

**Any Body,
Everybody,
Christ's Body**

**A Congregational Guide
for Becoming
Accessible to ALL**

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Above all hold unfailing your love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins. Practice hospitality ungrudgingly to one another. As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who utters oracles of God; whoever renders service, as one who renders it by the strength which God supplies; in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.

I Peter 4.8-11a (RSV)

Any Body, Every Body, Christ's Body

Accessible to All

A2A

This resource is designed primarily for the enrichment of congregations and other settings where people of faith and good will desire to provide and encourage hospitality and access to all. This resource is divided into three main sections that can be used over a period of weeks or months and in a variety of formats. Ideally a church would culminate this study series on disabilities and ministry with the commitment to become an “A2A Congregation”, thus proclaiming a desire and plan to become a more inclusive community of faith that will be accessible to all.

There is good information for individual and group study and reflection. The inclusion of people with disabilities and a renewed awareness of disabilities can enliven every aspect of congregational life. Within the three main sections to this study guide are many “pull-out” resources that can be used by different groups and committees. It is our hope that congregations will forge some new connections in their own communities – with disability advocates, group homes, communities for independent living, special education teachers, disabled veterans groups, and experts on topics of particular interest and relevance for the congregation (i.e. Alzheimer's Association, National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, Autism Society etc.) The following stories, insights, and recommendations come from members of the UCC Disabilities Ministries (UCCDM), all of whom are active clergy and lay members of United Church of Christ, most of whom live with a disability.

In many of our UCC congregations there has been a study and affirmation process about matters of inclusion in the life and witness of the people of God. Some of us belong to churches that have designated themselves as Just Peace, Whole Earth, Restorative Justice, and Open and Affirming congregations. These designations let people with a particular interest or identity know that they are welcome and acknowledged in this house of God.

Another sign of welcome is the well known “wheelie” icon that has become an international visual symbol for “handicapped access”. Our churches have

these bright blue emblems on parking places, bathrooms, attached to our church signage, in newspaper ads, and printed in our brochures and bulletins. We realize that there has been excellent work done in many places to get us in the doors, but now what? What about those of us with so-called “hidden” disabilities who can’t easily follow the patterns of the worship service? What about the teenager, who is resisting the intimacy of a small confirmation class because he is ashamed of his recent hospitalization for depression? Can we take some of the mystery out of pot-lucks so we know if the food we eat will trigger an allergic reaction? Can we teach the Greeters to go ahead and shake our hands, even though we don’t have much strength to grasp them? Shouldn’t our Search Committee consider a candidate who uses a chair and worry about pulpit access later? There are many voices, and many questions coming from people with disabilities who are already part of our congregational life. There are many more who stopped trying. The vast majority of adults with disabilities are not part of any faith community. We have some work to do!

The Scriptural foundation we have chosen is from I Peter 4.8-11. Within this exhortation to a challenged community we found the encouragement and direction to assist our communities of faith in the ongoing ministry of welcoming and embracing adults and children with disabilities. Accessible space is a good start, but it is not enough. We wish to invite our brothers and sisters to examine the possibilities of deeper changes – in attitudes, rituals, theology, leadership, and language – our very essence as a community of faith.

This is a study series designed for a group process of reflection and action. It is best utilized by a core group that shares the desire to become an “Accessible to All” congregation. There are readings and discussion questions for each session. In the disability rights movement our slogan is “Nothing about us without us”. *Please* include people with disabilities in your study sessions. If you are unable to identify people in your congregation who have a disability and are willing to participate in this process, invite someone from outside the church. Local ARC organizations can help you find a self-advocate. Another idea is to go through the school district and find out who in the community provides advocacy for families. Community services and government listings in the blue pages can provide some resources as well.

Our title “Any Body, Everybody, Christ’s Body” reflects a progression in the presentation. First, we need to explore the meaning of the actual flesh and blood body we each inhabit, our differences, our gifts, our laments, our anger, our sacred selves, and the ways we can be “good stewards of God’s varied grace”. Next, we would like to learn ways to “practice hospitality ungrudgingly” as we work toward including everybody as part of the family of God. Many excellent writers and theologians have helped explore the concept of hospitality as we welcome strangers in our midst, be they new neighbors from other cultures, people who have been marginalized by economics or physical conditions, or merely new faces on Sunday morning. Our group wanted to focus on the “ungrudgingly” part of practicing hospitality. Lastly, and most importantly, we want to refresh our understanding of the Body of Christ as a symbol of brokenness **and** healing, of interdependence **and** community. As the Body of Christ we are reminded yet again, to “hold unflinchingly [our] love for one another”. And we must be bold. As we try new things in the spirit of love, we will be met in the spirit of love, and truly become accessible to all.

In “The Low Road” poet Marge Piercy describes the process of becoming more inclusive (and empowered!) this way:

It goes on one at a time,
it starts when you care
to act, it starts when you do
it again after they said no,
it starts when you say *We*
and know who you mean, and each
day you mean one more.

Let the whole church say “Amen”.

Rev. Jo Clare Hartsig
Easter 2005

Marge Piercy, “The Low Road”, from The Moon is Always Female, c. 1981, Knopf, NY

...as good stewards of God's varied
grace...

Any Body

Part I

What We Believe

For many years Washington Park UCC has been known in the Denver area for being involved in the local community as well as for being deeply committed and actively engaged as a Just Peace, Open and Affirming, Whole Earth, and Restorative Justice Congregation. In other words, they have a reputation! One of church's lay leaders was at a Colorado UCC Conference meeting during which a seminary student inquired about a good place to be "in care" as part of the ordination process. When this lifetime member of "Wash Park" eagerly volunteered her church, another person at the meeting immediately said, "You don't want to be a member *there*. They'll take *anybody*". The story, when told the following Sunday during announcements, was met with grand applause.

How would that look on the sign in front of your church? "We Take Anybody!" Could there be a simpler way to express Jesus' invitation to us all? Let's examine what it might look like for our church to be the one that is meant for anybody, or even more specifically, any **BODY**. It is a challenge. We can meet that challenge only if we are willing to listen to one another, learn together, work together, and continue to move ever closer to the vision of love, relationship, justice, and inclusion revealed to us in the life and ministry of Jesus.

It is, after all, our earthly bodies that serve as our ways of being. The reality of our bodies must be taken into account as we develop our theology of access. Our faith stories have many things to say about our bodies and our brokenness. Our culture has many more messages about appearances, mobility, abilities, and disabilities. If our bodies generally don't cause us a lot of problems, we may not even notice these messages. If we have a more unconventional body, we might receive these stories and messages on a very deep and sometimes painful level.

This first section – ANY BODY is divided into three parts:

1. What We Believe
2. What We Know
3. What We Do

Each one would make a substantial group study session and will be presented that way.

In the Image of God

Begin this session with some centering quiet or music as the group prepares to look at messages from our faith stories. The leader reads from Genesis 1. 27.

So God created people in God's own image, in the image of God, God created them; male and female God created them.

Divide up into smaller groups (3-4 people) for conversation. Take about 15 minutes to discuss these questions.

1. What does it mean to be created in the "Image of God?"
2. How would you describe the Image of God?
3. What unique message does God convey to the world through you?
4. What message does God convey to the world through someone who is unable to walk? Has a severe visual impairment? Has mental retardation? Does not communicate verbally?

When the leader has called the group back together, invite the participants to share in ONE word an image of God that came up in their small group. You could write these words on newsprint and leave them posted where everyone can see them.

Then have individuals read each of the following stories aloud to the group. As you read, think about what you are saying and who you are representing to the group. Leave some room for quiet in between readings.

1. GRANT in the Image of God

I suffered a brain injury when I was in my 40's which left me unable to use one side of my body. The technical term for this is "cerebral vascular accident," but most of us know it as a stroke. In addition to MY PHYSICAL diminishment, the stroke changed my perception of myself in space and time. At first I thought my true self had disappeared and what was left of me had taken up residence in this shell of a body. I had to regain my sense of balance all over again, just like a baby learning to walk without falling over or a kid riding a bike without training wheels for the first time. It was scary and I did in fact fall a few times. Because I was so weak from several months lying on my back in a hospital bed, when I started walking again I had to sit down a lot. When I first went back to my church I heard the

minister say, "All who are able may stand." That was like music to my ears because it meant it was OK to stay seated! When I used to hear that phrase before my stroke I thought it was stupid. "Of course only those who are able will stand," I thought. But now I felt INCLUDED in a new way.

One of the things that means the most to me is when someone comes up to me - usually a child - and asks me what happened to me. That gives me a chance to explain what a stroke is and why I walk funny. It helps us both not to feel embarrassed. Some other people are afraid to ask. One of the things I hate is when people try to do things for me that I can perfectly well do for myself, like pouring a beverage into a glass. Sometimes I can use help with a task, but it's much more liberating to be asked, "Do you need some help?" because that way I can say yes or no.

2. BROCK (middle school student) in the Image of God

The thing that I used to have, that I don't have anymore, is the ability to walk. I have muscular dystrophy, and I stopped walking about a year and a half ago. I'll continue to lose the ability to move my other muscles, too. But I really miss walking because people ignore me now. They think that because I am in a wheelchair, I am not smart. People who were my friends when I walked are not my friends now that I'm in a wheelchair because they think they would be embarrassed. I know who my real friends are now.

3. DEE in the Image of God

My husband and I began our Nebraska co-pastorate wondering how our congregation would feel about my traveling with a dog guide, wearing clodhopper shoes beneath my clerical robe, extending a brace-covered hand, and using a jaw support when speaking. While I revel in the freedom these tools offer within the barbed wire fences of blindness, rheumatoid arthritis, and diabetes, would my congregation?

I chose to be straightforward; so did they. These independent ranchers and townfolk know about partnership, whether that of maintaining balance within a difficult rural economy or an arduous life dance. They honor my physical challenges by recognizing my wholeness. Our shared acceptance of differences and gifts energizes this free-spirited, community-focused church. We take in stride the mud and muck of each other's journey as well as its joys.

An unspoken rapport connects us, heart with heart and soul with soul. All three members of this pastoral team, each with a unique ministry, feel welcomed for who we are "inside." I rejoice in this partnership of spirit and in the gift of having been sent by a generous God to this particular congregation. Bind us together, God, like the 110, unique "church family" squares in two quilted banners now hanging in our sanctuary. But let us not hem ourselves in.

4. BOB in the Image of God:

I compare incurring a disability to entering a foreign culture. We don't travel there willingly, we don't understand the language or customs of the natives of this strange land, and we grieve when we discover we've lost our return ticket back home to "normal." But, if you keep your wits about you and look around to gauge the lay of the land before you panic, you may find that a strange sort of grace accompanies a disabling injury or illness.

I was struck by a hit-and-run driver while bicycling in the spring of 1997, incurring a spinal cord injury that left me in a wheelchair. As a parish pastor, I've been able to return to my career, but have had to make many subtle adjustments in self-identity. Five years after the injury I took a sabbatical from my pastoral duties to write a book on my journey. The result, "Blindsided by Grace: Entering the World of Disability" (Augsburg Fortress Press), is not only an exploration of the concept of disability as a cultural and social phenomenon, but was a therapeutic tool for me to come to grips with my new body.

Several years ago my wife and I uprooted our children to move to Nicaragua for three years. Our daughter, who was five at the time, arrived in a horrible tantrum, screaming, "I don't wanna speak Spanish!" But after a few months in her new home, she made friends and took to the new language like a fish to water. When I awoke in the hospital six weeks after my injury I was screaming inside, "I don't wanna be a cripple!" But, like Kate, after some time getting acclimatized to my new culture, I'm finding the hidden grace in this condition

5. RITA in the Image of God

You wouldn't believe the difference my (guide/companion) dog has made. For years I have been ignored or shouted at because everyone thinks if you use a wheelchair you must have other disabilities as well. Now, I always get stopped while people ask me about my beautiful Black Labrador. We talk

dogs. It's really great. Not only does having a dog help me when I drop things or when I'm getting organized to drive my van, he has been really good "social glue". I don't feel so isolated any more.

6. JOHN in the Image of God

When I get fatigued I stop going to church. I think my pastor has figured this out because he always calls me if more than a week goes by. He helps me feel connected to my congregation, even when I don't have the energy to face everyone. He always invites me to come to Bible Study on Tuesdays which is nice because it is a small group.

7. LINDA in the Image of God

Last winter my doctor prescribed antidepressants for me. I felt so bad about being depressed, about having something wrong with my mind. Everything seemed gray and lifeless. I did not fill the prescription for at least a month. One Sunday in the sermon our Minister talked about depression and put it in the same category as other kinds of physical illnesses. And I thought, "Surely if I had diabetes, I'd take insulin". I filled my prescription on the way home from church.

8. JILL in the Image of God

I need to use the Large Print Bulletin on Sundays. It works out well for me because I can follow the prayers. Someone even makes sure the hymns are enlarged so I can enjoy singing along with the congregation. However, when I hear "You can read more about it in the bulletin insert" or "Look on the back of your bulletin for the time and place for the Youth Group auction" I get annoyed. It would be nice to have access to all the information everyone else has on a Sunday morning.

9. NORMA in the Image of God

Persons with identifiable disabilities have unique needs, but also unique gifts. The ministry of presence is a great gift to offer. Our son has this gift and many others to offer the body of Christ. He has a beautiful tenor voice, a believing heart, and a compassionate spirit. He is a choir member, a generous person, an employee, a son, a brother, an uncle, and he has a recurring illness, bipolar disorder. His illness does not define him. He is not a manic-depressive. He is a person who has an illness who periodically needs help in caring for himself. He needs medication; he needs other people's respect, love, and prayers; he needs God's comfort and mercy. He does not need to be part of some marginalized, stereotyped group of people

called, “the mentally ill”. No he is person who is “fearfully and wonderfully made” in the image of God.

10. MIKE in the image of God *

I find it very demeaning when a person with a disability is called “Pal” or “Buddy”. Every person has a first and last name. My name happens to be Mike Cohn, not Buddy or Pal. People with disabilities deserve to be treated like anyone else. Don’t be afraid to ask questions, for that is how we learn about one another. Disabled people are like everyone else; some are intensely private about themselves and some are very focused on themselves, but most want to mix in with everyone else and contribute in what ever ways we can to the greater good of society.

Group Discussion:

1. How did it feel to speak “in the voice” of someone with a disability? How does our congregation listen to the voices of people with disabilities?
2. Now brainstorm again as a group using one or two word phrases to describe “image of God”. Do you notice any changes from the first list?
3. On a fresh sheet of paper list the ways the image of God is presented in your building and through programming and worship in your congregation. For example, what image of God is revealed through stained glass, sculptures, staff, hymns, liturgy, outreach programs, children’s programming, adult education, etc?
4. How can we broaden and deepen our image(s) of God?

*this passage is from an article entitled, *Who Am I? Meet Average Joe*, published in the July 10, 2004 edition of Access Press, St. Paul, MN, and access@mninter.net

Read and Reflect

Make and distribute copies of, *Jesus Never Said, "Be Perfect"*, by Walter Wink. The following questions can be used for personal reflection or group discussion:

1. Do you see disabilities on a continuum that goes from slightly to extremely disabled? How might that view of disabilities influence a congregation?
2. What is the difference between “the well-off practicing charity” and “breaking down the barriers that have previously excluded those with disabilities”?
3. There was no such word as “perfect” in Jesus’ dialect. What words do we use to mean “perfect” in our lives?
4. How do we live with the “curse of perfectionism today”?

Jesus Never Said

“BE PERFECT”

By Walter Wink

In the popular mind, there are two kinds of people: normal and abnormal, normal and deformed, normal and disabled. Some are okay, others are not. But if pressed, we soon discover that almost everyone has disabilities, and that we are not talking about an either/or, but a continuum that runs from slightly disabled to extremely disabled.

Let me use myself as an example. I have been relatively healthy all my life, so that neither I nor those who know me would describe me as a person with disabilities. Nevertheless, in certain ways I am. My feet have hammertoes, and they have become increasingly painful, so that now I am unable to walk much more than a mile. I have had chronic back pains since injuring my back as a child. I have had irregular heartbeats, so I don't drink caffeine. I have hypoglycemia so I don't eat sugar.

Minor things, all, but that is precisely my point. Press anyone who looks “normal” and you will probably find, instead, a person with disabilities.

Yet such people do not define themselves as “disabled.” They think of themselves as normal people with disabilities. Now those who are sensitive to these issues are trying to help us see that all of us are acceptable, regardless of our disabilities. The problem, then, is not with those with disabilities, but with the very idea of “normalcy.” I want to work this idea of normalcy over, because I suspect that it is the source of the real trouble. There are three sources of this pernicious notion of normalcy:

- ☆ Hebraic cultic thought,
- ☆ Greek aesthetic norms, and
- ☆ Values of the Enlightenment.

The idea of normalcy is not only at the root of the mistreatment of people with disabilities, it is a pathological notion that creates illness, persecution and the rejection of our God-given uniqueness.

Blemish in Hebraic thought

In Hebraic sacrificial practice, both the gift offered to God, and the priest who makes the offering, must be “without blemish.” This phrase, “without blemish,” does not refer to some standard of perfection, as in later Greek thought. It flows rather from the belief that the gift must be the best one has -

- not the culls from the herd, not the runt lambs and three-legged goats, but the very best. One does not offer God the cast-offs but rather the most valued.

And the priest making the offering is to be fully representative of the people. Thus, according to Leviticus 21:16-24, the priest cannot be one who is blind, lame or a dwarf, or one who has a mutilated face, a limb too long, a broken foot or hand, a hunched back, a blemish in the eyes, an itching disease, scabs, or crushed testicles. In short, the maimed, diseased and deformed are excluded from priestly service.

What unites these quite diverse items is the notion of abnormality. These are not evil qualities; the person possessed of these disabilities is not cast out of the priesthood into which he has been born. He is still allowed to eat at the Temple table, and draw all his sustenance from the Temple economy. He is unable to represent the people of Israel in the Temple before God. He is excluded from sacrificing.

Note also that these are not necessarily aesthetic categories. While a few of the items are explicitly noted as being “unqualified by reason of unsightliness” (such as fallen eyelashes and lost teeth), the rest are simply deviations from the norm. The issue is not one of perfection or beauty; others might consider a priest ugly, but he could still officiate, as long as he was normal—that is to say, unblemished. Blemish denoted a negative standard of exclusion rather than a positive standard of perfection.

