



Accessibility Committee

Quick Tips

Creating Access Using Minimal Effort for Maximum Gain

Be prepared to welcome people who are Deaf or live with disabilities or mental health challenges into your Secular Franciscan fraternity and accommodate those who are already there. These practical tips will take a minimum of effort, but make a world of difference.

General Guidance:

1. Be open-minded, recognizing that God may be calling a variety of people to our OFS life.
2. Consider access when planning meetings and classes, retreats, or other activities. Make checking for accessibility as routine as any other planning task that you undertake. For example, ensure that the location is wheelchair accessible, has good lighting, and a reliable audio system.
3. Seek guidance from the individual asking for needed accommodations, whether a member, or a person wishing to enter the fraternity. They know best their needs. When appropriate, and with the permission of the individual, families might also provide helpful information.
4. Do not be afraid to ask a person if they need help, but don't automatically do something for them. Ask and they will let you know if they would appreciate assistance. If they say no, it is not a personal reflection on you.
5. Recognize the dignity of each person, and treat them with hospitality and respect.
6. Use your typical voice and cadence while communicating with any individual who is Deaf or has a disability.
7. Key factors to consider. Is the person:
 - a. able to engage in small and large group settings?
 - b. able to communicate and access material with appropriate accommodations (e.g., sign language, Braille, large print)?
 - c. able to contribute in some way to the building of fraternity, and sharing Gospel values, as is expected of everyone?

8. Spend time with the individual. A decision does not have to be rushed.
9. Independent Living Centers ([click here to be taken to a website listing ILCs](#)), Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies ([click here to be taken to a website listing voc. rehab. agencies](#)), and Area Agencies on Aging ([click here to be taken to a website providing information on Area Agencies on Aging](#)) may provide helpful information. Search for the agency in your local area or visit these national sites for more information.

Technology:

1. When producing your website or electronic newsletter, identify pictures using “Alt text” tags. There are numerous helpful websites providing guidance – just search for “alt text.”
2. Become familiar with the many apps that assist individuals with various disabilities or who are Deaf:
 - a. **Deaf and Hard of Hearing (HOH)** – speech-to-text apps greatly aid Deaf individuals to engage in conversation or to understand homilies and other presentations. Some popular ones include:
 - i. Otter ([click here to be taken to the Otter website](#)) – free for 30 minutes per day, paid subscription available, can record in person, relies on WIFI
 - ii. Apple iPhone and iPad – included free, but cannot record
 - iii. INNOcaption ([click here to be taken to the INNOcaption website](#)) – assists with conversing on the telephone (user speaks, other person’s message is written out); can record; available in different languages, very accurate, free
 - b. **Blind and Low Vision** – print-to-speech apps such as those below provide access to written and/or electronic material:
 - i. Seeing AI ([click here to be taken to the Seeing AI website](#)) – app that will read print for even long documents; use it with a camera on your phone (can be obtained free in the app store)
 - ii. Be My Eyes ([click here to be taken to the Be My Eyes website](#)) – is also free, both their personal assistance over the phone regarding reading labels or identifying items, etc., and their separate AI service
 - iii. NVDA ([click here to be taken to the NVDA website](#)) (formerly Serotek)
 - iv. Apple VoiceOver ([click here to be taken to the Apple VoiceOver website](#)) – a program within Apple products,

including the iPhone, which reads the content of the screen to blind users who have it turned on within their respective Apple products. It reads text only and is unable to read any graphics or images.

- v. Welcome to Orca ([click here to be taken to the Orca website](#))
 - vi. WebAnywhere ([click here to be taken to the WebAnywhere website](#))
3. Sorenson is a service that provides voice to sign language translation over a phone or monitor ([click here to be taken to the Sorenson website](#)).
 4. Some people use augmentative and alternative communication to voice their message ([click here to be taken to a website explaining augmentative and alternative communication](#)). Be patient as the person speaks to you using such tools. As with any communication, listen attentively and respond as you would in a typical situation.
 5. Technology such as the Meeting OWL enhances virtual meetings by clearly displaying the current speaker using a 360-degree camera with auto-tracking, mic, and speaker ([click here to be taken to the OWL Labs website](#)).
 6. State or regional Assistive Technology Centers can provide helpful information on available technology assistance ([click here to be taken to a website listing Assistive Technology Centers](#)).

Deaf or Hard of Hearing (HoH):

1. Speak with current members about their experiences with hearing loss and their coping mechanisms.
2. Getting the attention of a Deaf/HOH person includes letting them see you approach, switching the room or lamp light on and off, and even waving from a side angle.
3. The best meeting arrangements are sitting in a circle or square table. If a classroom arrangement is used, it might be best to ask the person where they feel most comfortable sitting—up front, end of the row, or where ever they prefer.
4. Become familiar with technology that assists the Deaf community to communicate individually and in a group setting (see Technology section above).
5. For a meeting, provide written documentation including agenda, PowerPoint slides, and/or text of presentation.

