

# NAAL Statement on Accessibility & Disability

1. Limiting the Statement on Accessibility & Disability. In order to offer some clear path through this labyrinth, the current statement is limited in a number of ways.
  - 1.1 This statement does not include any specific guidelines about Academy worship. This is not to say that our worship is not an important aspect of our life together as an Academy, nor is it to suggest that our Academy worship should be without some guidelines for accessibility. Given the many questions which surround our worship aside from issues of accessibility, however, it seems inappropriate to begin with guidelines about our worship. Rather, these guidelines are about our meetings. It is hoped that from these, we may be able to move in the future to more specific guidelines about our worship.
  - 1.2 These suggested guidelines are offered in stages. We are aware that every guideline is not of equal import. Nor are all elements in this Statement necessarily linked. Sometimes the Academy may be inhibited from implementing one or two guidelines because it appears that any statement about accessibility is an “all or nothing” situation. In order to clarify that such is not the case, these guidelines are offered as a progression, often moving from the simpler and less costly to the more complex requiring more resources. The Academy Committee could, therefore, put into practice some of these guidelines without adopting all of them.
  - 1.3 Finally, we would suggest that these guidelines, or any elements thereof, be approved *ad experimentum*, within a specific time frame. Again one of the difficulties of the Academy Committee in approving these or similar. guidelines is an awareness of the fluidity of the Committee itself and the Academy leadership in general.

## 2. Presuppositions

While there are many presuppositions behind this Statement, it seems appropriate to articulate five of them. This is done so that we may receive appropriate critique from the Academy Committee about their perceived validity of our presuppositions, and conversely that such might serve to help the Academy Committee explicate their own presuppositions about accessibility for people with physical challenges.

- 2.1 There are many degrees of physical challenges to which we need attend. Some disabilities, such as complete loss of sight or the inability to walk, are relatively obvious and severe. There are innumerable other physical challenges, however, which are less obvious, such as hearing loss. Furthermore, there are varying degrees of physical challenges. For example, mobility may be severely impaired because of paralysis. Apart from such severe impairment, however, an individual's mobility may also be limited because of age, respiratory disorders (e.g., asthma), or other medical problems (e.g., arthritis).
- 2.2 There are already a number of Academy members who have varying degrees of physical challenges. There are some members, for example, who have a hearing impairment and find it difficult to understand what transpires at our plenary

- gatherings or in the Seminar groups.
- 2.3 The number of members of the Academy who have serious physical challenges most likely will increase. With the “graying” of the Academy, the number of current members with visual, hearing, or mobility impairments—like that of the general public—is going to increase. Furthermore, given the advocacy for people with physical disabilities in the general populace, higher education, and our own communities of faith, it is likely that an increased number of liturgical scholars and specialists will have such disabilities.
  - 2.4 The issue of Academy accessibility for people with physical challenges is serious enough that it should be systemically addressed. Given the rapid changeover in our leadership, and the many responsibilities put upon newly elected leaders, it appears to be an inordinate burden to expect the Academy President to respond personally to issues of physical challenges as she or he helps the Academy prepare for its Annual Meeting. Thus, a set of guidelines could assist the entire Academy Committee in their annual responsibility for meeting planning, as well as significantly help the newly elected leaders.
  - 2.5 The issue of accessibility is not simply an issue of justice or of personal rights. Rather, it is first and foremost a God issue. In the Judaeo-Christian tradition, we believe that people image God. Critical in this belief is an awareness that—aside from Christian's understanding of Jesus as the Incarnation of God—it is not one person who images God, but rather it is the whole of humanity. Consequently, believers are called to embrace the whole of humanity, not because these “others” might be preferable to their own kind, but because the “other” shatters the delusion that we can tame God or make God in our own image. Accessibility is not about our charity, but about God's graciousness: a God who chooses to be imaged in poor and rich, old and young, able-bodied, and those with disabilities. As an Academy concerned about ritualizing God's self-revelation, therefore, we need to be open to God's self-communications in every kind of person.

### 3. Services to those with disabilities

The Academy Committee agrees that, in principle, all NAAL meetings will be accessible to those with physical challenges. Progressive guidelines to achieve this proposal include

#### 3.1 Architectural access

- 3.1.1 The annual Academy meeting should be centered in a hotel that is in compliance with the letter and the spirit of the American Disability Act (ADA, 1990).
- 3.1.2 The plenary meeting space should always take place on a lower floor.

#### 3.2 Communication access for those with hearing impairments

- 3.2.1 The Academy Committee will explore resources within the membership, discovering how many members are fluent at American Sign Language.
- 3.2.2 The Academy Committee, when inviting members to register for the annual meeting, will allow people to request
  - 3.2.2.1 Interpreter services for the plenary session, business meeting(s) and banquet.

3.2.2.1 The use of assistive listening devices for the plenary session(s), business meeting, and banquet.

3.2.3 The Academy Committee will draw upon the Academy resources to fill such requests from the membership for the Annual Meeting.

3.2.4 In recognition of this service from Academy members, the Academy Committee will stipulate an appropriate discount in the cost of the Annual Meeting for such members.

3.2.5 If resources are not available from the membership to provide this service, the Academy Committee will consider hiring interpreters from the local commission for the deaf or a local synagogue or church agency.

3.2.6 When arranging for public address systems for the meeting, the Academy Committee or local committee will explore acquiring assistive listening devices for use at the plenary session(s), business meeting, and banquet.

### 3.3 Communication access for those with visual impairments

3.3.1 The Academy Committee, when inviting members to register for the Annual Meeting, will allow people to request the assistance of sighted guides.

### 3.4 Mobility access

3.4.1 The Annual Meeting will be so planned that Academy activities will ordinarily not take place more than two or three blocks from the central hotel.

3.4.2 If any Academy activities take place more than two or three blocks away from the central hotel, transportation should be provided for Academy Members and guests with visual or mobility disabilities.