This demand for unblemished sacrificial beasts and priests arose directly out of Israel's sense of God's holiness. Holiness was like a vibratory energy. Anyone who drew near to God picked up this energy.

Israel's very separateness as a people was a consequence of ideas of holiness: God's holiness has fallen on Israel and has thus set it apart from all others. God's holiness must therefore be protected, almost, we might say, quarantined. Thus the closer one got to the Holy of Holies in the Temple, the greater the holy power one encountered.

By the same logic, one avoided everything unclean—anything that might contaminate God's holiness. Therefore people in unclean trades, like tanners, people in immoral occupations, like tax collectors and prostitutes, or people outside the covenant, like Samaritans and Gentiles, were to be avoided, because they would sully the holiness of God.

Jesus' rejection of purity

Jesus' table fellowship with social outcasts was an acted parable of the dawning of the age of reconciliation. Jesus deliberately contravened the entire program of holiness of the Pharisees and other groups in first-century

Judaism. He denied the equation of holiness with separation. He rejected the notion that external things defile or pollute a person's essential being:

There is nothing outside a person, that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile. (Mark 7:15/Matthew 15:11).

Jesus scandalized his hearers by his positive attitude toward Samaritans. He threw out altogether the notion that blemishes disqualify anyone before God.

Instead of holiness as separation, Jesus offered an economy of mercy that extends to all, especially outsiders. By abrogating the laws of purity, defilement and blemishes, Jesus was announcing a new image of God: a God not concerned with normalcy, a God who loves precisely the marginalized and rejected, whose tender womb aches for the uninvited and the unloved: a compassionate parent, transcending gender, the Mother and Father of us all.

In contrast to the traditional view that God's holiness had to be sequestered in a special place and protected against contamination, Jesus regarded holiness/wholeness as outgoing and contagious. Holiness was not a power to be guarded, but a force exploding into the world to bring it more into line with God's purposes.

The physician is not overcome by those who are ill, but rather overcomes their illness. Thus Jesus touches the leper, the unclean, women, the sick without fear of contamination. Jesus is not rendered unclean by the contact. Rather, those whom society regarded as defiled are made clean.

Holiness was not something to be defended or rationed. It was God's numinous transforming power. God's holiness cannot be sullied. It is a cleansing and healing agent. It does not need to be shut up and quarantined in the Temple. Through Jesus' healings and fellowship with the despised and rejected, it was breaking out into the world to transform it.

Therefore, Jesus taught, when normal folks give a banquet, they should not invite their friends—that is, other normal people of the same class, status, and persuasion, but rather they should invite *the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.* (Luke 14:13, 21)

This phrase virtually summarizes the lists from the Old Testament of those who are blemished and unable to serve before God. Jesus is not, then, simply suggesting that the well-off practice charity. He is directing them to go out of their way to break down the barriers that have previously excluded those with disabilities. Not only are they to be included in the festal celebrations, but they are to be given preferential attention. The last shall be first.

This means the very basis of human fellowship before God has been altered. Only when the previously excluded are ingathered can the feast

commence. Only when the pernicious idea of normalcy is destroyed can normal life begin.

The curse of perfectionism

If Jesus threw out the holiness code with its exclusiveness, why are people with disabilities today still subject to exclusion, bias, prejudice and discrimination? Churches themselves have a poor record of treatment of those with disabilities. How did that come about?

Let me suggest at least one cause: the biblical command to be perfect as God is perfect (Matthew 5:48). Matthew had just said that God loves everyone equally (5:45), and then three verses later he springs the demand for perfection on us. The gospel appears to be saying opposite things: God loves everyone, good and bad alike, unconditionally; and God does not love everyone, but only those who are perfect.

This closing line seems to fly in the face of everything Jesus has just taught. Normalcy seems to have been slipped right back in through the back door. Our heavenly Parent no longer seems to be kind to the ungrateful and the wicked, but has now become exceedingly choosy.

It may come as immediate relief to learn that Jesus could not have said, “Be perfect.” There was no such word, or even concept, in Aramaic or Hebrew. And for good reason.

The Second Commandment had forbidden the making of graven images (Exodus 20:4). Israel consequently never developed the visual arts. The word used by Matthew, *teleios*, was, however, a Greek aesthetic term. It described the perfect geometric form, or the perfect sculpture. It was seldom used in ethical discourse, since moral perfection is not within the grasp of human beings, and would even have been regarded, in Greek piety, as a divinely-punishable pride.

In Israel, the closest thing to the notion of perfection was being without blemish. This was a purely negative and functional idea, however. Remember, a priest whom we might regard as physically grotesque could still officiate at a Jewish sacrifice. There were no positive norms of beauty, only negative criteria of exclusion.

Among the Greeks, perfection did not accrue to people, but only to works of art. In the Christian Middle Ages, Greek and Hebrew thought coalesced, with sin taking the place of blemish. Perfection was negatively defined as not behaving or even thinking in certain ways. But the sense of sin was so profound that moral perfectionism was no factor at all except among the “spiritual athletes,” the ascetics, who made it their whole life's task to achieve moral perfection.

Protestants transform heresy

It was not until the Enlightenment, with its reintroduction of Greek aesthetic norms in neo-classical art and its search for universals, that widespread moralistic perfectionism became really imaginable. The merger of Protestant and Enlightenment thought now for the first time made the achievement of perfection—a heresy on its face—not only a cultural goal but a profound obsession.

That many Protestant churches officially espoused justification by grace alone scarcely checked the advance of perfectionistic moralism. The Enlightenment ideal of humanity making itself had so deeply penetrated Western culture that deviance was defined as failure to live up to social norms that one now had no excuse, such as human sinfulness, for violating, and for which no restitution, such as forgiveness, was offered. Unprotected by the doctrine of sin, secular people were thus held to standards of perfection impossible to achieve. Thus perfectionism is not simply a characteristic of Protestantism, but an artifact of Western culture generally.

Jesus never commanded this kind of perfectionism. Placed in its context within the rest of the paragraph, his saying about behaving like God becomes abundantly clear. We are not to be perfect, but, like God, all-encompassing, loving even those who have least claim or right to our love.

Jesus does not call for “wholeness,” though that would have been a better translation than “perfect.” For wholeness places all the focus on us, and Jesus points us away from ourselves to love our enemies. All-inclusive love is his goal, even if broken, contaminated by elements of our own unredeemed shadow, intermittent.

Jesus is not urging us to a perfection of being in ourselves, but to abandon all dreams of perfection and to embrace those we believe are least perfect, least deserving and most threatening to our lives. And we are to embrace all of that within ourselves as well.

We today are still living with the curse of perfectionism. For people with disabilities—and few are without them—perfectionism is the condemnation we feel for not having an acceptable body. This judgment is felt even by those who have what seem to be altogether adequate bodies.

Girls, and now increasingly, boys, feel they are not thin enough and so develop anorexia or bulimia. Fortunes are spent at health spas, not simply to get healthy exercise, but to try to measure up to some invisible and elusive standard of normalcy or perfection. Barbie dolls, *Playboy* or *Penthouse* centerfolds, and muscle and fashion magazines all trumpet an ideal figure to which we are all supposed to conform.

All people are not created equal. Do you see why I said at the outset that the problem is not with disabilities, but with the notion of normalcy? That seemingly universally held standard—the norm—is in fact an engine of the devil. It destroys people's capacity to accept their bodies. It creates an ideal, with those who conform most closely to that ideal getting the most attention, the most money, the most praise, and those farthest from that ideal being treated as the scum of the earth.

The Enlightenment taught that all people are created equal. If that is so, then it is your own fault if you have a mental or physical disability. The curious result of the Enlightenment doctrine of equality is the worst kind of inequality, built upon a denial of the obvious truth. We do not all begin from the same starting gate in life. Some are born to wealth, health and opportunities, while others are born to poverty, physical disabilities and malnutrition. It is an outrageous lie that all people are created equal. It is just another version of the blame-the-victim scam.

The gospel teaches not that we are all equal, but that we are all incomparable. Each person is unique in the eyes of God. All people, regardless of how they score on the popularity ratings of normalcy, are of infinite value, are infinitely treasured and are infinitely interesting. There is no end, no limit, to the love of God for each one of us.

My wife June never tires of comparing us to flowers. There is no such thing as a flower that is not beautiful. And we feel that way about each flower, even if it is missing a few petals. The beauty of individuals is not limited to those who fit cultural norms.

In fact, “falling in love” means being blinded to cultural norms so that one can see the divine uniqueness of a person and value her or him ultimately. Love is the trick God plays on us to tear us free from the cultural delusion of normalcy.

Disabilities are not the problem

So the problem is not people and their disabilities. We are all disabled in significant ways, and who is to say what is the more severe disability? Perhaps we must pity most those whose approximations to normalcy have been so successful that they are completely unaware of what is most unique about themselves.

Without doubt, the problem is rather with the idea of normalcy itself. Those who struggle most acutely with disabilities are a continual accusation to those who have sold their souls to normalcy. No wonder they are sometimes hated, mistreated, shamed or ignored. They are an ultimate threat to a normal person's very self-definition.

As we age, most of us will experience increasing disabilities. Rather than becoming depressed over these new limitations, we need to respond with compassion to these constraints. Perhaps they have something to teach us. They should certainly help us develop increased capacity to be present to those with more serious disabilities.

So the world is divided up into two groups after all. Not, however, the normal and the abnormal, or the able and the disabled. Rather, the line is drawn between those who are aware of their disabilities, and those who are not. Those who are more obviously disabled, or who have been forced by life to come to terms with their disabilities, have a prophetic task to play in awakening the rest of us to the uniqueness of who we are under God.

Walter Wink is professor of biblical interpretation at Auburn Theological Seminary, New York City. Portions of this essay were taken from his book Engaging the Powers, Fortress Press, 1992, and are used with permission. This article first appeared in a longer form in Auburn Views, Spring 1993.

This article first appeared in the February 1994 edition of *Response* published by United Methodist Women.

You are invited to read, pray, or sing the following meditation:

Just As I Am

Charlotte Elliot

Just as I am, without one plea,
But that your blood was shed for me,
And that you called inviting me,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, though tossed about,
With many a conflict, many a doubt,
Fightings and fears within, without,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, you will receive,
Will welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve,
Because your promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, your love unknown,
Has broken every barrier down;
Now to be yours, and yours alone,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Charlotte Elliot (1789-1871) wrote the words to *Just As I Am* in hopes it might aid financially in a school her brother started in Brighton, England. Miss Elliot was struck by illness at the age of 30. Unable to participate in parish life by being physically present, she wrote over 150 hymns as a way to worship God. This hymn, published in *The Invalid's Hymnbook*, brought in more revenue and support for the school than all the other fund-raising events. This version is from *The New Century Hymnal* #207.

Biographical details from www.webdelic.com/church/justasf

God is Still Speaking



GOD

Move the right open hand, palm facing left, from above the head downward in an arc toward the face.

Hint: The hand comes down from heaven.



STILL, YET

Beginning with both "y" hands in front of each side of the chest, palms facing in, move the hands downward toward each other and forward, ending with the palms facing down.

Hint: Shows continuous future action.



SPEAK, TALK

Beginning with the index-finger side of the right "4" hand at the mouth, palm facing left and fingers pointing up, move the hand forward with a double movement.

Hint: Shows words coming from the mouth.



Any Body

Part II

What We Know about Disabilities

This is your chance to “customize” presentations/learning experiences for your setting. The following are general guidelines to help the process.

1. **Frame the message that disabilities affect every one of us in some way.** By excluding (even unintentionally) people with disabilities we are depriving our congregation from the gifts of “God’s varied grace”. We are all somewhere on the ability/disability continuum. Chances are, if we live long enough, we will move to a different spot on the continuum eventually. Sudden diagnoses or accidents can also dramatically change our status. The more we know, the better prepared we can be to welcome one another in the name of God.
2. **Don’t overwhelm your audience.** Sometimes it is a good thing to offer a “Disabilities 101” type of forum as series for a congregation. Depending on the needs of the group several sessions might be the best way to approach the variety of topics that fall into the category of “disabilities”.
3. **Look for partners.** This is a topic that affects everyone so it is also an opportunity for Ecumenical or Interfaith partnerships. A local cluster of congregations and advocacy groups can plan a series or day-long event together. Some communities have disability awareness/advocacy organizations that provide this kind of support to local congregations.
4. **Find the experts.** One of the slogans of the Disability Rights movement is “Nothing about us without us”. There may people in your congregation available and willing to share their experience of disability. Alternatively, consider inviting someone or several people from outside your congregation to be your guests/teachers for these sessions. Keep in mind any accommodations that might be necessary (signers, companion dogs, caregivers, etc.)
5. **Decide ahead of time about areas you wish to emphasize.** There are a variety of disabilities to consider, and as with everything else, each person has their own experience of disability. Here are some general categories:

Developmental and learning disabilities: ADD, autism, Downs Syndrome

Disabilities that occur from birth: cerebral palsy, blindness, deafness

Later in life onset: stroke, multiple sclerosis, brain disorders

Trauma related disabilities: amputations, paralysis, brain injuries

Disabilities that affect our elders: Alzheimer's, dementia, arthritis

6. **Try to create a safe environment for everyone.** Encourage questions about practical matters as well as feelings. People are often surprised at the large amounts of planning and extra time it takes for many of us to get ready for the day or just getting from one place to another.
7. **Educate your staff.** Does your church staff know where to turn or where to refer families who may need specialized support for a member with a disability? Make sure the congregation is on local mailing lists to be informed about events, new resources, or opportunities for financial support (i.e. walks and races or art fairs or "galas" designed to support the local non-profits.) Offer to create a file that is updated regularly for referral purposes. There are excellent web sites that will have a great deal of information for disability awareness. They are listed in the following pages along with some organizations that may have chapters or counterparts in your community.
8. **Make some popcorn.** Many congregations and fellowship groups enjoy hosting a film series pertaining to a particular theme. The following films can help start an exploration of disability issues:

The Elephant Man

Fisher King

Mr. Holland's Opus

Rain Man

What's Eating Gilbert Grape?

Lorenzo's Gold

Mask

Forrest Gump

Children of a Lesser God

The Best Years of Our Lives

To Kill A Mockingbird

A Beautiful Mind

My Left Foot

The Sound and the Fury

Million Dollar Baby

Born in the USA

Cuckoo's Nest

The Miracle Worker

Passion Fish

King of Hearts

Discussion questions to consider:

1. How do you think the portrayal of disability in this film was influenced by the culture of the time?
2. Is the “problem” in the film the person with the disability or the society that will not accept him or her?
3. What are the feelings that the movie evokes?
4. How might this movie influence your attitudes or behavior?
5. What/where are the sources of strength for the characters in the film? Sources of pain or sadness?
6. Does this film reinforce stereotypes of people with disabilities?
9. **Field Trip.** Check your community out for opportunities to tour a vocational support center or see about visiting a rehab facility or adaptive gym that sponsors wheelchair basketball or has a therapeutic swimming pool. Often, these pools have open swim time for a small fee. For a true “immersion experience” a youth group could have a swim party in a place where there are ramps and lifts, and water chairs. Water is often a great equalizer for some people with disabilities. We regain some lost mobility or find the sensory part of swimming very relaxing. Another place to visit would be a training facility for working dogs. Often these are also non-profit groups who would enjoy having church partners for their work. Arranged visits to an early childhood center that “does” inclusive education would be inspiring for church educators and Sunday School volunteers. Make sure you call ahead to make arrangements for your group.
10. **Tell your story.** Use the church newsletter, worship opportunities, bulletin boards, website or Sunday bulletins to report on activities and announce upcoming events.

Disabilities Activism

People with Disabilities make up the largest “special interest” group in the nation (possibly the world!). Tremendous progress has been made from the times when we were completely hidden from society. Now there is legal protection for people who are discriminated against because of disability. Now public school districts are mandated to provide a free and appropriate education for children with disabilities from the age of 3 to 21. The Americans with Disabilities Act, signed in 1990, has improved access and helped educate employers, landlords, builders, architects, medical facilities, and local governments.

All of this has been achieved because of steady pressure from people with disabilities and our allies. The UCC has had a special role in these struggles largely due to the spirited commitment of Rev. Harold Wilke (1915-2003). Harold Wilke was born without arms. His parents and siblings, as well as his faith community, gave him the confidence and support necessary to have a very successful, very exceptional ministry. He founded The Healing Community/Caring Congregation in Claremont, CA. He traveled all over the world as a disability advocate for people in faith communities. He taught at Union Theological Seminary and was a frequent lecturer on many other campuses.

On July 26, 1990, Rev. Harold Wilke was asked to pray at the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act in White House Rose Garden. After signing the Act, President George H. W. Bush handed the pen to Harold who deftly accepted it with his toes.

Rev. Wilke served the entire UCC by chairing the “Advisory Committee on the Church and the Handicapped” which began in 1977. Rev. Virginia Kreyer staffed this committee until her retirement in 1995. Presently the UCC Disabilities Ministries Committee continues this ministry of advocacy and inclusion for people with disabilities within all aspects of the Church.

Signs of Liberation and Access

by
Harold Wilke

The festivals of the religious year show forth new meanings for access and liberation:

In the glory of Easter – the stone rolled away – we see the barrier removed.

In the wonder of Pentecost the message is heard, understood, and seen by all,

In the liberating act of Passover the message is:

“Let My People Go!” and the parting of the Red Sea.

In the joy of Advent God embodies divinity in human form.

Yet for many persons today – who are blind or deaf or have mental retardation or who are in wheelchairs – the barriers still remain;

The stone is still in place;

The waters are not parted, the way not opened;

The words cannot be heard;

The flame of the Spirit’s tongues cannot be seen, the message not understood.

Proclaiming the message in all languages for today means using Braille or larger print for people with visual disabilities, signing or special sound systems for persons with hearing disabilities; image, color and drama for people with cognitive disabilities; architectural access for people with physical disabilities or who are getting older.

Let the stone be rolled away!

Let the glorious message be proclaimed truly, in all languages

So all may hear and understand!

ANY BODY

Resources for Disability Awareness

Organizations:

UCC Disabilities Ministries - www.uccdm.org, Established Board within the United Church of Christ with the responsibility of supporting the denomination to fulfill its mission to become Accessible to All (A2A). We create resources and network with congregations and Conferences to further our work in this area.

