

Commission on Ministry With the Disabled Report to the 222nd Diocesan Convention

One of the Commission's major projects in 2005 was the establishment of a small grants program for disability/accessibility projects. Grant application requests totaling almost \$200,000 were received from eleven churches. Since our budget line was \$5,000, the Commission was unable to assist several churches that were seeking major grants for projects such as new ramps and elevators. However, at the end of the year we did award seven grants ranging in value from \$100 to \$1,000 to the following churches:

St. Augustine's Church, Asbury Park
Church of the Good Shepherd, Berlin
St. Augustine's Church, Camden
St. John-in-the-Wilderness, Gibbsboro
Grace Church, Plainfield
St. John's Church, Somerville
Trinity Church, Swedesboro

In the spring of 2005, each church in the diocese received a narrative summary of the results of the accessibility assessment survey the Commission had conducted in 2004. We were delighted with the excellent response to the survey, with almost 40 percent of our churches responding. One of the important things the survey revealed is that only a small number of churches had provided any kind of disability awareness and sensitivity training to their vestries and members.

To address this need, the Commission sent all churches a copy of a booklet called, "Making Our Church a Welcoming Place of Worship for All People," which is excellent disability sensitivity/awareness training manual for church leaders. Each rector was asked to read this booklet and then to share it with their vestry members.

In addition, a mailing recently was sent to all churches asking them to consider designating one Sunday in March 2006 as "Disability Awareness Sunday." The mailing included a sermon that can be given on the Sunday they choose, along with suggested disability-themed Scripture readings, additional worship materials (including a "Litany for Wholeness" and a hymn called "Help Us Accept Each Other"), and a bulletin insert titled "Beatitudes for the Disabled." Churches are being encouraged to include persons with disabilities from their congregations in this special worship service.

On Saturday, May 6, at Trinity Cathedral, the Commission on Ministry with the Disabled and the Christian Formation Commission will co-sponsor a workshop on two prominent and largely misunderstood disabilities, autism and Down Syndrome.

We were saddened by the deaths in 2005 of two of our faithful members, Martin Papp and Sarah Strohmeier. In addition, we lost another member, the Rev. Janet Johnson, to relocation. The valued contributions of all three will be greatly missed. We also mourned the passing last fall of Jan Hardy, head of the Bethsaida Project (our counterpart commission in the Diocese of Newark), who was of great help to us when we were reactivating this commission several years ago.

We welcomed four new members to the Commission last year, appointed by the Bishop. They are Linda Phyllis Volker, Donna and Tom Devlin, and Robert Carlson.

Respectfully submitted,

The Rev. Cynthia Carlson
The Rev. William Johnson
Co-Chairpersons