

Health & Retirement

Report: Church can meet needs of its disabled

By Nancy Frazier O'Brien
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — More than 10 million U.S. Catholics have some kind of disability, but the worship needs of nearly all of them can be accommodated, according to a report prepared by the National Catholic Office for Persons with Disabilities.

"There are few among the 10 million Catholics with assorted disabilities whose needs cannot be met when we make appropriate accommodation for their inclusion," said the report prepared for the National Conference of Catholic Bishops earlier this year.

Using information from several Louis Harris polls about the disabled, the report said 54 percent of the disabled population — or about 5.4 million Catholics — have a physical disability and need "ramps, railings and adequate space in which to maneuver."

About 4 percent of those with disabilities — an estimated 400,000 Catholics — are blind or visually impaired, with most of them unable to read Braille. "The remainder prefer large-print, audiotapes or com-

puter-generated data to access print materials and appreciate having the visual elements of worship and religious programs audio-described," the report said.

Another 4 percent of the disabled — or about 400,000 Catholics — are deaf or hard of hearing, and only about 15 to 20 percent of them communicate using American Sign Language.

"The remainder consider English (or their native tongue) as their primary language and need written text, whether real-time captioning, captioning of already existing materials or print scripts," according to the report.

The Catholic disabilities office estimated that 3 percent of those with disabilities are mentally retarded, and said that 97 percent of the mentally retarded live in their communities, either in their own homes or in group settings.

The mentally ill make up about 5 percent of those with disabilities, with about 500,000 Catholics being classified as mentally ill at any given moment.

The remaining 26 percent, or about 2.6 million Catholics, have other serious health

impairments, the report said.

Ten percent of the disabled population have heart disease or blood or blood vessel disease, while 11 percent have cancer, diabetes, kidney disease or the like. Five percent of the disabled are limited by pulmonary or respiratory problems.

"Many within this group may have mobility and other limitations which require consideration when planning for their inclusion," the report said. "Those with such hidden disabilities face misunderstanding and their need for accommodations may be misinterpreted as unreasonable demands for special privileges rather than reflective of legitimate need."

The National Catholic Office for Persons with Disabilities was established in 1982 to promote greater inclusion of the handicapped in church and society. Copies of its report went to various offices of the NCCB and U.S. Catholic Conference, including the Department of Social Development and World Peace, the Secretariat for Family, Laity, Women and Youth, the Department of Education and the Secretariat for Doctrine and Pastoral Practices.

Organizations need volunteers to help programs

The following organizations need volunteers to help in various areas:

— At the Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (ABVI) in Rochester, volunteers are needed to assist with the Choices for the Visually Impaired program.

Volunteers make visits, read mail and write letters for visually impaired adults residing in Monroe, Wayne, Ontario or Livingston counties. Flexible hours. Call 716/232-1111, ext. 279.

— Catholic Family Center, 25 Franklin St., Rochester, seeks volunteers for its STAR program.

Volunteers assist home-bound and frail senior citizens through activities such as grocery shopping, friendly visiting and providing rides to doctor appointments. Mileage reimbursement is available.

Call 716/262-7069.

— Volunteers are needed for this year's Camp EAGR, a program operated by the Epilepsy Association of Greater Rochester, 3399 Winton Road S.

Camp EAGR is a one-week residential camp for boys and girls ages 8-15 with epilepsy. This year's camp will take place Aug. 20-26.

Call Joan Powell at 716/334-6400.

— The Episcopal Church Home, 505 Mt. Hope Ave., Rochester, needs volunteer workers to work with the elderly.

Volunteers spend time with residents during dinner, help with serving lunch, or assist with recreational activities.

For details, call Kathleen Ebeling at 716/546-8400.

— At Kirkhaven, a 147-bed nursing home located at 254 Alexander St., Rochester, volunteers help with activities such as Saturday-morning bingo, Sunday-afternoon church services, Tuesday-morning yarn group, Friday-afternoon choir and occasional evening programs.

For details, call Aura Kamm at 716/461-1991 Monday through Thursday.

— Webster's Visiting Nurse Service, 2180 Empire Blvd., is seeking volunteers for its "Friends at Westfall" adult day-services program.

Volunteers assist with recreational activities, field trips and serving noontime meals. For details, individuals age 14 or older may call 716/787-8325.

— At Respite Cares!, a division of East Rochester's Heritage Christian Home, volunteers are needed to spend time with disabled individuals so that their full-time care givers can take a break.

Call Marilyn Curtis at 716/381-6550.

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