National Organization on Disability - www.nod.org, Has a Religion and Disability organization that publishes several excellent publications and has programs designed for religious groups who want to improve accessibility. 910 16th Street NW, Washington, DC, 20006. (202) 293-5968

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) – www.nami.org is the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to improving the lives of persons living with serious mental illness and their families. Founded in 1979, NAMI has become the nation's voice on mental illness, a national organization including NAMI organizations in every state and in over 1100 local communities across the country who join together to meet the NAMI mission through advocacy, research, support, and education.

Public Education and Information Activities

- 888.999.6264 ~ NAMI's toll-free HelpLine serves over 4,000 callers a month and is staffed by a dedicated team of volunteer associates, as well as state and affiliate HelpLines in communities across the country;
- Public awareness activities such as *Mental Illness Awareness Week*, held during the first week of each October, helps dispel the stigma surrounding mental illness and encourage early intervention and treatment.

Pathways to Promise - www.pathways2promise.org is an interfaith technical assistance and resource center which offers liturgical and educational materials, program models, and networking information to promote a caring ministry with people with mental illness and their families. These resources are used by people at all levels of faith group structures from local congregations to regional and national staff. 5400 Arsenal Street St. Louis, MO 63139, FAX: (314) 877-6405, E-mail: pathways@mimh.edu

ARC - www.thearc.org, The Arc is the national organization of and for people with mental retardation and related developmental disabilities and their families. It is devoted to promoting and improving supports and services for people with mental retardation and their families. The association also fosters research and education regarding the prevention of mental retardation in infants and young children. Check for a local ARC organization for help with disability advocacy and support for individuals and families.

The PACER Center – www.pacer.org, The mission of PACER Center is to expand opportunities and enhance the quality of life of children and young adults with disabilities and their families, based on the concept of parents helping parents.

Through its ALLIANCE and other national projects, PACER, a national center, responds to thousands of parents and professionals each year. From California to Minnesota to New York, PACER resources make a difference in the lives of 6.5 million children with disabilities nationwide.

With assistance to individual families, workshops, materials for parents and professionals, and leadership in securing a free and appropriate public education for all children, PACER's work affects and encourages families across the nation. Excellent resource for understanding special education and disability rights.

PEAK - www.peakparent.org, PEAK Parent Center is Colorado's federally designated Parent Training and Information Center (PTI). PEAK assists families and others through services like its telephone hotline, workshops, conferences, website, and publications. Web site and printed materials are useful for families everywhere. PEAK sponsors excellent events for educators, parents and other professionals who deal with families and children (CLERGY!)

Disability History Museum – An excellent archive of the disability rights movement. Great articles and photos. www.disabilitymuseum.org

Additional Web Sites:

www.disabilityresources.org

www.disabilityworld.org

www.thenthdegress.org

www.inlcusion.com

Books:

That All May Worship: An Interfaith Welcome to People with Disabilities,

 Ginny Thornburgh and Ann Rose Davie -

An excellent handbook with sections about particular disabilities and an Audit of Barriers (architecture and attitudes). Available from National Organization on Disability (see above).

From Barriers to Bridges: A Community Action Guide for Congregations and People with Disabilities,

 Ginny Thornburgh and Janet Miller Rife -

Organizing tips for educational events and community-building activities. Songs, readings, and prayers appropriate for inclusive worship. Available from National Organization on Disability. (see above)

Dimensions of Faith and Congregational Ministries with Persons with Developmental Disabilities and Their Families.,

 Ed. William C. Gaventa -

A truly comprehensive bibliography and address listing of resources for clergy. Laypersons, families, and service providers. The guide is divided into areas of ministry and outreach, worship, pastoral care, religious education, videos, coping with grief, person-centered planning...and more! A “must-have” for the church library, seminaries, and Conference resource centers. 2005. 176 pages. Cost \$15.00 download order form www.rwjms.umdj.edu, also available in pdf format on website!

Blindsided By Grace: Entering the World of Disability ,

 Robert F. Molsberry, Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004 -

Excellent insights offered from the author’s experience before and after a serious accident. A unique look at disability in terms of cross-cultural understanding. A good choice for book groups and stimulating conversations. Bob Molsberry is a UCC Minister and is active with the UCCDM.

No Pity: People with Disabilities Forging a New Civil Rights Movement,

 Joseph P. Shapiro, New York: Random House, 1993 -

This book teaches us the “hidden history” of disability rights in this country. Learning where we have been is important in order for us to go forward.

The Wounded Healer, Henri J.M. Nouwen, New York: Image Doubleday, 1979 -

Understanding the power of ministry “in the broken places” of our lives. Spiritual teachings about universal vulnerability and God’s love and acceptance.

Author’s Note on Disability Awareness Exercises –

There are disability awareness “kits” designed to help able-bodied people experience certain kinds of disabilities. These simulation exercises are controversial with some people with disabilities and our allies. In an article written by Valerie Brew-Parish, “The Wrong Message”, she states the position that disability simulations should be abolished. Some of this article follows:



Simulations are phony. To "simulate" means to assume the mere appearance of -- without the reality. The reality is this: nondisabled persons can never understand what it is like to have a disability. Jumping in a wheelchair for a few minutes, wearing a blindfold, and stuffing cotton in one's ears does not make a person understand life with a disability.

People who have never been disabled who simulate a disability are often terrified. Many of the "simulators" even cheat a little. Haven't we all observed a person standing up in their wheelchair in order to lift the chair over a curb? They breathe a collective sigh of relief knowing full well that their charade will soon come to an end and their momentary disability will gratefully vanish.

Agencies purportedly serving disabled clients frequently advocate disability simulations, with fancy brochures encouraging the public to assume a disability with blindfolds and wheelchairs. The pamphlets gleefully expound the theory for teaching family with a disability is really that disability simulations are useful members and others what the person experiencing.



**What these
that the
or strategies**

**rehab professionals fail to realize is
public does not have the coping skills
developed by people who actually
have disabilities.**



This point was clearly illustrated a few years ago when airline personnel decided to blindfold themselves to test evacuation procedures in case of an airline crash. The results were disastrous. Naturally. The airline staff had no training in mobility or orientation. Therefore, they erroneously concluded that blind persons could never safely evacuate a plane. Nothing could be further from the truth.



When I'm disoriented in a dark place, I let my blind husband lead the way! The National Federation of the Blind has long argued that disability simulations are destructive. Other disability groups should follow their lead and speak out against these sordid attempts to empathize with us by becoming gimp for a day.

For several years, I was employed at a large university that sponsored an annual "Disability Awareness Day." Despite protests from students and staff with disabilities, the nondisabled sponsors of the event continued the spectacle.

I was told by participants that I was an inspiration because I coped so well with my disability. Others told me they would rather be dead than live with a disabling condition. The participants of the simulation debacle now looked at me with pity. In their eyes, I was no longer on an equal basis with them; they felt superior because all of their limbs were in proper working condition.



Regrettably, it seems every annual celebration of the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, every disability awareness event, is combined with a tasteless display of disability simulations. In many instances, persons with disabilities are actually participating and perpetuating these contemptible attempts to make the public aware.

Awareness Days can be beneficial if it they are done properly; it is important for the public to meet with persons with disabilities and to interact with us. Why not have people who use wheelchairs discuss obstacles and the need for accessibility? Deaf persons can demonstrate sign language skills, and blind persons can show proper travel techniques. The public needs to know we exist; that we are professionals, parents and homeowners just like them.

But disability simulations need to die a quick death. There are more effective and positive ways to educate the public. Come on folks, we can do

a better job getting our messages across. We do not need people to pretend they have disabilities and simulate our disabilities to understand us. All of us need to demand to be treated with dignity. When disability simulations become extinct, perhaps the flood of pity will dry up and be replaced with respect.

Valerie Brew-Parrish is a polio survivor and longtime disability activist. She writes a column on disability issues for her local newspaper. This article originally appeared in the March/April issue of “The Disability Rag”, now archived as the “The Ragged Edge Online”

www.raggededgemagazine.com

[Read the author's 2004 update.](#)

ANYBODY

Part III

What We Do

Congratulations, you have started the conversation about disabilities in your congregation!!

Here are some helpful handouts and ideas for getting this message around to each constituency in the congregation. Many of these have been part of packets previously distributed by the UCCDM. As we do the work of disability awareness, we tap into an ageless practice that spans all cultures and all religions: hospitality.

Ramping Up for Disability Awareness

1. List all the committees and groups that are part of your congregation. Plan a strategy for each group.
2. Distribute the resources included to help build awareness (i.e. everyone gets a copy of “Words That Empower”, ushers get specialized handout for them, spirituality group gets “The Accessible Labyrinth”, ministers get pastoral issues handout, liturgy planners get list of hymns). You are planting seeds.
3. Identify people who may wish to be part of an assessment process for your setting. Some churches have made this a youth group project. We all need to take an honest look around our buildings and at our curriculum and programming and judge our capacity for inclusion. Included is a list of places that have just such assessment tools available. Ask your governing body to endorse an accessibility audit and report back to that group with the results and any recommendations.
4. Advertise accessibility. Use symbols for accessibility in your publications.
5. Start a book/handouts/video/DVD collection for disabilities awareness. There are resource suggestions in each section of this study guide.
6. Promote disabilities awareness with Ushers and Greeters. Practice hospitality!

Materials to Share

1. “Ableism” – An outline for discussion of institutionalized attitudes and behaviors towards people with disabilities. Created by Marsh Saxton, Boston Self-Help Center.
2. “The Accessible Labyrinth” – Some ideas for making this popular spiritual tool more inclusive. Modified by Tracy Smith, City of Bloomington, MN.
3. “Hymns for A2A Congregations”- A listing of hymns from New Century Hymnal written and/or composed by people with disabilities or which highlight the gifts of an inclusive community.
4. “Words That Empower: How to Speak About People with Disabilities” – a style sheet for use and distribution throughout the congregation. UCCDM.
5. “Multisensory Worship Ideas” – Ways to design worship that will appeal to all our senses and does not rely solely on intellectual abilities. Created by Margot Hausmann
6. “Bring on the Church Coach” – Specific suggestions to summon the resources of a local congregation to support families who have children with disabilities. Written by Bill Van Dyken.
7. “New Access Symbols are More Than Design” – Graphics to use when describing accessibility in church programs and places. Helps broaden awareness beyond the “wheelie” handicapped access logo. From National Catholic Office for Persons with Disabilities.
8. Tips for Ushers and Greeters brochure – Perfect way to heighten awareness and give practical suggestions to the frontline people for ministry of hospitality.
9. “Pastoral Care and Disability: Tips to Consider”- For clergy and other church staff to connect with individuals with disabilities and their families. A good handout to utilize when seeking a church home. Prepared by UCCDM.

10. “Thoughts on the International Access Symbol”, Dan Wilkins. A thought-provoking message that will change how you see “wheelies”, by disability culture writer, artist, designer, and entrepreneur.
11. “Disability Etiquette Tips” from NOD. Everything Emily Post forgot to mention. Clear ideas and practical suggestions to build relationships based on respect.
12. “Guidelines for Writing About Disability”, Brewster Thackeray, NOD. Although Scripture and some liturgical prayers present challenges in referencing people with disabilities, we can and should use inclusive, “people first” language as much as possible. Here is a good foundation and a number of links to other style guides.

ABLEISM

Origins of Attitudes toward Disability

- Normalcy as a goal and standard of quality of life
- Tendency to focus on disability rather than abilities
- Isolation of persons with disabilities, institutionalization
- Negative stereotypes of persons with disabilities
- Conscious and unconscious fear of becoming disabled
- Youth and beauty culture
- Personal/family history of illness/ disability

Overt Signs of Discrimination

- Architectural barriers
- Discrimination in housing, employment, etc.
- Communication access issues: interpreters, large print/taped material, etc.
- Segregation, institutionalization

Behaviors Directed towards Persons with Disabilities

- Avoidance behaviors/turning away
- Staring
- Avoiding physical contact/emotional distancing
- Pity/guilt/condescension
- Confusion around helping
- Denial of biased behaviors

Stereotypes of People with Disabilities

- People with disabilities are...
 - Weak and need help
 - Heroes (“Super Crisp”)
 - Depressed with low motivation

- Responsible for their condition (bad karma, negative attitude, “name and claim” disability, insufficient faith in God)
- Well-taken-care-of by society/have easy lives
- Embarrassed to be in public
- Prefer to be with others like themselves
- Mentally incompetent (proportional to degree of disability)
- People with disabilities are...
 - Not sexual/asexual
 - Saints/sinners
 - Deserving of charity
 - Always cheerful
 - Ill-tempered
- People with disabilities. . .
 - Have little to look forward to in life
 - Should not expect to marry
 - Should not be encouraged to have children
 - Are incompetent to raise children
- Problems people with disabilities have are always related to their disability
- One should not raise the hopes/expectations of persons with disabilities or expect too much of them

Responses of People with Disabilities to Ableism

- Attempt to “pass” or “act normal”
- Deny disability or its impact
- Avoid asking for help, even if needed
- Overcompensate
- Underestimate self-worth, skills, and abilities
- Isolate themselves
- Lower their expectations
- Engage in substance abuse
- Over medicate/under medicate
- Experience feelings of despair, powerlessness, and isolation

LABYRINTH BASICS

©Jill K H Geoffrion, Pondering the Labyrinth

WHAT IS A LABYRINTH? A labyrinth is a symbol, a pattern, or energy field that contains a single pathway that turns back on itself at least once before leading to a center.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF A LABYRINTH? There are many. Different purposes have surfaced throughout history including:

- | | |
|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| ■ Decoration | ■ Symbolic |
| ■ Prayer | ■ Reminder of Death and Rebirth |
| ■ Protection | ■ Psychological Exploration |
| ■ Inspiration | ■ Ritual |
| ■ Amusement | ■ Competition |
| ■ Guidance | ■ Involving Physical Skill |
| ■ Meditation | ■ Ceremony |
| ■ Distraction | |
| ■ Creation | |
| ■ Dance | |
| ■ Problem Solving | |

IS THE LABYRINTH ASSOCIATED WITH ANY PARTICULAR RELIGIOUS TRADITION? Throughout history labyrinths have been used by members of many spiritual and secular traditions for differing purposes. Some labyrinth patterns have been altered or created to include specific religious messages. Because of the symbolic nature of the labyrinths, they are open to varying interpretations. Therefore, people of different religious backgrounds are able to be together on a labyrinth in ways that are spiritually meaningful, but do not always carry the same content.

WHY WOULD SOMEONE USE A LABYRINTH?

- To gain clarity.
- To break old patterns.
- To Explore.
- To connect with God.
- To receive help.
- To become more open.
- To relax.
- To find wisdom.
- To celebrate.
- To turn a new corner.
- To pray.
- To integrate inner and outer realities.
- To heal.
- To wonder.
- To see if anything is going to happen.
- To mediate.
- To connect with Sacred Truth.

BEFORE USING A LABYRINTH, WHAT DOES A PERSON NEED TO KNOW? Nothing. Many suggest that experiencing a labyrinth is the best introduction possible. Willingness to engage the pattern and be engaged by the pattern is all that is needed.

THE ACCESSIBLE LABYRINTH

Tracy Smith

The primary beauty of this ancient tool is that it is programmatically inclusive by its very nature. Whether you "walk" the labyrinth with your "feet," fingers, or eyes, the experience can be equally personable and powerful. The labyrinth experience can aid healing, understanding, and acceptance of the mind, body, and spirit.



REMEMBER THESE STANDARD SUGGESTIONS FOR AN INCLUSIVE LABYRINTH EXPERIENCE?

- No previous experience is necessary to experience the a labyrinth.
- You may move at your own speed.
- It is okay to walk around others or let them walk around you.
- If you need to exit the labyrinth at anytime, it is okay to walk out of the labyrinth.
- There is no right or wrong way to "walk" the labyrinth.



ARE ALL LABYRINTHS PHYSICALLY ACCESSIBLE?

Some labyrinths are on uneven ground such as grass or on a beach. Here are some suggestions to make a path accessible or offer variations of labyrinths.

- **FINGER LABYRINTH** - created on paper, wood or other surface that would allow a person to follow the journey with their finger.
- **VISUAL LABYRINTH** - encourage a person to trace the path of any style of labyrinth with their eyes.
- **LABYRINTH PERIMETER WALK** - some may find value and accessibility in "walking" the outside of the labyrinth path.
- **CANVAS LABYRINTH** - this flat surface can be positioned on an accessible path and surface so that any individual can get on the labyrinth. Please note that the standard width of a wheelchair is 32" wide. This shouldn't hinder a person from entering a canvas labyrinth with a narrower path. The canvas may bunch up when the individual turns, however others using the labyrinth could quietly help in straightening out the canvas.
- **CREATE-YOUR-OWN** - use rocks, shells, sticks, or any item to create your own 3 or 7 circuit labyrinth on an accessible spot such as a parking lot or gymnasium floor. Ensure paths are a minimum of 36" wide and the center is 80" in diameter to allow for a person in a wheelchair to make a complete turn in the center of path.
- **ADVERTISING YOUR LABYRINTH** - indicate the terrain to the path and alternative labyrinth opportunities, so an individuals can plan accordingly for his/her own needs.

Prayers From Various Traditions

For use with a finger labyrinth or on a classic labyrinth



From the Christian Tradition

"Thy will be done." Matthew 6:10

From the Egyptian Tradition Prayer for Pilgrims

See: Phil Cousineau, *The Art of Pilgrimage*. Conari Press, 1998

"Be safe and well.
Peace, love and courage."

From the Hindu Tradition

"From what is unreal,
lead me to what is real."

From the Jewish Tradition

Pray as if everything depends on God,
Act as if everything depends on me.

From the Sufi (Muslim) Tradition

"May Divine Light be before me, behind
me, to my right, to my left, above and
below."

From the American Secular Tradition

"Whatever!"

Adapted from ©Jill K H Geoffrion, www.jillkhg.com

New Century Hymnal – Hymns for A2A Congregations

The history of hymnody in our tradition has numerous writers and composers with disabilities. It was a way to be included in the spiritual community, even though it was difficult to participate in the same way others did. Fanny Crosby, who was blind, wrote over 8,000 hymns. Charlotte Elliott published a number of hymns in “The Invalid’s Hymn Book”. And, of course, one of the most often sung hymns in many of our churches, “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee”, was set to music written by a deaf man. The following hymns will add a “note” of inclusion in worship.

