide interpreters or hearing-device systems.

Included with the new figures for Monroe County parishes are updated results of an unpublished 1986 survey of Livingston County parishes. This update shows that none of the 12 Livingston parishes have church doors wide enough to admit wheelchairs, none accommodate the hearing impaired, and only three provide accessible rest rooms in the church.

"(Parishes) have improved, but they have a long way to go," Belanger observed, attributing slow progress, in part, to the large expense entailed in providing access. He estimated, for example, that a loop system for the hearing impaired could cost more than \$1,000. Poor parishes can't afford to spend the money needed to make a church completely accessible, he said, noting, however, that many poor parishes have gone out of their way to create at least makeshift ramps.

Belanger also attributed the lack of accessibility to ignorance of the range of disabilities and the special needs they create.

"It's not stupidity, it's just that people don't know what disabled people need," Belanger said. "Even a person with a disability knows his disability, but not (those of) others."

Belanger noted that even when parishes attempt to become accessible, they sometimes err. Some parishes, for example, designate parking spots for the handicapped by painting signs on the ground. In the winter, these signs are covered by snow and can't be seen. Some of the ramps churches have built are too steep or have too many angles.

Andrea Warner, a Monroe Community College student who helped conduct the survey, pointed out that some parishes reported hav-

ing accessible bathrooms because they had put in a ramp, but when representatives of the survey group inspected, they found that the bathroom doors were too narrow for people in wheelchairs.

The survey update was conducted by phone and mail during the winter and spring by a panel consisting of Lucy Dechaine, coordinator to the disabled for Catholic Charities; Warner; Belanger; and the members of the Catholic Charities Ministry with the Disabled Committee. Parishes indicating that they had made changes since the last survey were visited by members of the panel.

On the whole, the visiting teams found the parish priests cooperative and concerned, Dechaine reported.

"I had one priest talk to me about what a disability was," Warner recounted. "At first, I thought he was being difficult, but I realized he wanted to know what he could do."

Dechaine said more education is needed to dispel misunderstanding of disabilities and to help parishes respond to the needs of the disabled. Too often, she said, accessibility is limited to putting in a ramp or expanding a bathroom stall.

Part of this misunderstanding results from interpreting the term "disability" as meaning wheelchairs or being blind or deaf, Dechaine explained. Yet disability encompasses a whole range of conditions — developmental disability, emphysema or arthritis, the effects of stroke, even the normal problems brought on by the aging process.

"The elderly have many disabilities that are hidden away," Belanger observed. "Some give up going to church because they can't get up the steps."

The elderly frequently benefit from changes

made to make churches accessible to more obviously disabled people, Belanger and Dechaine noted. For example, many elderly people have hearing problems, so they use church loop systems. They also make use of the ramps — as do stroke victims and people with emphysema or arthritis.

But even when churches attempt to become more physically accessible, an atmosphere of acceptance for the disabled remains the most important element of accessibility, Belanger added.

"Acceptance is when a person is looked at as a person, not as a wheelchair," Belanger said. "When a person takes a couple of minutes to say, 'Amen' when they receive communion and they're not pushed along, it makes it easier for them to come back."

Sometimes, small changes can make a difference for disabled parishioners. Some churches take out a row of pews to provide seating for people in wheelchairs or offer alternative places to sit so that they do not feel they are the center of attention. Such simple — and relatively inexpensive — changes as providing a few large-print missalettes and bulletins can make elderly or sight-impaired parishioners feel welcome, Dechaine suggested.

"If people aren't accepting (of the disabled), they won't want to go to a church even if it is fully accessible," Warner observed.

On the other hand, lack of physical access is also driving some people away from the Church, Belanger said.

"Many of the hard-of-hearing and deaf are switching to other denominations where they can at least get to a service where there's a loop," he said.

Often, Belanger pointed out, parishes are

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