6. When a microphone is available, ask each person to use it when speaking.

Blind and Low Vision:

1. When preparing documents such as the fraternity newsletter, flyers, or event programs use fonts without serifs (e.g., Helvetica, Tahoma, or Arial) in at least size 14 point. Create a style sheet that can easily be used by anyone preparing documents for the fraternity.
2. Prepare documents in large print if requested using a style sheet such as the following:
 - a. Font – Tahoma, Helvetica, Arial
 - b. Font size – Body – 20; Major heading – 24; Subheading – 22; Headers or footers – 20
 - c. Line spacing – 1.25 between lines, double space between paragraphs
 - d. Margins – Top and bottom – 1”, left and right sides – 1.5”
3. Learn about the resources and services of the Xavier Society for the Blind so that you can refer a person who could benefit from their offerings ([click here to be taken to the Xavier Society website](#)) . They provide requested books in large print and Braille, along with the Propers for Sunday and Holy Day masses in Braille, all free of charge.
4. Become familiar with technology that assists those who are Blind or have vision loss (see Technology section above).
5. When planning meetings, provide documents in the requested media and electronically. Providing them in advance is especially helpful in case formatting changes need to be made by the Blind user to enhance readability.
6. Research the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled in order to refer people to their variety of services ([click here to be taken to the National Library Service website](#)).

Physical Access:

1. When planning meetings and events select accessible locations with a street-level or ramped/elevator entrance and meeting space, and restrooms with at least one accessible stall with grab bars and doors at least 36” wide.
2. Adequate lighting is appreciated by all. When selecting a space to hold gatherings, consider the amount of natural and artificial lighting, and arrange the room to best utilize the available lighting.

3. When planning events, whether single or multi-day, it is helpful to allow some down time. Fully-packed agendas are difficult for everyone, but may be especially taxing for someone with physical or developmental disabilities, health conditions, or Deaf individuals watching an interpreter.

Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities:

1. Do not make assumptions or stereotypes regarding the capabilities or limitations of a person with an intellectual or developmental disability, as these conditions vary widely in each person.

Mental Health Challenges:

1. Be familiar with local community mental health centers that may be of assistance to people; maybe even have a speaker make a presentation to the fraternity. Speakers can also be found through local colleges or universities, or other mental health agencies.
2. If you have current members or are forming people for whom mental health is an issue, you could check with your community mental health center to see if they offer Mental Health First Aid to groups in the community ([click here to be taken to the Mental Health First Aid website](#)). If not, they may know of another group who offers it or something similar to the community in general. Some members of your fraternity would benefit from participating in this training.
3. Become familiar with Catholic organizations providing resources and training to support individuals with mental health challenges, including the Association of Catholic Mental Health Ministers ([click here to be taken to the Assoc. of Catholic Mental Health Ministers website](#)) and the Sanctuary Mental Health Ministries Course for Catholics ([click here to be taken to the Sanctuary Mental Health Ministries website](#)).

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Voicing and Captioning Your Zooms, Screens and Webinars, and Other Communication Helps

Making material accessible to anyone who will see or hear it is important. In the interest of universal access and because you will likely not know in advance that you have someone in your group who has a severe vision or hearing loss or who is completely deaf or totally blind or who lives with another disability that may impact the way in which they best send or receive information, here are some practical guidelines to follow for every event.

- If you are on Zoom, you can have your session captioned at no financial cost. Go into settings and look for accessibility settings and turn on Captioning. This has the added benefit of giving you a transcription of your meeting, especially if you remember to save it when your meeting is over.
- If you put any text on the screen, please read it aloud for anyone with no vision, poor vision, or a learning disability such as dyslexia. Hearing it read is also beneficial if you are away from your screen while something is being shown.
- Written Materials and Handouts: If you will have written materials or handouts that attendees will be receiving, implement best practices that include all participants. Find out in advance what format is most comfortable for your participants: regular print, large print, Braille, or audio or electronic file.
- Sign language interpreters: Remember that sign language interpreters are in essence repeating what you've said and converting it into American Sign Language.
- Please be mindful and speak at a relaxed pace; not too fast, please!
- You may also need to remind your audiences from time to time that one person at a time should be talking. A sign-language interpreter is unable to interpret more than one person speaking at the same time; one at a time, please!
- If you write material on an easel or on something that will make what you've written visible, please repeat aloud what you're writing so that those with low vision, no vision or those who can't see you due to their location in the room can have access to what you are sharing.
- If your presentation involves the need for people to move or to change postures, please describe clearly what you want people to do.

- If your videos are not audio described, please make provisions so that a blind or low-vision participant can have access to what is being shown. You may want to invite others to sit with them and describe what is pictured and answer questions about what is on the screen. An example of a problematic video would be one with beautiful images and possibly text on the screen and music but no descriptive narration.
- If your video is not captioned for those using sign language, you will need a sign language interpreter for the video.
- If you invite people to change positions, for prayer for instance, invite them to stand or kneel as they are able. Some people, due to physical impairments, will not be able to change positions but will want to be invited into what will be happening.
- Repeat questions that are asked of you from the audience in case people have difficulty hearing them.
- Reserve some front seats for those who may need to sit up close to hear or see well.
- State the person's name when you call on him or her rather than pointing to someone; this lets everyone know whom you are addressing. If you don't know the person's name, select a common identifier such as the "woman in the cat t-shirt" or the "man with the pony tail and nose ring."
- If you move when you talk, please be mindful that people need to hear or see you clearly. In order to be seen, please do not have your back to the audience.

If you have questions that you would like to run by someone on the Accessibility Committee, please email us by [clicking here](#).

Peace and all Good,
The OFS-USA Accessibility Committee