- #4 Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee
- #16 Let Us With a Joyful Mind
- #54 O Praise the Gracious Power
- #146 Glad Tidings
- #163 Many Are the Lightbeams
- #175 O Christ, the Healer, We Have Come
- #176 “Silence, Frenzied, Unclean Spirit”
- #177 God of Change and Glory
- #178 We Have the Strength to Lift and Bear
- #179 We Yearn, O Christ, for Wholeness
- #197 Jesus Keep Me Near the Cross
- #207 Just As I Am
- #254 These Things Did Thomas Count
- #473 Blessed Assurance
- #495 Called As Partners in Christ’s Service
- #539 Won’t You Let Me Be Your Servant
- #551 Pass Me Not O Gentle Saviour
- #553 There Is A Balm in Gilead
- #554 Out of the Depths, O God, We Call
- #562 Take My Gifts
- #564 We Are Not Our Own

There are many wonderful images of inclusion and wholeness in these and other hymns. Chanting and instrumental music, especially drumming, is another way to connect with people who may not be readers or singers.

Words that Empower: How To Speak About People With Disabilities

Positive language empowers. When writing or speaking about people with disabilities, it is important to put the person first. Catchall phrases such as "the blind," "the deaf," or "the disabled," do not reflect the individuality, equality, or dignity of people with disabilities. Following are some recommendations for use when speaking, writing copy, and developing stories:

1. Unless it is crucial to your story, focus on the individual, not on his or her disability, which is only one facet of the person. In all cases, try to keep the person's disability in proper perspective, without unduly magnifying its importance.
2. Portray successful people with disabilities as successful people, not as superhumans. Overstating the achievements of people with disabilities inadvertently suggests that they are exceptions, and most others with disabilities are not competent or are incapable of out-standing achievements in their own fields.
3. When reporting on people with disabilities, consider the broader implications of how quality of life issues like accessible transportation, housing, affordable health care, employment opportunities, and discrimination impact a large and growing segment of the US. population.
4. Be accurate in describing disabilities. For example, people who had polio and experience aftereffects years later have a post-polio disability. They do not have a disease. Similarly, people with disabilities should not be referred to as "patients" or "cases" unless the relationship with their doctor is the subject.
5. Emphasize abilities, not limitations. For example, say "uses a wheelchair" or "walks with crutches" rather than "con fined to a wheelchair," "is wheelchair bound," or "is crippled:" Similarly, avoid use of inappropriate emotional descriptors such as "unfortunate" or "pitiful."

FOLLOWING ARE EXAMPLES OF POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE PHRASES. NOTE THAT THE POSITIVE PHRASES PUT THE PERSON FIRST.

Affirmative Phrases

- Person who is blind
- Person with a disability
- Person who is deaf; person who is hearing impaired or hard-of-hearing
- Person who has multiple sclerosis
- Person with cerebral palsy
- Person who has muscular dystrophy
- Person with mental retardation
- Person with epilepsy; person with seizure disorder
- Person without disabilities
- Person who uses a wheelchair
- Physically disabled
- Seizure

Negative Phrases

- The visually impaired
- The disabled, handicapped
- Suffers a hearing loss
- Afflicted by MS
- CP victim
- Stricken by MD
- Retarded, mentally defective
- Epileptic
- Normal person (implies that person with a disability is not normal)
- Confined or restricted to a wheelchair
- Crippled, lame, deformed
- Fit

- Unable to speak; uses synthetic speech
- Successful, productive
- Courageous (when it implies the person has courage because of having a disability)
- Person with psychiatric disability
- Person who no longer lives in an institution
- Says she has a disability
- Dumb, mute
- Has overcome his or her disability
- Crazy, nuts
- The deinstitutionalized
- Admits she has a disability

The ultimate objective of all of these suggestions is to move our society to the point where disability status is only one variable in the full range of human experience. In other words, when thinking about people with disabilities, think about people first.

Sources: The President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities and Guidelines to Reporting and Writing about People with Disabilities (copyrighted third edition, 1990), produced by the Research and Training Center at the University of Kansas in consultation with more than 100 disability organizations. Single copies are available from the Media Project, Research and Training Center on Independent Living; 4089 Dole; University of Kansas; Lawrence KS 66045.

Publication is available in alternative formats.

October 1993

*President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities
1331 F Street NW Washington DC 20004*



Multisensory Worship Ideas

Ideas collected by Margot Hausmann; all rights reserved. Please feel free to copy, use, and share with others in ministry!

KINESTHETIC ELEMENTS

CLAPPING with hands, feet, and eyes!

DANCE and expressive dance movements with arms or legs as able

PROCESSIONS to site of worship with banners, placards, wheelchairs, music, etc.

TRIPUDION step of humility, taking three forward and one back; also appropriate for wheelchairs

ORANS, uplifted hands as a gesture of prayer

RAISING OF THE EYES as praise or to ask for God's help

FOLDING OF THE HANDS symbolizes submission to God's will
(Imagine God's hands around your own)

FORFOLD MOVEMENT when a four word response is required (i.e., "Lord hear our prayer"), those gathered may participate with four claps, four stomps

GESTURAL LEADERSHIP as congregation follows the leader's gestures (posture, arms, etc.)

PASSING THE PEACE with a handshake or hug as a sign of reconciliation

BREATHING "in" the Holy Spirit and breathing "out" the old, stale air

STRIKING of the breast in penitence

KNEELING in humility or penitence

PROSTRATION laying face-down in humility, depravity (as some disabled folks demonstrate on their positioning equipment!)

MARKING the sign of the cross on one's body symbolizes belonging to God

OFFERING gifts by bringing them forward

POSITION wheelchairs or other chairs as in DaVinci's Last Supper or other meaningful ways

CONGREGATIONAL DANCE by clasping arms at shoulder level and swaying, stepping

DRAMATIZING the "feeling" of a word by worshipers, such as "love" or "praise"

PREPARING THE WAY participants may clear away clutter and obstacles from worship space to make the way to our hearts “accessible” for Christ

APPROACHING table to receive Eucharist

WRITING of prayer requests, if able

AUDITORY ELEMENTS

GREETING each person by name

SACRING BELL calling those gathered to worship, or rung before scripture is read

SPEAKING THE NAMES of participants often (i.e., “God so loved the world, Helen, that he gave his only son, Richard. . .”)

TAPED MUSIC to which participants can join in song or with instruments

SUNG MUSIC choruses or simple songs

HAND-HELD INSTRUMENTS maracas, tambourine, bells, etc.

HEAD-HELD INSTRUMENTS bells attached to a baseball cap

CLAPPING with hands or feet!

PASSING THE PEACE by name, “The peace of the Lord be with you, Nicky, and with your spirit”

READING of the word

RESPONSIVE READINGS which allow a congregation or assistant leader to participate with a simple response, “God’s love lasts forever” (Psalm 136)

TAPED OR PHONE-LED LEADERSHIP by someone not able to get out to worship, such as the scripture reading

ANTHEMS which proclaim the word

INVITING SPOKEN PRAYER REQUESTS while also listening for the meaning behind nonverbal vocalizations to include in prayer (a cry, laugh, shout, etc.)

SYMPHONY/CACOPHONY OF PRAYER, inviting all to speak their prayers simultaneously

BIDDING PRAYER short petitions which may conclude with the leader saying, “Lord in your mercy,” to which all respond, “Hear our prayer”

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT in the background of pastoral prayer if lengthy

SING FIVEFOLD “AMEN” to conclude prayers

INTERPRETATION WITH VOICE of a service which is first signed

SILENCE of being still before God

GROAN for joy or for grief; allowing Holy Spirit to interpret our prayers

VISUAL ELEMENTS

COLORFUL BANNERS appropriate to the message, also use of simple symbols such as arrows pointing up or down

COLORFUL FLAGS to wave, or a tall pole bearing an inverted hanger strung with long ribbons

CLOTH DRAPED IN WORSHIP SPACE red for Pentecost, etc.

STOLE AND PARAMENTS of season's liturgical color, also point out others present wearing color. When celebrating the priesthood of all believers, crepe paper stoles for all!

WORSHIP PENDANTS, leader may wear large symbols such as bread, grapes, rock, fish, light bulb, etc., explaining meaning

COLORED BANDANAS for all, worn around the neck, purple for Advent, etc.

SIGN LANGUAGE, sign a greeting, simple songs, prayers, Lord's prayer, benediction, etc. All participants may be invited to sign even a simple "Thank you," "I'm sorry," "Please," or "I love you" to God in prayer

GESTURAL LORD'S PRAYER with fewer and more simple gestures than American Sign Language

BRIGHT SATIN RIBBONS may be attached to hand-held instruments

COLORFUL SCARVES to wave during music

BALLOONS to celebrate baptism, or in color of liturgical season

BUBBLES blown in celebration!

FLOWERS as a sign of life

A DOVE hanging from the ceiling as reminder of the Spirit's presence

A CANDLE (when safe) as reminder of God's presence

SLIDES PROJECTED onto screen corresponding to each part of the service (i.e. Bible, offering plate, praying hands)

LITURGICAL DANCE which illuminates text

SIGN OF THE CROSS which marks an individual as belonging to God

OBJECTS which lend themselves to the teaching: i.e., crown, wrapped gift, rock, etc.

SIGNS OF THE SACRAMENTS including font, table, cup, plate

BIBLE visible when read

BOLD GESTURES AND SIGNS which will illuminate the text as it is read

ASH CROSS on forehead for repentance

STAINED GLASS WINDOW (where available) as the object of instruction

A PROCESSION with banner at the front on appropriate days: Palm

Sunday, All Saints, Good Friday. May include balloons, sunflowers, sparklers, trumpets, cross etc.

AN ADVENT TREE to which an appropriate symbol ornament is added each week

RAISED HANDS of the worship leader as the closing blessing is announced

DRAWN SIGNS such as a “happy face” or a “sad face” to be worn as worshipers participate in a liturgical drama

WRITTEN SIGNS to be worn as worshipers participate in a liturgical drama as various “characters”: Hope, sorrow, Promise, Rejection, etc.

PARTICIPANTS LEAD FROM THEIR WEAKNESS, leader explains that I.V. (intravenous) treatment is a metaphor for how the LORD feeds and strengthens; leader may explain the spiritual significance of humility behind a “bowed” posture if someone is bent over, etc.

TACTILE ELEMENTS

GREETING AND GENTLY TOUCHING each person as service begins

WIND from a fan as a reminder of Spirit’s presence, hand-held or electric

ANOINTING of hand/forehead with oil

LOTION can be rubbed on hands

ASPERSION blessing by sprinkling water with an evergreen branch as benediction

MISTING gently from a water bottle

WARM WASHCLOTH touched to forehead as a sign of cleansing

HOT STEAM TOWEL service as a sign of cleansing

TOUCHING of object involved in the lesson, such as water, rock, etc.

LAYING ON OF HANDS as participants receive a prayerful blessing.

Depending on comfort level: gentle touch on arm, hand on head, shoulders, or embracing sides of head with hands

PLACING A ROBE on the newly baptized, symbol of being clothed with Christ

HAND WASHING OR FOOT WASHING ceremony (John 13), washing of hands for what you’ve done, washing of feet for where you’ve been, washing of face for how you’re known

SIGN OF THE CROSS MADE WITH WATER on forehead as a reminder of baptism

SIGN OF THE CROSS MADE WITH ASHES on forehead as a reminder of mortality, repentance

OLFACTORY ELEMENTS

SCENTED ANOINTING OIL on hand/forehead

INCENSE as a reminder of God's presence in the temple

SCENTED CANDLE for God's presence

BAKING BREAD from portable bread-making machine

WINE brought to participants to smell

LOTION which can be rubbed on hands

PERFUME to signify our fragrant praise offering

SCENT OF FLAVORS (found in baking section) on cotton ball, kept airtight

GUSTATORY ELEMENTS

EUCHARIST receive bread, juice; can be served to all as a taste of pabulum with grape juice, or in the Russian Orthodox tradition of breaking the bread into the cup and spooning it into mouth

TASTES of honey, bitter herbs, and other illustrative flavors

Practical Helps for Church Ushers

We all know that persons with disabilities and their families should be integrated into the life of the church and we want to be welcoming in every way. However, we often don't know what to do and we fear doing the wrong thing. Thus we sometimes appear to be unwelcoming when in reality we are just uncertain. This brochure is designed to assist ushers and other church leaders to offer hospitality to persons with disabilities.

BASIC SUGGESTIONS

- Always speak directly to persons with a disability instead of to their companion.
- Don't hesitate to ask the person if you can help and then follow her or his instructions carefully.
- Whenever possible seat the person with his or her family or friends.
- Don't ignore persons with disabilities. Include them in what you are saying and doing.
- Stress the person not the disability. (Example: a person who is blind, deaf, etc. instead of a blind person).

VISUAL DISABILITIES

- When greeting a person who has a visual disability, identify yourself and your role (usher, greeter, etc.)
- Explain where things are located.
- If the person has a guide dog ask how much room is needed for the dog.
- Offer a bulletin whether the person can read it or not. Make sure there are large print bulletins available.
- If possible, offer a Braille or large-print hymnal.
- Ask the person where s/he would like to sit and then walk the person to his/her seat.
- Explain the order for worship if the person is unfamiliar with your church.
- Offer assistance when and if needed. Extend your elbow, do not grab or push the person.

HEARING DISABILITIES

- Speak clearly, slowly and normally. If your church has audio aids, show the person where they are and how to use them.
- Never speak directly into a person's ear. If necessary, communicate in writing.

SPEECH DISABILITIES

- Try to give your full, unhurried attention to a person who has difficulty speaking.
- Remember, a person with a speech impediment may use alternative ways of communicating, including writing.
- Resist the urge to complete words or sentences for persons with speech difficulty.
- Slow down! Take the time to appreciate the person talking.

MOBILITY DISABILITIES

- A person who uses a wheelchair may be able to walk, but may prefer to use the wheelchair—honor that choice.
- Do not move a wheelchair or crutches out of reach of the person who uses them.
- If possible, provide a shortened pew for the person who uses a chair so s/he can sit with the rest of the congregation.
- If you must lift a wheelchair, be sure to follow the person's instructions carefully. S/he knows best what works for him/her.

DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

- If some congregational members are uncomfortable by the behavior or needs of a person with developmental disability, try to find others who are willing to share a hymnal, explain the service, or sit with the person at coffee hour or lunch. It's a good idea to train someone in advance to offer such assistance.
- Offer a bulletin to a person with developmental disability whether he or she can read it or not.

MENTAL ILLNESS

- Treat persons with mental illness and the families just as you do any other member of the Body of Christ.
- Some persons with mental illness may be disruptive. Find one or two members of the congregation who are willing to approach the person quietly and ask him or her to accompany them to another area of the church, where they can talk aloud while others listen to the sermon or service.
- Persons on medication for mental illnesses may exhibit facial or bodily movements which people unaccustomed to this side effect of drugs may not understand. A good program of information about mental illness—which affects one family in four—is helpful.

IN CASE OF EMERGENCY

- If a person has a seizure, don't attempt to restrain her or to put anything in her mouth. Move objects or furniture to prevent injury. Make the person feel comfortable after the seizure, perhaps by helping her to a comfortable place to rest, and by offering reassurance.
- Since a sudden attack could be epilepsy, a stroke, or a reaction to medication, find out at once whether there is a nurse, a doctor, or an informed family member present. While they attend the person, call for emergency medical assistance. (Keep the number posted next to the church telephone.) One usher should call **immediately** while another helps the person in need.

Bring On The Church Coach!

Bill Van Dyken is the Religious Services Coordinator of Hope Haven Inc. in Rock Valley Iowa. He is also a church coach. He doesn't organize winter basketball teams, or summertime softball. He organizes congregational care teams. How? By helping families of persons with disabilities contact their congregation. He goes with them to meet with a group to tell their story describing their simple basic need for a break in the tasks of care giving through the support of others they can trust. Bill then helps organize and guide these groups into a team of friends within that congregation. These teams take turns providing respite care to that family as a way of support and living out their own faith and call.

So what's a church coach? A church coach (or synagogue coach or mosque coach) is not that different from a job coach or inclusion facilitator. However, he or she works in a very different kind of organization and community.

The familiar story is that of families with children or adults with disabilities who have not had much support from their congregation. Sometimes, it is an issue of trying, and not having any success. Sometimes, it is spiritual abuse: when a church leader or congregation member has said or done something that has been very wounding. These wounds can be particularly painful coming from “a man of God” or “God's people.” More often, it is fatigue. Parents who have had to fight and advocate in every other area of their children's lives may not want to when it comes to church. “That's the one place,” they have often said, “where I thought I wouldn't have to. If I do, forget it. It is easier not to go.” Sometimes not wanting to advocate within the congregation is the normal struggle with being or appearing vulnerable, or to ask for something for ourselves. When it comes to church, most of us would rather be givers than receivers.

The other side of that story is a congregational community that simply does not know the struggles and journey; that may want to help, but does not know how; that is afraid and uncertain of how to act or respond; that is, ironically, dis-abled in their ability to act in faith and love.

Thus enters the church coach. A person who believes that within congregations, there are many groups of people who will respond to others, once they see the need and feel empowered to do so. The coach's role is to help a family or person with a disability tell their story to the right group,

and then help the congregation to see their own capacity and ability to support that family or person. Most families don't want *special* ministries or services. The *real* gift to them and their children is to be included in what is the typical and normal life of that particular community of God's people.

When people say, “Well, we would like to respond or help, but we don't know how,” the coach is the one who responds:

- “I can help you learn.”
- “The family can help teach you.”
- “Let's work on it together.”
- “All the questions and fears you have are perfectly normal, and it is OK to ask me.”
- You *all* can do something I can't. You can include that kid in that class, or be his friend on the retreat, or help her be part of the synagogue's preschool...”

The coach knows that he or she is on the sidelines. The coach's role is to teach, guide, motivate, celebrate, and support a group of others who begin to learn about their own capacity and ability to do something they once thought they could not do.

Where do you find these coaches? Lots of places. They could be a chaplain of an agency or program, like Bill Van Dyken, a Director of Ministries with People with Disabilities at the local diocese; or someone like Wendy Chesnov, who works for the Jewish Metrowest Federation in New Jersey. She helps congregations include children with disabilities in all kinds of programs of Jewish life and education. They could also be a professional in your congregation who works in the area of disabilities, or your child's teacher, or, think of it, someone from the IEP (Individualized Education Program). Lots of professionals are also people of faith, but have not been asked to use their gifts from both “worlds” to help faith communities with inclusive supports. What the coach *must* be is someone of faith who sees the needs, gifts, and abilities of everyone concerned through the eyes of faith, and can use the language of that congregational community, not of the IEP.

