

**Report to the 223rd Annual Diocesan Convention
Commission on Ministry with Disabled**

This year the Diocese of New Jersey Commission on Ministry with the Disabled entered into a partnership with the Commission on Christian Formation and Life Long Learning to offer a day of workshops highlighting some of the needs and ways of including those with autism and Down Syndrome. The keynote speaker was author Jeff Cohen who spoke on the joys and trials of life with a teen aged boy who has Asberger's Syndrome. Workshops included one on how to do church school class when one of the students has a disability, what to expect if a child has Down Syndrome, what to expect if a child has autism, how our churches and church school classrooms can be made more inclusive, ways to include those with disabilities in full participation of service at the altar, and more.

We made grants to seven churches to help them improve their accessibility to their buildings and for improvements to sound systems, helping with elevator installations etc. We offered assistance to congregations who wished to know more about improving accessibility. We also contacted each congregation in the Diocese of New Jersey urging them to set aside one Sunday to be observed as a day to become more acquainted with those members who have disabilities whether they be physical, mental, or psychological.

On May 12 we will again cosponsor, with the Christian Formation and Life Long Learning Commission, of a day of workshops. This year we will offer helps on support of parents and families of children with disabilities, an experiential disabilities session where participants will be able to actually "try on" a disability such as hearing loss, sight impairment, a physical difficulty requiring a wheelchair, walker, cane, etc. as well as others. Our keynote speaker will be from the Elizabeth Boggs Center in New Brunswick.

We are always willing and able to offer support to congregations looking for ways to improve accessibility and we are prepared to do this in a range of ways. Applications for this year's grants will be sent later in the spring. We have a wide range of experience, knowledge, and resources within our membership and we invite congregations as well as individuals to speak with us regarding ways that we can be of service.

For the Diocese of New Jersey Commission on Ministry with the Disabled,
Donna Devlin, Co-Chairperson