A coach *could* be a parent, but neither the church nor the parents should have to be the coach for their own child or member. I remember a mother telling me that the Sunday School teacher of her children with ADHD asked her not to send her fourteen year old son anymore, unless she could come to help out. Her son may have needed a buddy, or several, and a coach to work with them. How many teenagers want their own *parents* performing that

role! Much better that the parents can be the teachers for those who are willing to help. However, like a coach, they must be willing to believe others can and *will* respond, and then *let go*.

The resource materials are out there for congregations to use. A wealth of materials on inclusive religious education, respite care, congregation-based circles of support youth activities and more is compiled by the Religion Division of AAMR. For many families of children with developmental disabilities, their congregations have been life-giving sources of hospitality, friendship, and support. For many, many others, that *is* not the story. Bring on the *Church Coaches!*

~Bill Gaventa

Bill Gaventa, M.Div., serves as Director of Community and Congregational Supports at the Elizabeth M Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities, and Associate Professor, UMDNJ-Robert Wood Johnson Medical School.

This article is used with permission by Disability Solutions, 9220 S.W. Barbur Blvd. #119-179, Portland, OR 97219-5428; www.disabilitysolutions.org.

To learn more about two care team models visit www.pcusa.org/health/usa (Congregational Care Teams) or www.pcusa.org/phewa/pdc (Circle of Friends).

From <http://www.gag.org/resources/das.php> -
The Graphic Artists Guild

Disability Access Symbols

The twelve symbols below may be used to promote and publicize accessibility of places, programs and other activities for people with various disabilities.

Organizations, both public and private, are working to be fully accessible to this country's 54 million citizens with disabilities as well as foreign visitors. Organizations that receive government funding are required to provide accessible programs and services under Sections 503 and 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. A more recent law, the 1990 Americans with Disability Act (ADA), extends accessibility provisions to the private sector in order to help guarantee persons with disabilities employment and the right to enter the economic, social and cultural mainstreams. The ADA goes well beyond federally funded organizations to encompass private sector entities that serve the public, including cultural organizations that do not receive federal support, retail businesses, movie theaters, and restaurants.

These symbols are intended to help you advertise your access services to customers, audiences, staff and other targeted publics. Advertisements, newsletters, conference and program brochures, membership forms, building signage, floor plans and maps are examples of material that might display these symbols. You are encouraged to place these symbols next to the relevant information in all publications and media.

Any language accompanying the symbols should focus on the accommodation or service, not on who uses it. For example, "Ramped Entrance" may accompany the wheelchair symbol. This is important because not only do individuals in wheelchairs use ramps, but so do people with baby carriages, luggage, packages, etc. Language that fosters dignity is important too. For example,

"Reserved Parking" or "Accessible Parking" may be used with the wheelchair symbol to indicate that parking spaces designated for people with disabilities.

To Order by Mail

You may also obtain Mac or PC floppy disk copies of all the symbols by contacting the Graphic Artists Guild Foundation at 212-791-3400.

Access (Other Than Print or Braille) for Individuals Who Are Blind or Have Low Vision

This symbol may be used to indicate access for people who are blind or have low vision, including: a guided tour, a path to a nature trail or a scent garden in a park; and a tactile tour or a museum exhibition that may be touched.



Symbol for Accessibility

The wheelchair symbol should only be used to indicate access for individuals with limited mobility including wheelchair users. For example, the symbol is used to indicate an accessible entrance, bathroom or that a phone is lowered for wheelchair users. Remember that a ramped entrance is not completely accessible if there are no curb cuts, and an elevator is not accessible if it can only be reached via steps.



Audio Description

A service for persons who are blind or have low vision that makes the performing arts, visual arts, television, video, and film more accessible. Description of visual elements is provided by a trained Audio Descriptor through the Secondary Audio Program (SAP) of televisions and monitors equipped with stereo sound. An adapter for non-stereo TVs is available through the American Foundation for the Blind, (800) 829-0500. For live Audio Description, a trained Audio Descriptor offers live commentary or narration (via headphones and a small transmitter) consisting of concise, objective descriptions of visual elements: i.e., a theater performance or a visual arts exhibition.



Telephone Typewriter (TTY)

This device is also known as a text telephone (TT), or telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD). TTY indicates a device used with the telephone for communication with and between deaf, hard of hearing, speech impaired and/or hearing persons.



Volume Control Telephone

This symbol indicates the location of telephones that have handsets with amplified sound and/or adjustable volume controls.



Assistive Listening Systems

These systems transmit amplified sound via hearing aids, headsets or other devices. They include infrared, loop and FM systems. Portable systems may be available from the same audiovisual equipment suppliers that service conferences and meetings.



Sign Language Interpretation

The symbol indicates that Sign Language Interpretation is provided for a lecture, tour, film, performance, conference or other program.



Accessible Print (18 pt. or Larger)

The symbol for large print is "Large Print" printed in 18 pt. or larger text. In addition to indicating that large print versions of books, pamphlets, museum guides and theater programs are available, you may use the symbol on conference or membership forms to indicate that print materials may be provided in large print. Sans serif or modified serif print with good contrast is important, and special attention should be paid to letter and word spacing.



The Information Symbol

The most valuable commodity of today's society is information; to a person with a disability it is essential. For example, the symbol may be used on signage or on a floor plan to indicate the location of the information or security desk, where there is more specific information or materials concerning access accommodations and services such as "LARGE PRINT" materials, audio cassette recordings of materials, or sign interpreted tours.



Closed Captioning (CC)

This symbol indicates a choice for whether or not to display captions for a television program or videotape. TV sets that have a built-in or a separate decoder are equipped to display dialogue for programs that are captioned when selected by the viewer. The Television Decoder Circuitry Act of 1990 requires TV sets (with screens 13" or larger) to have built-in decoders as of July, 1993. Also, videos that are part of exhibitions may be closed captioned using the symbol with instruction to press a button for captioning.



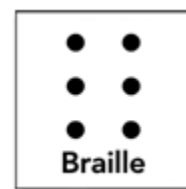
Opened Captioning (OC)

This symbol indicates that captions, which translates dialogue and other sounds in print, are always displayed on the videotape, movie or television program. Open Captioning is preferred by many including deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals, and people whose second language is English. In addition, it is helpful in teaching children how to read and in keeping sound levels to a minimum in museums and restaurants.



Braille Symbol

This symbol indicates that printed material is available in Braille, including exhibition labeling, publications and signage.



Special thanks to the [National Endowment for the Arts](#)
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Consultant: Jacqueline Ann Clipsham
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Pastoral Care and Disability

Tips to Consider

1. Know what your own beliefs/theologies are about disability. Take time to familiarize yourself with a variety of disability situations. A sensitivity to one type of disability doesn't necessarily translate to other disabilities.
2. Be willing to establish a relationship with the person with a disability.
3. People are in different stages/places in dealing with their disability. Validate people where they are/push them where they need to be.
4. Take time to LISTEN. ASK people what they need or would like from the church. Don't assume.
5. Have the attitude, "Let's figure it out." See the possibilities of inclusion, not the problems.
6. Know your community resources. Be willing to partner with people in advocating for their needs.
7. Isolation factor: Many things contribute to the experience of isolation in the lives of people with disabilities. It can be social exclusion because of cultural biases, lack of transportation or other services that keep people in the mainstream, energy expenditure of living with a disability, etc. Realize that quite often you need to be the one to initiate and maintain the relationship.
8. Recognize the ongoing nature of the need for support. Many times congregations are good at being there for the first few months after the onset of disability but then disappear, when the reality is that the person and their family still need continued support. Laity and clergy tend to avoid people when they "don't get better." Recognize and end this attitude.

9. Pastoral care and congregational care need to go hand in hand. The pastor can't do it all alone. Create a system where congregation members are intentionally involved in people's lives, whether it be informal or a formal program like Befrienders or Stephen Ministry. Specifically orient these people to disability issues.
10. Intentionally connect people with disabilities to the faith community in meaningful ways. Introduce them to people with similar interests. Identify and use their gifts and talents.
11. Connect the congregation to the disability community. Be aware of issues faced by people with disabilities in your neighborhood. Ask the question, "Who is in my neighborhood?" Be aware of legislative issues.
12. People in the caregiving role need respite as well as assistance with basic daily chores such as grocery shopping, etc. Be persistent in your offers of help. You may need to be specific rather than general in your offers. "I can take X to his/her doctor appointment" rather than, "Let me know if you need help." With caregivers there can be an attitude of rugged individualism that causes them to resist the support they need.
13. People with disabilities are connected to families. Pay attention to the whole family.
14. Host support groups at your church.

Thoughts on the International Access Symbol



As I was getting out of my van in the parking lot of an area store this older woman with white hair pulled into the accessible parking space next to mine. I sat on the lift waiting for her to get out of her car and lock the door. She had a placard on the dash. Suddenly, as she was making sure she had her keys, a man walking by stopped, took one look at me, and addressed her somewhat demonstratively, saying, “You can’t park there!!!” He pointed at the sign and then at me. “That space is for people who use wheelchairs...You can’t park there.” This guy, it seemed, was trying to advocate for ME!

I looked at the woman. She was turning toward him. She was also turning red. I felt I needed to do something. I felt a need to advocate for her; to help this wanna be Good Samaritan to understand that not all people with disabilities use chairs. I wanted to tell him how important it is to first look for the placard or plate. I never got the chance.

The woman put her keys in her purse, slammed the car door, took one step toward the gentleman and advocated for herself (loudly), “LISTEN, BUCKO!”, she said, “I’ve had two heart attacks and five bypass surgeries in the last three years. I CAN PARK HERE!” I thought to myself “Geez, lady, don’t have another one.” With a look that dared him to rebut, she walked briskly by the dumbstruck pedestrian and into the store.

I spent about five minutes practically counseling the poor guy. He’d only come to buy nails. He thought he was doing the right thing. I told him about hidden disabilities, of being denied legitimacy as one who’s “really disabled” by an exclusionary symbol which does more to perpetuate misconceptions than to empower and unite a culture. He walked away

somewhat enlightened but mumbling something to the effect of “Never again...”

Yeah, even though I’m a chair user, I have a problem with the access symbol. It disenfranchises many of my friends who live with disabilities but who do not use chairs. It is a major cause of grief. To an uninformed public, the access symbol by its very design equates disability with wheelchairs and relegates folks like the woman above, those with less obvious disabilities, to always having to prove themselves as worthy of accommodation. The symbol also implies, to those who do not know us that those of us who do use chairs, tend stay in our chairs, confined or bound to them.

We, as advocates and activists, rally around the symbol because it has been around for a long time, because it is recognized, because it is all that we have. With so few members of our disability culture using wheelchairs: ten percent, maybe less, why do we keep it around? Let’s see...90% of 55 million Americans (let alone 11% of the rest of the world)...we’re talking about 49.5 million people for whom the design is not really representative. So what can we do about it? How do we find a symbol that truly represents the expanse of disability culture? How do we incorporate into a design chair users, cane users, dog users, sign language users, people with hidden disabilities, brain injuries, cognitive and developmental disabilities? How about folks with mental illnesses? The list is long and as individual as there are people living with one.

It seems to me the only way to not alienate anyone is to get away from a design that speaks to a certain disability or body type, like the current access symbol. We may have to abandon any type of representation of a human form. This is not to be misconstrued as eliminating the “person” or the humanity from disability. I only wish to refocus attention.

Every time I have ever been involved in an access or accommodation dispute the focus has always been on me, or the person with the disability in question. We, folks with disabilities, are always seen as the troublemakers, as “the problem.” All we want is an equal shot at what our community has to offer: Access, Accommodation, Equity, Respect, a chance to contribute; to feel and know that we belong. Nothing more. Nothing less. A new symbol, one to be placed on signs in parking lots, on or beside doors to public buildings, restrooms, paths of travel; next to mission statements and on

telephones should focus attention on the real barrier to full inclusion: on the attitudes of those controlling the spaces; on those providing the access.

So let's trash the wheelchair symbol, keep the same blue field and throw a big bold capital "A" in the middle. Keep it white for continuity. Why an "A"? A for Accessible. A for Accommodating. A for All. A for Aw heck, you too. The "A" doesn't just focus on architectural access but on attitudinal access. If you, as a store owner, as a city park, as an airline or hotel have it on your door, you've earned it. You've also earned our respect and our business. No small potatoes when you consider the respect and buying power of not only 55 million folks with existing disabilities but the 70 million baby boomers hitting fifty. That's a lot of latent disability. Face it, we get older and, when we do, disability often happens. And let's not forget the 37 million or so AARP members. Laws aside, providing real access and accommodation is the right thing to do but if that's not enough, for no other reason, it makes good business sense.



No confusion. No misrepresentation. No explanation or proof necessary. A symbol we ALL can rally around.

Disability Etiquette Tips

July 26, 2001

One in five Americans has a disability. There is a good chance that you interact everyday with somebody who has a disability, perhaps without even knowing it. Sometimes people are uncomfortable around people with disabilities because they don't know how to act or what to say. Here are some general tips to make communicating easier.

1. First and most important - people with disabilities, like everyone else, deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. People with disabilities have different personalities and different preferences about how to do things. To find out what a person prefers, ask.
2. When you meet someone with a disability, it is appropriate to shake hands - even if a person has limited hand use or artificial limbs. Simply touch hands (or the person's prosthesis) to acknowledge his/her presence. Shaking the left hand is also fine.
3. Always ask before you assist a person with a disability, and then listen carefully to any instructions. Do not interfere with a person's full control over his/her own assistive devices. For example, before you push someone who uses a wheelchair, make sure to ask if they want to be pushed. Likewise, never move crutches or communication boards out of the reach of their owners without permission.
4. Remember, most people with disabilities want to serve as well as be served and enjoy assisting others.
5. Usually people with disabilities do not want to make the origin or details of their disability the first topic of conversation. In general, it's best not to ask personal questions until you've become real friends.
6. Be considerate of the extra time it might take a person with a disability to get some things done.
7. Speak directly to the person with a disability rather than to a companion or sign language interpreter who may be along.

8. Relax. Don't be embarrassed to use common expressions such as "I've got to run now," "See you later," or "Have you heard about" even if the person doesn't run, see or hear well. People with disabilities use these phrases all the time.

9. Some terms that might have sounded acceptable in the past, such as "crippled", "deaf and dumb" and "wheelchair-bound" are no longer accepted by people with disabilities. Many have negative associations. Instead say "person with a disability," "Mary is deaf (or hard of hearing)" "Denise uses a wheelchair," and "Joe has mental retardation." This type of language focuses on the person first, and their disability afterwards.

10. Avoid excessive praise when people with disabilities accomplish normal tasks. Living with a disability is an adjustment, one most people have to make at some point in their lives, and does not require exaggerated compliments.

11. Don't lean on a person's wheelchair - it's considered an extension of personal space.

12. When you talk to a person in a wheelchair for more than a few minutes, try to sit down so that you will be at eye level with that person.

13. Don't pet a guide or companion dog while it's working.

14. Give unhurried attention to a person who has difficulty speaking. Don't pretend to understand when you don't -- ask the person to repeat what they said.

15. Speak calmly, slowly and directly to a person who is hard of hearing. Don't shout or speak in the person's ear. Your facial expressions, gestures, and body movements help in understanding. If you're not certain that you've been understood, write your message.

16. Greet a person who is visually impaired by telling the person your name and where you are. When you offer walking assistance, let the person take your arm and then tell him or her when you are approaching inclines or turning right or left.

17. Be aware that there are many people with disabilities that are not apparent. Just because you cannot see a disability does not mean it doesn't exist.

18. Whatever you do, don't let fear of saying or doing something "wrong" prevent you from getting to know someone who has a disability. If you are unsure of what to say when you first meet, try "hello."

19. Help make community events available to everyone. Hold them in wheelchair accessible locations. This makes it easier for everyone!

Related link 1: [EPVA Disability Etiquette Manual \(PDF File\)](#)

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Guidelines for Writing About Disability

Brewster Thackeray, Director of Communications, NOD

November 1, 2002

Most people with disabilities want to take part in and contribute to the lives of their communities just like everyone else. Since roughly one-fifth of the population has one disability or another, many people with disabilities will make the news. The important thing is to note their disability if it is relevant to the story, but not dwell on it disproportionately.

In writing about people with disabilities, as with covering any other minority, it is important to consider the impact that words may have both upon readers generally and on the disability community.

As a general rule, you will never offend or confuse by using "person-first" language. For instance, "A man who is blind won the lotto." "Susan, who uses a wheelchair, entered the room." "Mr. Smith has mental retardation and works for the hospital."

Putting the person's disability before their name (e.g., "a blind woman" rather than "a woman who is blind") can minimize their personhood.

Similarly, when speaking of this population segment, it is better to say "people with disabilities" than "disabled people" or, worse yet, "the disabled." These terms are irritating to many individuals; a disabled car, after all, is one that will not work. A person with a disability has many abilities that make them a whole member of society.

Some other terms are simply not acceptable in the 21st century, including "crippled," "lame," "retarded," "deaf and dumb," and "wheelchair-bound." (That last term is particularly ironic -- for a person who cannot walk, a wheelchair is in fact a liberating mobility tool, not something that binds.)

For more information about people-first language in written communications, visit:

[Guidelines for Reporting & Writing About People with Disabilities](#), from The Life Span Institute at the University of Kansas

Now in its sixth edition, the Guidelines have been reviewed and endorsed by media and disability experts throughout the country and portions have been included in the Associated Press Stylebook.

Communicating With and About People with Disabilities, from the Office of Disability Employment Policy

Style Guide (a glossary of terms), from the National Center on Disability & Journalism

Manual of Style for Depicting People with Disabilities, from the Office of Illinois Attorney General Jim Ryan

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Practice hospitality ungrudgingly
to
one another.

Everybody

belong, v. 1: to feel and be a part of...i.e. of a community, a workplace, a neighborhood or school. **2:** to enjoy a sense of contribution, value, self-worth. **3:** to truly believe one is a natural and equal part of the whole. **4:** comfortable, safe, cared for, welcome. (The Nth degree)

When my son was a toddler, his commute to pre-school was on the proverbial short bus. Because of his developmental disability he qualified for a “free and appropriate education” at the age of three. Through his experience in an inclusive preschool, he taught me about the gifts of diversity and the power of community.

In this school the classrooms are designed for classmates with disabilities, yet about half of the kids are more or less typical. The teachers use sign language for everything they verbally say. There are visual schedules posted on the walls, kids who need support sitting up on their own have special chairs and everything is accessible for the children who use wheelchairs and walkers. For the students who need more one-on-one support, there are paraprofessionals in each classroom. No wonder there is always a long waiting list for “typical” kid spots in the classrooms! The school is an example of what is possible when everybody is valued and included. It is a place where children learn about each other and how best to communicate or accompany one another from place to place. They freely express their frustrations or unedited questions about unconventional bodies and behaviors because experienced adults serve as social coaches. I knew that this school experience had taught my son more than the alphabet and his colors when he came home and told me he rode the bus that day with an older girl who could “read with her fingers and see with a stick”! He had never met anyone so gifted!

This public school, and the Federal law that mandates children with disabilities be educated in the least restrictive environment, embodies a deeper truth. Educators call this technique “Inclusion”. Planners and architects would call it “Universal Design”. Our Biblical tradition would call it “hospitality” or the “beloved community”. When our goal is inclusion, a place at the table for everybody, we are able recognize and utilize each other’s gifts.

Everybody

Part I

What We Believe

Guests, Hosts, and Strangers

To truly embody God's gift of hospitality it is important to understand ourselves and one another as clearly as possible. These are two different ways to begin that process.

.....

1. **Listening-** In some Native American cultures Talking Sticks are passed around the circle during councils and other gatherings as a way of making room for everyone's voice. This ceremonial stick is often decorated with feathers intended to call on spirits for guidance or beads and strips of leather to emphasize the importance of this ritual. The stick is passed from speaker to speaker. Whoever is holding the stick is able to speak without interruption while others listen. This is a great technique for meetings where enthusiasm creates lots of conversation for some but makes it difficult for slower speakers or folks who need more time to formulate their thoughts into words. Your group may want to try using a stick or any other kind of ritual object during meetings. Using a "koosh" ball or a softer kind of object helps folks who like to fidget while they talk and is easily passed or tossed across the circle or table to follow the conversation or jostle anyone struggling to stay awake!

Listening deeply and intently, with empathy, is an act of hospitality. It is simple and profound. As a way to experience this, ask the group to split into pairs. One person is Partner A. The other is Partner B. Start with a simple question like "What was the best part of your week so far?" or "Who do you think of when you think of hospitality?" Remind everyone that the listener is supposed to do just that – listen. You can show you are listening by nodding or with facial expressions. Remind people not to think about what they will say in response until they have a turn. Ask Partner A to be the first listener and ask Partner B to begin talking on cue. After 3 minutes stop the conversations and ask the Partners to reverse their roles. Spend another 3 minutes for listening. Allow some time after the exercise is completed for people to share their experience of and feelings about the hospitality of listening.

2. **Word Association** – Using newsprint or writing boards, write the word STRANGER in one column and WELCOME in the other. Ask the group to give you as many words as possible that each word brings to mind. You can do the same thing again with GUEST and HOST. Ask the group to point out any patterns or similarities they see in the responses. Are some responses rooted in fear and suspicion? Are others rooted in love? What else? Ask people to talk about their contributions to the lists.

Typically, words associated with stranger are negative in nature and welcome is usually positive. Our task is to try to reconcile the stranger with the welcome available to him or her. See if your lists for guest and host reveal any similarities or sense of imbalance. Who has more power, the guest or the host? What kind of power? Is hospitality ever mandatory? When? Why?

Who are the strangers in our lives, our communities, and our world? Are we afraid of strangers? Why or why not? In Biblical times, when strangers appeared it was as if God was being welcomed into the tent or household. The presence of strangers evoked delight and revealed God's gifts. The Greek word for hospitality is *philoxenia* or "love of the stranger". We are all more familiar with the opposite word or *xenophobia* or "fear of the stranger". Ask the group members to share with one another a time when a stranger brought blessing to them or what it feels like to be a stranger and a situation when he or she felt that way. Depending on the size of the group, this can be done in a large group or in pairs, being mindful of the hospitality of listening!

Wrap up the discussion by explaining that the actual word for guest and for host and for stranger is the same word in Greek – *xenos*. This could mean that all of us at one point or another in our lives or even in a typical day, spend time in all of these roles. True hospitality allows us the capacity to flip the roles from guest to host to stranger and back around again. This idea is played out in the two Bible stories in this section.

Closing Prayer:

Say/Pray this in unison as a way to close the session.

Celtic Rune of Hospitality

I saw a Stranger yesterday
I put food in the eating place
Drink in the drinking place
Music in the listening place.

In the name of the Triune God,
He blessed me and my household
My cattle and my dear ones
As the Lark says in her song
Often, often, often,
Goes Christ in the Stranger's guise.

This prayer is read every week at the Iona Abbey as part of the Welcome Liturgy designed for the Iona Community members and their many guests. It is one way they welcome pilgrims and visitors to this wild Scottish Island.

Scripture Reflection: Entertaining Angels – Genesis 18:1-15

Prepare the group for the story by asking them to imagine themselves as desert dwellers, relaxing in the shade of their tent one afternoon.....
Read this passage aloud or ask others to share the reading by taking parts.

Some ideas to discuss:

- What did the hosts do to welcome their guests?
- How would your household have responded to strangers approaching?
- Where does hospitality like this happen today?
- When and where have you felt most welcomed? Why?

Elements of Hospitality in Abraham and Sarah's time and place:

Were Abraham and Sarah trying to win “the hospitality of the year” award? Probably not. The welcome they offered would have been a common practice. In early Biblical times throughout the Mediterranean world, welcoming the stranger was not a choice; *it was an obligation*. Traveling through unknown and dangerous territory, strangers could expect hospitality in order to survive. It was not just good manners or the “polite thing to do”. *It was an obligation*. And this obligation was kept with more vigor and animation than many a written law and probably discharged more from fear and for protection than from generosity. But the host knew that a day might come when he/she might need the hospitality returned, so the guest was treated with respect and honor. Hospitality was to the Bedouin what almsgiving was to the later Jews – an expression of righteousness. A traveler entering a city would come to the open place, and there, unless a breach of etiquette occurred, someone would invite him home and grant the customary graces

In a time before Marriott and Motel 6, and in a day preceding the highway patrol, the stranger had only to reach the tent peg to qualify for hospitality from the resident. Once upon the property of the host, a stranger could expect shelter, food, feet washing, protection, and care for one's animals. *And the host was obliged to provide it. It was not optional!*

This passage reminds us of the mutuality of hospitality. It is a partnership, with expectations from both the host and guest. In exchange for protection and nurture, the guest was to provide a story or the news from places far

away. In this example to strangers become guests and then literally a “host” of angels. They honor their hosts with a blessing, an unbelievable one, but a blessing nonetheless. The elderly couple was to have a child after all. Sarah actually laughed at the news, it was so unexpected. Imagine the course of our faith history had the strangers been sent away!

Abraham and Sarah are the “patron saints of hospitality”. Religious art, from Andrei Rublev’s famous “Trinity” Icon to Marc Chagall’s “Hospitality of Abraham” serve to remind us of the sacred dimension of welcome. When Biblical writers mention Abraham (Sarah being forgotten most of the time), it is a reference that conjures up the centrality of hospitality to the faithful in Hebrew Scripture and the Christian New Testament. The “God of Abraham” (and Sarah!) is the God of Hospitality.

Including guests and strangers, those of us with differences, is not optional. It is part of our faith tradition. Better yet, it is a way to receive blessings. Another message from this story is that some of the biggest blessings are the most unexpected ones. Together, members and friends in your congregation can prepare themselves to be a blessing for everybody!

[Thanks to Rev. Bill and Gail Royster for their commentary, “Touching the Tent Peg”, written for the UCCDM. Parts of their Hospitality curriculum were used for this Bible Study, for more info: bgroyster@earthlink.net]

Scripture Reflection: Perfect Stranger – Luke 24: 13-35

Imagine the community of Jesus' followers after his murder and rumors of his return. What was it like for them right after the events in Jerusalem? How were they feeling?

Ask one person or an ensemble to read the story from Luke.

Some ideas to discuss:

Map out the story according to who is guest, host, and stranger.

Do roles change? How does this happen?

What rituals become the vehicles for hospitality?

What are the gifts in this story?

Because Jesus chose the life of a traveling teacher, he had the opportunity to sample hospitality throughout his life, starting with the hospitality of domestic animals willing to share their stable! He also used images of hospitality to teach about God's love and acceptance. Perhaps he chose these images because his audience understood the importance of hospitality and that God is present when two or three gather in God's name.

In his book, *Blindsided by Grace*, Bob Molsberry offers this advice for people who are seeking Scriptural sources for the work and witness of welcoming and including people with disabilities. He notes that the healing stories are really about Jesus and not especially about the person who has the disability. He writes,

Instead of scouring the healing narratives for good news for people with disabilities, let's explore the stories of God's radical hospitality. In discussing biblical hospitality, Jesus gives detailed instructions about the invitation list. "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous" (Luke 14:12-14). Finally, the disabled are valuable in their own right! Jesus is singling out here precisely those who were excluded by the Leviticus Holiness Code. He's inviting them as special guests a God's banquet. It turns out the Kingdom of God is ADA compliant! (pg. 100)

Some of those stories of radical hospitality are:

Luke 9: 10-17..... Pot-Luck for Five Thousand
Luke 10:25-37.....The Samaritan
Luke 10:38-42.....Mary and Martha
Luke 14: 12-14.....Who's Invited?
Luke 15:11-32.....Welcome and Forgiveness
Luke 19:1-6.....Zacchaeus' Guest
Luke 22: 7-28, Matt. 26: 17-35, Mark 14:12-25.....Last Supper
John 21:1-14.....Jesus Makes Breakfast
Romans 12:9-13.....Practice Hospitality
Hebrews 13:1-2.....Angels in the House!

When it is your turn to help put together a worship service for Disability Awareness Sunday or to introduce your church to the UCC Accessible to All process, remember radical hospitality!

Theologian Letty Russell has written about hospitality as a partnership. True hospitality allows for diversity in which the goal is unity and not uniformity.

What are some ways your congregation values unity?

What are some ways your congregation values uniformity?

These words from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. offer an excellent meditation on recognizing and making room for another. You can post this quotation near a gathering spot in your building or use it in written materials:

In a real sense all life is inter-related. All [men] are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be who you ought to be until I am what I ought to be. This is the inter-related structure of reality.

From Strength to Love

Everybody

Part II

What We Know

“Bill’s Ten Little Rules for Community Building”

This resource comes from Rev. Bill Gaventa who is at The Boggs Center in New Brunswick, NJ. He edits the enormously helpful bibliography *Dimensions of Faith and Congregational Ministries with Persons with Developmental Disabilities and Their Families*. (See resource list in Part I) As your congregation or other group prepares to start the process of becoming A2A, this list will help you focus your efforts. This list could serve as a good starting place for a Congregational Inclusion Committee or Task Force.

1. Setting the table: who is invited? Where, when, why?

This is another time to remember the Disability Rights slogan “Nothing about us without us”. People with disabilities need to be part of your process.

2. The last shall be first.

Jesus was careful to invite/include those with the least amount of power and prestige to be part of the “banquet”. Often by turning things upside down, we discover new kinds of power and grace.

3. Inclusion is good for ALL kids – all parts of the community.

This is a reminder to notice how much everyone benefits when the environment is altered to include people with disabilities. Becoming A2A is not something to do for the sake of a particular person with a disability but rather to enhance the entire community.

4. Who do you say that I am?

Be careful with language. Use appropriate words in identifying and describing people. (See *Words that Empower* resource in this packet). The quality of people’s lives depends on the quality of their introductions and invitations. What connects us?

5. Create or join a “Joshua Committee” with a person with a disability.

This group helps organize circles of support for individuals and families to break down the barriers in the daily lives of people with disabilities. The circle will include the faith community as well as other aspects of an individual’s life and may be designed in conjunction with other advocates, friends, and family members. This phrase is used by Judith Snow in her work at the Inclusion Network in Toronto.

6. Adopt a “Jericho Mentality”

There is power in persistent celebration! Take time to notice and recognize those who help the walls come down. Consider that the people of Jericho might have wanted to get out as much as Joshua and his followers wanted to get in!

7. Fishes and Loaves Abound.

Find the abundance in community. Never be afraid to put a specific need in the midst of caring people.

8. Believe in the Call for Everybody

Support staff, teachers, professionals, and entire faith community in discerning God’s call and eliciting our gifts. We all like to give rather than receive.

9. What is most important is invisible to the eye.

Relationships between people make inclusive community a possibility.

10. Watch out for “the paralysis of analysis”.

Adopt “Nike theology” – Just Do It. It is better to begin the process than do nothing.

EVERYBODY: What We Know

Despite the fact that this article was written 30 years ago, Harold Wilke's vision and his theological reflections are timeless. This piece has been divided into several parts, with discussion questions following. Use the article and questions in small groups or as part of a newsletter article to invite dialogue. In case you are interested, St. Dymphna's Feast Day is May 15.

*Mr. Wilke is director of the Healing Community,
a program of the New Samaritan Corporation.*

“Mainstreaming” The Alienated: The Church Responds to a “New” Minority

by Harold Wilke
The Christian Century, March 23, 1977

A Lady Bountiful attitude which assumes that the church's ministry is to the disabled -- rather than with them -- misses the gospel's whole point.

PRINCESS Dymphna was a lovely Irish lass who lived in about the fifth century A.D. Her father, the king, lusted after her, and she fled to Gheel in what is now Belgium. There, when the king caught up with her, she still refused his advances, and he had her beheaded.

Out of the grisly materials of this violent and sex-filled story there developed a strangely hopeful tradition. People understood the act of the king as obviously that of a mad person and came to believe, as a somewhat illogical corollary, that his daughter had special healing qualities for the mentally ill. People started coming to Gheel from all over Europe, a swelling number through the centuries, and finally in 1245 Princess Dymphna was canonized by the church.

The remarkable thing -- that which speaks to us across the years -- is that all the people who came to be cured stayed in the homes of the parish, the homes of the people in the community, and the visits lasted from a month to a year or more. No institutions were built, no huge dormitories prepared: the homes of church people were opened to the sick who came. In fact, the only change that has come about in this whole expression of acceptance is that

about 100 years ago, the Belgian government began reimbursing the people of Gheel for extra costs in room and board for their suffering guests.

What does this story say to us?

Discussion Ideas:

- 1. Have you ever experienced the healing power of a community? Do you know any other examples of this? [Catholic Worker, Camp Hill, L'Arche are examples of intentional communities designed around the ideas of acceptance and welcome and partnership – also modeling an alternative to popular culture. Visitors are welcomed and opportunities to stay for extended visits are often possible. See Part II Resource List]*
- 2. The use of therapeutic animals began in Gheel as part of the community's response to pilgrims in need of a healing welcome. How do animals – dogs, cats, horses, etc. help people feel better and get better? What has been your experience of this?*
- 3. What do you suppose is the effect of isolation on people who have mental illness, developmental disability or physical impairments?*
- 4. How does your congregation support the connection between community and mental health? What else is possible?*

Wilke article continues:

The Church and the Alienated

Societally alienated persons are far too often rejected by the local congregation and responded to, if at all, primarily in terms of a "mission" on the part of the church to these groups -- to alcoholics, the mentally retarded, the physically disabled, returnees from mental hospitals, the violence-prone, former prisoners, and the aging. These are the persons who are wounded or ill on the road to Jericho wherever we travel. On this road the church is far too often not the Good Samaritan, but the priest and the Levite passing by on the other side.

Our comfort is disturbed, our feelings are jolted by the presence of such a person in church (and as much on the way to church). We do not want to be reminded of the presence of such alienated persons in overwhelming

numbers in our society, and of Christ's response to them.

Their name is legion. The physically disabled and developmentally disabled, for example, number close to 30 million persons in the United States. But they are seen only when one consciously -- as in taking the commuter train through Harlem -- bothers to notice. They are seen only when we remove our blinders, for they exist outside the comfortable purview of most church members. Alienated persons are in every third home on the block, and they are spread throughout our society; but far too often these persons in wheelchairs and otherwise incapacitated remain "in the attic," where society has placed them through the years.

We have a history of keeping people "out of sight, out of mind." In the U.S. it has been thought the proper thing for the church to institutionalize such persons; in many cases the church has turned over to secular society the keeping of such institutions. Several of our denominations have been leaders in this work, which is motivated by humanitarian concern and often is necessary, although institutionalization is not always the best solution. The church in Germany helped to create, both there and through churches in this country that follow their examples, the idea that institutions can best take care of alienated people.

But now, within our churches and in secular society, the process of deinstitutionalization is gathering force. For just one example, the number of persons in mental hospitals -- over a quarter-million seven years ago -- has been cut in half over the past six years. Most of our state governments and the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare follow an intentional program of deinstitutionalization. In many cases our churches have led the way.

Within a stressful, technologically oriented society, the facts are clear. Ever more people are becoming alienated, and ever more of them are coming out into the open. A highly scientific Western world creates so much that is new and effective in medicine and technology that, on the one hand, more and more persons are injured and crippled by the use of that technology; on the other hand, more and more persons severely injured or born with physical abnormalities are saved to life through technology. Thus we are creating and holding on to an ever-increasing number of handicapped individuals.

An overwhelming majority of these persons need not, should not and indeed

cannot be institutionalized. They are part of our society, not apart from it. More sharply than ever before, the idea of "main-streaming" -- keeping persons who differ from the norm within the main current of social life -- is becoming a part of Western thinking. In this context, there is an urgent need for society to respond to a "coming-out party" for those who are about to be deinstitutionalized, as well as a need for a far more adequate response to that much larger number who already are in our midst. Certainly the religious community, in its contact with people on every street corner and in every hamlet, has a prime opportunity to help in this mainstreaming process.

Case in Point: The Physically Disabled

Considering just one group in this list of the alienated -- the physically and developmentally disabled -- we can discern some specific implications for the churches.

The physically disabled are emerging as a new minority (9 per cent of the population), only now beginning to find an identity for themselves and to exercise the power that they have. They are also a group with many close ties to religious faiths. For literally millions, a trust in God is what holds them together -- that is all they have. The care and concern with which many of our churches respond is beautiful, but the dark side is also there: my blind friend speaks bitterly of the many "church people" who say to him, "If your faith in Jesus were strong enough, you could overcome your blindness." While you and I cringe at hearing this response, many Christians cringe daily in having such judgmental words spoken directly to them.

As institutions, the churches have sporadically expressed concern for the disabled. The Louvain Conference held by the World Council of Churches in 1971 clearly placed on the agenda of world Christianity the matter of the church's ministry for persons with handicaps. At Nairobi the WCC not only included this matter on the agenda again, but in putting emphasis on "ministry to *and with*" fostered a far more accurate theological understanding of that ministry and placed it squarely at the heart of the gospel. The words that the Nairobi assembly spoke are these:

The Church's unity includes both the "disabled" and "the able." A church which seeks to be truly united within itself and to move toward unity with others must be open to all; yet able-bodied church members,

both by their attitudes and emphasis on activism, marginalize and often exclude those with mental or physical disabilities. The disabled are treated as the weak to be served, rather than as fully committed, integral members of the Body of Christ and the human family; the specific contribution which they have to give is ignored. . . . The Church cannot exemplify "the full humanity revealed in Christ," bear witness to the interdependence of humankind, or achieve unity in diversity if it continues to acquiesce in the social isolation of disabled persons and to deny them full participation in its life. the unity of the family of God is handicapped where these brothers and sisters are treated as objects of condescending charity. It is broken where they are left out.

Theology of the Alienated

Discussion Ideas:

- 1. Have you noticed any changes in your lifetime regarding the trend toward inclusion? What progress have you noted in people with disabilities going from being invisible to "visibly in"?*
- 2. Make a list of changes you have noticed over your lifetime – divide the list into public facilities, schools, the media, churches, and other areas that come to mind. How do churches compare with the other lists?*
- 3. In 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act was passed to insure access to public facilities for people with disabilities. Religious institutions were exempted. Do we have an obligation anyway? Why or why not?*

The idea of the Suffering Servant, a dominant theme in Hebraic Christian theology, stresses that the one who comes ultimately to give life and hope to humankind is the one who suffers for humankind, who gives himself for that humanity. The Suffering Servant exemplifies God's ultimate concern for humankind, giving the assurance that underneath all of us are the everlasting arms. The Suffering Servant is also one who responds to the needs of all persons. In a Western society which has so often rejected the physically handicapped, at least at the unconscious level, and has made such persons the *object* of mission and oftentimes also of pity and scorn, the Suffering Servant shows God's concern not alone for the able and privileged persons of this

world but even more for the apparently forsaken.

For the Christian community the one lost sheep is the one for whom the Shepherd leaves all the others that this one may be saved. In Jesus' picture of the Day of Judgment, he expresses the idea that God in Christ comes to that person who visits those who are sick and in prison and in need. The nail-pierced hands of Jesus -- the "stigmata" -- are the hands of one who cares for the stigmatized, who are in manifold ways pierced by the turned-aside eyes of fellow human beings. In word and action Jesus sets the handicapped directly within the circle of unity of the Christian church.

The Pauline writings set forth another kind of argument; namely, that the individual is made perfect in weakness, and that God has chosen the weak of the world to demonstrate life's meaning to the wise and the strong: indeed. God has chosen the weak over against the strong. Paul boasts "of the things that show my weakness" (II Cor. 11:30). His statements indicate that it is not weakness itself which is to be glorified, but the fact that in weakness he can see more clearly God's intent for the world; that is, for the "power of Christ" to dwell within him.

A dramatic statement of our being made perfect in weakness was made by Gerald Moede, general secretary of the Consultation on Church Union, at his inaugural address in Memphis in 1975. Dr. Moede pleaded for the church once again to recognize God's proffer of his strength in our weakness. He spoke of a young woman totally incapacitated, requiring help for each mouthful of food, every bit of clothing and every trip to the bathroom. What hope does she have, asked Dr. Moede, except for the grace of God expressed in close friends and family?

The "thorn in the flesh" which Paul speaks of but suggest that for Paul it was indeed a physical malady and that it inflicted severe pain. In any case, the argument is clear that God's strength is ultimately seen in weakness, the many meanings of which include the solemn reminder that we are mortal.

A third argument has to do with grace. We are accepted in the beloved not by our deeds or by our being but by the grace of God. Thus a person's power and beauty and majesty and strength all combined cannot save him: salvation comes through grace. As for illness, physical handicap, decrepitude, old age or mental retardation, none of these can destroy a person in the sight of God:

he or she is saved by grace. Our condition before God is the same.

A fourth argument has to do not so much with meaning or validity or doctrine as with the utilitarian and prudential question of what to do. Why debate the theological meaning of the unity of the church and persons with handicaps? Those persons are here! We acknowledge their presence among us and indeed see them in us. Without searching for reasons, without attempting to find the cause of evil and illness and pain in the world, we rather ask, What can we do? Jesus' answer at this point is found in his statement to the persons who asked him, "Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus' response was that neither sinned; then he went on to the next step: within the condition this person has, it is yet his duty and indeed his glorious privilege to praise God.

In weakness we are chosen. Not by our deeds or status, or lack of them, are we accepted in the beloved, but only through the glory of the grace of God in Christ.

Discussion Ideas:

- 1. Which (if any) of the images above feel like they "fit" your ideas about disability and God?*
- 2. What is problematic in dealing with Divine weakness and vulnerability? What is comforting about Divine weakness and vulnerability?*

Practical Responses of the Church

Any notation of specific ways in which the church has responded to the needs of alienated persons must begin with the realization of the overarching and undergirding aspect of the religious incursion into the whole of secular society. A total infusion of the Christian culture has formed the secular response to human need. While it may well be tax dollars which support institutional and community care and all the other manifold responses to human need on the part of our society, the inherent motivation derives from Christian understanding, and the policy and guidelines reflect a basic Christian concern. Regrettably, there is no direct ratio any longer -- the gears do not engage smoothly! -- and there are enormous areas of slippage as

between the secular response and the Christian motivation. Nonetheless, we must note at the outset the enormous contribution to the secular response to human need which is initiated and constantly reinforced by the Christian ethic.

Continuing specialized ministries under church auspices have been maintained for many years by the Episcopal Church, a number of Lutheran bodies and most other denominations in greater or lesser degree. Such ministries stem sometimes from the national denominational offices; more often they have come out of diocesan or synodical responses, which then have spread to other areas of the church. The usual target groups for such ministries have been persons representing very specific difficulties, such as the deaf or the blind. Within a local area, numbers of churches will tacitly accept an ecumenical answer by simply pointing out that "signing" for the deaf is carried on at one or more specific churches in the city, and deaf members in a church where such signing is not practiced are in effect invited to the church where it is, even though that church may be of another denomination.

Separatist attempts are made: some churches minister only to disabled persons. Examples are the "Church of the Exceptional" in Macon, Georgia, and the "Victim Missionaries," an organization based in the Convent of Our Lady of the Snows in Belleview, Illinois.

An approach that has great potential for consciousness-raising within ordinary congregations is fulfilled by a group in Chicago which convenes its handicapped members once a month at a different church in the Chicago area. Some 25 to 100 physically disabled persons in wheelchairs will by prearrangement and invitation converge upon a specific church, to become part of the worshiping congregation in the morning and then to be hosted with lunch and afforded time for fellowship in the afternoon.

Most of the major denominations have councils for health and welfare, designed not only to work with the health and welfare institutions operated by or related to the denomination, but also to relate the denomination to the varied secular institutional responses and thus to keep open the lines of communication between religious motivation and secular response to need.

Eliminating the Barriers

The fourth area of response on the part of the church is the one with which I

I am most in agreement: efforts to "mainstream" persons of special need. In literally thousands of local congregations a minister or a lay leader has raised the question of why a disabled member of the congregation has to go elsewhere: "Of course we must make it possible for him [or her] to attend here," they say, and then they intentionally work at overcoming two kinds of barriers -- architectural and attitudinal.

The architectural barrier is to be found in all too many places. A survey in St. Louis, Missouri, by the former director of the Healing Community Project, O. Walter Wagner, indicated that only 1 per cent of St. Louis church buildings were accessible to wheel-chairs. Now more and more churches are building ramps and designing new structures or renovating old ones so that persons with crutches or in wheel-chairs, persons who have suffered coronaries, etc., can enter easily.

The attitudinal barrier is more difficult. Certainly the first step is that of making the church building accessible so that the congregation no longer says in effect, "We don't want you here"; but once means of easy access have been created, the response of the church membership to persons of special need requires intentional action on the part of individuals, supportive statements from the pulpit, and a deeper understanding of biblical acceptance of all of God's children.

A Lady Bountiful attitude which assumes that the ministry of the church is *to* such "unfortunate individuals" -- rather than *with* them -- misses the whole point of the gospel.

The recognition that healing communities exist throughout the world is pointed out by the Christian Medical Commission of the World Council of Churches. Some of the criteria for such groups (which exist in both secular and religious contexts) are these: (1) the healing community is supportive of individuals in it; (2) it must cope with the question of how much it will impose conformity and whether such imposition is inevitable or necessarily repressive; (3) it has self-awareness; (4) it can adapt to change and growth; (5) it is small enough to function effectively; (6) in some cases it may be institutionalized to reach out in love and service to those outside the group.

Perhaps the concept of Gheel and St. Dymphna may help us most in the matter of acceptance. When people from all over Europe began coming to

Gheel to be cured of their mental illnesses, they found there total acceptance on the part of the community. No institutions were built for them; they stayed within the homes of community members. This situation still obtains today. Gheel represents a kind of community of acceptance which most of us have experienced at one time or another in our lives. You have felt it on occasions when you were accepted as a person just as you are, when you felt the "attributed wholeness" that society can and does give. We must extend to the person with a disability that supportive community of acceptance, which can in turn receive and learn from such an individual.

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info@disabilitymuseum.org

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Center For Disability And Public History

Friendly, Yes; Welcoming and Hospitable, No

CHARLENE J. SMITH



SITTING ON A NEW YORK SUBWAY TRAIN was a young teenager no more than fifteen years old, precariously holding a newborn infant. I overheard her tell someone that the baby was only a few days old. Less than a week old and the mother had this tiny thing, my guess is, no more than five and a half pounds on a subway train. Although it was a warm day, the baby had no blanket, no shoes, and nothing on her head. The mother was just a child herself. Nevertheless, she looked at the child with love and affection. And doing what she could, she was being protective of the baby. However, the way she was holding the baby, you could tell that no one had showed her how to properly hold an infant. Did she have any idea how those few minutes of pleasure would change her life forever? I couldn't help wonder if she herself had been born to a teen mother. I thought about the cycle. Children with no parenting skills having children, raising children to raise children when no one has any idea about how to handle a child, much less the responsibilities of a parent. All they know is that a child is born, and they are now a part of their life.

Our churches are much like this young girl and the cycle of dysfunction. Churches decide they are going to concentrate on gaining new members. Oftentimes the reason for increased membership is not based on their mission or mandate to bring new souls to Christ but to be larger than the church down the street or to increase the budget. Therefore we see many churches and generations of Christians thinking that they are friendly and in reality not being welcoming or hospitable.

Churches get high on the idea of church growth. They develop extensive programs to reach out to the unchurched, dechurched, and overchurched. They strategically place signs around the neighborhood with directions to the church. Visitor parking

spaces are identified next to the handicapped spaces, parking-lot greeters are in place, rain or shine, cheerfully directing the visitor to the entrance and describing the person they should see to fill out a visitor card. Signs are placed with directions to the sanctuary, church office, rest rooms, and other key areas of the church. The bulletin boards are updated weekly. The inside greeters ask if they can worship with the visitors and sit with them while explaining the nuances of the service that are not clearly spelled out in the bulletin. Other members of the church smile and welcome the visitor with a friendly handshake and a genuine kind word. The visitor is given a bag of popcorn and asked to "pop back in." Fellowship hour finds more people coming over and introducing themselves and holding conversations. The visitor is introduced to other members of the church that might have similar interests.

The church members feel good about themselves and pat themselves on the back. They really are the friendliest church in the town, in the state, maybe the entire denomination. They certainly know how to be friendly to visitors and potential members.

Unfortunately more often than not the members, although making a conscious attempt to be friendly are not hospitable. They have no idea how to make the visitor-turned-member feel truly welcome and even less of an idea of how to be hospitable and make them feel immediately wanted and welcomed into the family.

When a child has a child, there are times when the child-parent wants and needs the attention that must be given to the infant. In families with multiple children, sibling rivalry exists. This is a fact of life. No matter how hard the parents try to prepare the older children for the arrival of the new baby, there will come a time when the siblings resent the

attention given to the baby. Too often we in the church are the child-parent who needs attention or we are the older sibling, feeling jealous and resentful of this intrusion into the family.

We have done such a good job of being friendly that we give the new member the idea that they are welcomed into the family. However, in reality the new member has just been allowed to sit as a spectator in our show. We want to remain the star, chairing the committees, doing things the way they have

always have been done, and maintaining control over all aspects of church life. The attitude that prevails is that we are the empowered ones who have paid our dues and deserve to hold the offices we hold. We really are the only ones in the entire church who can effectively do the job we are doing. The new member is just that—new. They don't know anything about the church. They don't know how the church should be run. Therefore their job is to sit back and praise us and build up our self-esteem. Besides, hospitality is the responsibility of the committee that organizes the potluck.

People coming into churches today have many corporate and secular skills that would be extremely beneficial to the ministries of the church. It is the responsibility of the entire congregation to assist them in their spiritual growth and to accept them as equal members, integrating them into full involvement in the life and ministries of the church.

Somewhere along the line we have lost the mandate from Christ to be disciples and to make disciples. In some instances we have stopped being disciples and have become only church members. Somehow we no longer see the need for any changes in the way the church functions because we are comfortable with how the church is run. After all, we are in control. The church needs to grow in numbers but not in ministries. With this mindset, our churches run into a situation where we have a revolving door. New members come in and leave disillusioned and discouraged with church.

Our society has changed; our clothes have changed; our ways of communicating has changed. But we have not changed our approach to ministry or how the church functions. Now is the time to

look at hospitality as an ongoing function of church life.

To break this cycle and to become a truly hospitable church, the desire and responsibility must be owned by the entire church. It is the responsibility of the whole church to develop welcoming techniques to become hospitable.

Church leaders, lay and clergy alike, must be consciously aware of the jealous feelings that arise in our churches when new members speak up and want to become involved. Frequently people feel pushed out and overlooked over the ideas of the new kids on the block. Just as when a new child is born, sibling rivalry in the church becomes a reality. As a visitor you were allowed to sit in my seat. As a new member you are told that that is my seat. This is just one of the unconscious examples of how we act towards new members and live out our fears and insecurities as church leaders.

One of the many qualities of strong leadership in the church, beginning with the pastor and including the entire leadership of the congregation, is being able to walk that fine line between the old and the new, constantly empowering both groups to be active in the church and to continue to grow spiritually with a solid scriptural base. We must be rooted in reality, improving on the present paradigm while stepping into the future, creating and designing tomorrow's church with new paradigms.

As Christians in growing churches, opening our hearts and minds to and welcoming change is necessary. The mission of the ministry does not change, only the way in which we express and carry out our mission and some of our vision objectives will change. Adopting the attitude of the hungry mother with a hungry child, the hungry mother takes care of the needs of the child first; the seasoned Christians willingly empowers and supports the ideas, suggestions, and leadership of the new member.

We must be rooted in reality,
improving on the present
paradigm while stepping into
the future, creating and
designing tomorrow's
church . . .

So, what are some of the things that churches can do to become more welcoming and hospitable?

1. Pray. Every thing in the church should begin with prayer; therefore we must be in intentional prayer for the church, ourselves, the ministries that are taking place in the name of God, and for the integration of the new members into the fold.
2. Ask the church to pray for new members.
3. Assign a prayer partner who will contact the new members and pray with them daily.
4. Someone other than the pastor should telephone the new members during the week to welcome them into the congregation.
5. Send the new members a welcome card or letter signed by the pastor and church moderator.
6. Have new-member classes.
7. Have a member of the various ministries contact a new member to explain the mission and mandate of the committee and invite the new member to the next meeting.
8. Introduce the new member to other parishioners each Sunday for a least a month.
9. Socialize with the new members during the fellowship hour.
10. Send e-mail messages or telephone with information about the church activities and mission programs for at least a month.
11. Be open to new suggestions, ideas, and ministries and support them.

12. Provide leadership-training sessions for persons interested in becoming more involved in the life of the church.

13. Be willing to step back to allow the new member to chair a program or ministry.

14. Mentor the new member in an area of ministry that is interesting to them.

This is not a comprehensive list but suggestions on how to develop a positive climate for spiritual growth and hospitality.

We have the opportunity to break the cycle of dysfunction in our churches. It takes an open mind and respect for all persons, whether young or old, new members or seasoned Christians. When we let everyone know that their opinions are welcomed, appreciated, taken seriously, are vital to the over all ministry of the church and the future existence of the church, they will feel welcomed and excited about participating in the total life of the church.

Our churches will no longer pride themselves on being friendly but will know that because of prayer and being in tuned with God they are welcoming and hospitable places for all of God's children.

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See previous E-word resource packets for more information on welcome and hospitality.

To discuss issues of hospitality, please contact:

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Worship and Education

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Available for download as a pdf file at:
<http://www.ucc.org/evangelism/eword/Package41/8WelcomeBrochure.pdf>

- Hold a welcome practice session with worship leaders, greeters, ushers
- Begin hospitality in parking lot with welcoming attendants
- Provide visiting guests parking spots
- Provide accessible parking spots
- Place greeters outside and inside main doors
- 'Roaming' welcome greeters greet visiting guests
- Create a welcoming center for visiting guests
- Provide nametags for guests and members
- Provide information on your congregation and the United Church of Christ
- Give visiting guests a hospitality gift
- Provide visiting children with nametags and special children's gift bag
- Make sure that parents and children know where children's rooms are
- Welcome and recognize visiting guests in worship service
- Encourage everyone to fill out pew pads or welcome cards
- Invite visiting guests to join in coffee hour and/or education classes
- Invite visiting guest to participate in church group or activity
- Inform visiting guests how they might become part of the congregation and grow in discipleship

Followup on Guests

- Record and track visiting guest information including: guest names, children, addresses, telephone numbers, and e-mail addresses
- Pray for the guests visiting your church
- Followup with those welcomed in church
- Church members and pastors may write notes, visit guests at home call and/or e-mail, send or e-mail church newsletter, invite to church or activity

Resource List

Scripture Passages

- Genesis 18:1-8, 19:1-11, 24:14-61,
- Judges 19:10-25
- Luke 18:15-17, Matthew 18:5
- Matthew 25:31-46, John 13:20
- Romans 12:9-13, 1 Peter 4:9
- Hebrews 13:2

Other Resources from United Church of Christ Resources

(800.537.3394)

- *Becoming a Welcoming Congregation*, Chapter 6
God is Still Speaking 101 (Ron in a Box version 2.01)
- *Power of Invitation and Welcome*
God is Still Speaking Leaderguide 2.01
- *Revive Your Mainline Congregation:
Prescriptions for Vital Church Life*
by Robert D. Schieler, The Pilgrim Press
- *That All May Worship and Serve*,
Disabilities Ministries Resource Packet

E.word articles

<http://www.ucc.org/evangelism/eword.htm>

- *Evangelism: a Surefire Prescription to Get a
First Time Visitor to Return for a Second Look*
—Frank Proctor
- *Friendly, Yes; Welcoming and Hospitable, No*
—Charlene J. Smith
- *Welcoming the Stranger*
—Susan Stonestreet
- *You Don't Have to Break the Bank! What Your Church
Can Do Now to Be Accessible with Minimal Cost!*
—Charles L. Bamforth
- *Being a Truly Welcoming Church*
—Stephen Camp
- *Tips from a "Professional" Church Visitor*
—Jane Fidler Hoffman

see also

- *God is Still Speaking, Through You and Me*
A Practical Guide for Witnessing to the Stillspeaking
God in Your Life and Congregation

"Whoever receives one
whom I send receives
me; and whoever
receives me receives him
who sent me."

—John 13:20

A Congregational Vitality Initiative Resource
For more information, contact:

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**UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST** 

ECESS2



God is Still Speaking,
Through You and Me!

Extend Hospitality
to **Strangers**

—Romans 12:13

*A Practical Guide for Living the Welcome
and Hospitality of the Still Speaking God
in Your Life and Congregation*

Welcome —Receive with pleasure and hospitality into one's company or home. To receive or accept gladly.

Hospitality —The act or practice of welcoming guests with warmth and generosity.

Welcome and hospitality are central to the still speaking God's message and spirit. Hospitality in the lives of God's people in the Bible was a response to the very welcoming nature of God. The practice of extravagant welcome and hospitality is evident throughout the scriptural narratives of the Hebraic families and prophets. Welcome was seen as akin to worship, for in welcoming another, not only was the other welcomed but also the divine 'shekinah', the holy presence of God that is in each person was recognized and affirmed.

Extravagant welcome and hospitality were central to Jesus' ministry and teaching. When the disciples tried to keep the children away from him, he said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs." (Luke 18:16) "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me." (Matthew 18:5) Indeed, Jesus welcomed and was welcomed by many who were not welcomed by others or by the religious community.

So central was welcome to Jesus' teaching that in a parable he warned that we would be blessed or judged by our hospitality to strangers. "Come, you that are blessed..., inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for... I was a stranger and you welcomed me." (Matthew 25)

The ministry of the early Christian community and teaching was expressed in its hospitality and welcome. St. Paul wrote to the Romans, "Contribute to

the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers." (12:13) And the author of 1 Peter reminded the early church communities, "Be hospitable to one another without complaining." (4:9)

God is still speaking a message of extravagant welcome and hospitality in the United Church of Christ. Congregations are learning what it means to welcome a whole new world of spiritual seekers responding to The Stillspeaking Initiative. Congregations and individuals that do so see those they welcome not as visitors but as guests, welcomed guests who bear God's presence. Congregations prepare to welcome guests who might not be familiar with being in church, people who might have been alienated from the church, people who might not expect to be welcomed by the church.

"Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it." (Hebrews 13:2)

In order to prepare to share the stillspeaking God's extravagant welcome and hospitality, individuals and congregations should ask:

How and when do I feel welcomed?

How did I welcome a guest recently in church?

Do I and my congregation welcome strangers as I like to be welcomed?

What gifts of hospitality do I and my congregation have to share?

Welcoming congregations are made up of welcoming people, where everyone extends hospitality.

Here are ways to personally grow in the extravagant welcome and hospitality of the still speaking God.

- Ask yourself the questions on the previous page
- Read about the gift of hospitality in the Bible
- Pray to grow in hospitality and welcome
- Practice welcoming and greeting others throughout week
- Welcome and invite those you meet during the week to your church
- Pray for those you invite and welcome to church
- Prepare and look to meet someone new at church
- Plan to sit with your invited or new guest
- Invite new persons you meet at church to join you in refreshment time or education class
- Introduce visiting guests to the pastor and others
- Volunteer to be part of your church's hospitality team
- Followup during the week with the new persons you met with a card, phone call or e-mail

Welcoming congregations see hospitality not as a task but as a spiritual attitude that expresses their faith.

Here are ways that a Congregation can grow extravagant welcome and hospitality of the still speaking God.

Set the Climate for Welcome

- Plant the seed of a welcoming attitude and ministry
- Study the gift of hospitality with church leaders and groups
- Preach, teach and practice hospitality in all church gatherings
- Practice hospitality with members and pastors
- Create a welcome and hospitality ministry team
- Review your welcome and hospitality plan for worship

Prepare Your Building

- Review the welcoming warmth and cleanliness of church entrance and building
- Post clear directional signage to and in church
- Review accessibility issues related to the building and sanctuary
- Review cleanliness, attractiveness and security of children's rooms and restrooms

Welcome Guests in Worship

- Review worship and bulletin 'user-friendliness' to first time worshipers
- Include a welcome message in bulletin
- Put up welcoming messages and banners
- Identify your congregation as a Stillspeaking welcoming church

God is Still Speaking, Through You and Me!



God
is Still
Speaking.

"for I was a stranger and you welcomed me," —Matthew 25:35

EVERYBODY: Hospitality Resources

These are a few of our top picks for congregations willing to take a deeper look at theology and community, as well as to learn about examples of hospitality that heals and transforms.

New Testament Hospitality: Partnerships with Strangers as Promise and Mission, John Koenig, 1985, Fortress Press, Philadelphia.

An excellent resource for Bible study or sermon preparation.

Koenig's scholarship reveals details of hospitality as it was practiced in Jesus' time.

A Company of Strangers, Christians and the Renewal of American Public Life, Parker Palmer, 1981, Crossroads, NY.

Well-written invitation to look at our social behavior and the public square. Good basis for Lenten or Advent series or Book Club.

Creating the Caring Congregation, Harold Wilke, 1980, Abingdon Press,

A classic look at the theology and practice of inclusion in local churches. This book continues to be completely relevant. It is out of print but it is still very possible and relatively inexpensive to go on-line at www.amazon.com and be linked to sellers.

Exceptional Teaching: A Comprehensive Guide for Including Students with Disabilities, Jim Pierson, 2002, Standard Publishing, Cincinnati.

This book will be a good friend to any CE program looking for ways to be more faithful, effective and inclusive. It can be used to train Sunday School teachers and to modify curriculum and/or classroom space. Step-by-step process for writing a religious IEP. Very user-friendly format for teachers and parents.

Parabola, Magazine of Myth and Tradition, Hospitality Issue, Winter 1990.

This beautiful journal contains a collection of articles on the dimensions of hospitality from a variety of cultural and spiritual traditions. Good descriptions of Bedouin culture and hospitality. These issues can be purchased on line from www.Parabola.org.

Lest Innocent Blood be Shed, Philip Hallie, 1985, Harper Collins, NY.

Compelling story of hospitality as resistance to evil. Le Chambon, a small village in occupied France was the place from which hundreds of Jews found safe passage during the Nazi terror. The catalyst for this work was Pastor Andre Trocme and his Huguenot congregation. Companion film is called *Weapons of the Spirit*. Good for Book Club, Youth group, Adult Ed class.

Love is the Measure: A Biography of Dorothy Day, Jim Forest, 1994, Orbis, New York.

Dorothy Day embodied the spirituality of hospitality through her work as founder of the Catholic Worker movement's houses of hospitality. A great exploration of what it might be like to live the life of Biblical welcome, especially in regard to poor and disenfranchised people.

The Catholic Worker – www.catholicworker.org – this site can direct you to a CW community near you! Excellent opportunities for service learning projects, social action, and experiencing life in a house of hospitality.

L'Arche Communities – www.larcheusa.org - L'Arche (the Ark) Communities are residential communities designed on the basis of partnerships between people with developmental disabilities and more or less typical folk.

Camphill Communities – www.camphill.org – There are a number of Camphill Communities in North America with opportunities for visitors, volunteers and residents. Camphill is dedicated to social renewal through community building with children, youth, and adults who have developmental disabilities. In a time where many are experiencing a crisis of spirit and search for meaning, Camphill offers a life of celebration, service, and community building in which all participants flourish.

Joni and Friends – www.joniandfriends.org – There are many chapters in this Christian group founded by Joni Eareckson Tada. Their Disability Ministries materials for Sunday School and children's programming are especially good.

EVERYBODY: What We Know

Christian Education: A Child Shall Lead Us

In many cases, it is the presence of a child with a disability that starts a congregation's awareness and action about disability and inclusion. Parents may come to church without their child until they feel it is safe for them to entrust the Sunday School or CE program with their child's care and nurture in the faith. They may need to ask questions about the physical layout of rooms or the experience of the teachers or the kinds of snacks that are served to be sure their child can participate. Church staff members who are aware that a child may need accommodations of some sort should ask the parent or parents "How can we support you to be able to participate fully in our faith community?" This is much more welcoming than "What are your needs?"

The "experts" available to help you understand a child who has a disability are the child's parents. Faith communities should turn to people with disabilities and their families to help solve any problems with inclusion – they will be good at finding solutions. If the child is in school, he or she will have an IEP or Individualized Education Plan. Any kind of accommodation that a child requires for learning is described in the plan. Parents are usually willing to share IEPs or other materials they have found helpful if you ask them. IEPs are written every three years and updated annually. These meetings can sometimes be stressful as parents and school districts do not always agree about what should/can happen for the student. Parents can bring anyone they wish to include to the meeting. Often they invite an advocate, another parent of a child with the same disability label or a therapist. To have the Minister or CE Director attend an IEP meeting with a family can be a wonderful pastoral opportunity as well as an opportunity to learn from special education staff about the ways they work with that particular child.

When children are baptized in our churches the congregation makes a promise to support that child in his or her experience of Christian faith. How we respond to families and children who have disabilities reflects on how well we keep the promise.

- See "Hospitality Resources" list for CE recommendations.
- The Spring 2005 newsletter from Association of United Church Educators is on the topic of Inclusion and Christian Education. It is available on the AUCE website www.auce-educators.org.

Also available for download at:
<http://www.ucc.org/evangelism/eword/Package21/11YouDontHaveToBreakTheBank.pdf>



You Don't Have to Break the Bank!

WHAT YOUR CHURCH CAN DO NOW TO BE ACCESSIBLE WITH MINIMAL COST!

Charlie Bamforth, Kansas Oklahoma Conference of the United Church of Christ

As one looks at the illustration to the right, full accessibility for many of our churches seems to be an insurmountable task.



Meanwhile, here are some simple things we can do now that will make worship more meaningful for some persons with disabilities. While we are waiting, consider the following:

1. Visual

Large print bulletins, newsletters, and information. Cost: about 5–10 minutes of time, plus cost of paper. Using the UCC bulletins, change font size from 12 points to 18 points, or 15 points. Instead of folding the bulletin, use it unfolded. This will allow for the use of larger type without disrupting the flow of the bulletin. Use a computer to change size, a copier to enlarge, or use 15 or 18 points for all bulletins, newsletters, and other church publications.

Changing the line spacing is also helpful, if you are working with a computer. Change single space to 1.25 and you will be surprised as to how easier it is to read.

A) Include **Large Print Copies of Hymns**. If large print editions of your hymnal are not available, this may be

done by enlarging hymn from hymnal or printing out the words in large print. Follow the copyright laws! There are companies that you may purchase a license from which covers most of the hymns used in worship. Cost for license varies according to number in attendance at worship. License also allows for the hymns to be placed in transparencies, in booklets, and in advertising. Contact Communication Resources at 800.992.2144, or Christian Copyright Licensing, Inc. at 800.234.2446. Both are worth contacting for current prices, etc.

B) Consider purchasing **Large Print Bibles**, or purchase one of many computer Bible programs that will allow you to print out the Bible verses for the day, using large print font of 15 points or more.

C) Check with area Independent Living Center, our bulletin is now offered in Braille at the cost of \$1.75 for the first, 50¢ for each after, one week turn-around time.

D) Provide **Sunday School Materials** either in large print, or if the company you are using does not provide large print, obtain permission to enlarge materials.

2. Audio

Use a **reliable sound system**, and ensure that people know where the speakers are if they choose to be near one.

Single earphones, audio loops, sign language interpreters, and hearing devices are of great benefit for those who have a hearing limitation. (Sermon notes may also be provided at the beginning of worship for those who would choose to use them.) **Regardless of how loud a speaker you are, USE THE SOUND SYSTEM!!** Also, **face the congregation when speaking**. Some people read lips or use body language to help understand what the person is saying.

3. Parking

Reserve parking for persons with disabilities, and clearly indicate the direction for the building entrance. If you are hosting a meeting and expect visitors, use signs to direct where the closest entrance is for the event. Parking spaces for a car should be 8 feet wide with an adjacent 5-foot aisle on the driver's side. Van space should be 11 feet wide, with a 5-foot aisle on the passenger side. This aisle may be shared with a car-sized parking place. Use sign indicating it is a "Van Accessible" parking place.

4. Dietary

If you are hosting a dinner, please be sure to include foods without sugar and label them as sugar-free. You might also consider "fat free" and "low sodium" foods as well.

Keep in mind that persons with certain disabilities must eat at a reasonable time. It is inappropriate to delay a meal for longer than 30 minutes in order to continue with the meeting agenda. If you are hosting an event that includes food, put a place on the registration form for people to indicate if there are any dietary concerns.

5. Portable Ramps

In cases where a permanent ramp would be a safety hazard, or is just not practical, consider building a portable ramp that may be placed when needed, and removed when not. This is a good option for the chancel area.

6. Sunday School Class for Persons with Learning Disabilities

Seek out a teacher that is comfortable teaching children or adults with learning disabilities. Provide materials that are appropriate for this class. Encourage the class to do the same kind of things done in other classes.

If you have students with speech disorders, allow them to participate, and be patient. Ask questions if you did not understand what was said. Use craft projects that involve a variety of colors to keep the students attention.

Send teachers and aids to training seminars at the expense of the church. These seminars are great in that the teachers share what works for them, and you can get lots of ideas from this experience.

Youth Groups should also take into consideration the needs of youth with disabilities. They might not be able to play a particular sport, but are capable of keeping score, cheering on others, and take part in other ways.

7. Offering Assistance

It is appropriate to offer assistance for someone with a disability. Ask if there is anything you can do to assist, and wait for an answer. Do not be alarmed if the response is “No,” some people with disabilities have learned how to do things independently and know what is best for them. **Never help without permission!**

8. Advertise What Kind of Accessibility You Have

If there is a listing of churches in your local newspaper, include in the listing if you are wheelchair accessible, if you offer assistance for hearing impaired, if you have a Sunday school class for persons with learning disabilities, if you have food that is sugar-free, etc. Include such information in any invitations that you send out for activities in your building.

For additional resource materials and information from United Church of Christ Disabilities Ministries (UCCDM), please contact:
Margaret (Peg) Slater
700 Prospect Ave E
Cleveland OH 44115-1100
Phone: 216.736.3838
E-mail: slaterm@ucc.org

For additional information, please contact:
Charles L. Bamforth
2424 Melrose LN
#D-110
Lawrence KS 66047
Phone: 785.830.8237
E-mail: revcharlie@mindspring.com

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Everybody

Part III

What We Do

Audits/Assessments

Once a congregation has decided to explore becoming more inclusive and accessible, it is recommended that members conduct an “audit” or survey of the building and worship and program and web site and advertising and hospitality, and outreach.....it can be as thorough as the group desires.

Some of the better measurement tools are designed by NOD (National Organization on Disabilities). They are available on the website www.nod.org. “Journey of a Congregation” helps the group chart progress meeting a variety of goals dealing with accessibility. They also publish an “Audit of Barriers” with the nitty-gritty details of building design and modifications spelled out.

Hosting large events in the church building or in rented space for Association, Conference and other gatherings takes a great deal of planning. Taking accessibility issues into account from the beginning will save many headaches later on. The National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA Committee on Disabilities has created an “Equal Access Guide” that can answer many questions related to hosting groups. This is a resource that every Conference office should utilize when preparing for meetings. It is available at www.nccusa.org/elmc , click on Disabilities.

Another tactic for building awareness about accessibility is to ask a youth group or Confirmation class to include accessibility in evaluations of worship services in their home church or as visitors in other houses of worship. An activity designed for this purpose for UCC “Worship Ways” is on the next page.

The idea of any kind of audit is to see where your congregation is today and help make plans for tomorrow. To assure that accessibility remains a priority, an assessment could be made annually with progress noted and celebrated.

Who May Come to the Banquet?

Confirmand/Youth Group Activity

October 9, 2005, Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost

Disability Awareness Sunday

The UCC Disabilities Ministries has as part of its mission “to encourage local churches to be open, inclusive, affirming, and accessible in all aspects of their lives, including their buildings, worship, education, fellowship, and service...” Often it is not until we have a personal experience of disability in our congregations that we begin to notice barriers – physical, social, and even theological – in our midst. Learning the basics of accessibility and becoming more observant is the first step toward becoming a congregation and a denomination that is accessible to all.

The following is a fairly typical action/reflection worksheet designed for the youth and mentors of a Confirmation class when they visit other places of worship to contrast and compare with their home congregation. Along with observations about liturgy or music, the confirmands are also asked to note the presence of ramps or “wheelie” symbols.

[This activity was designed by the Confirmation Committee at Union Congregational UCC in St. Louis Park, MN.]

“A2A” Checklist

Our United Church of Christ has made a commitment to work toward being accessible to all (A2A) in the design of our church buildings as well as the way we worship, have fellowship, and communicate (this is the recommended 14 pt. size of type).

Over the next few months we will all be visiting local congregations and making some observations about the style and content of worship services. We would like to check out how A2A the congregations appear to you during your visits.

Here are some things to think about:

Are there access symbols present throughout the building?

Is seating space available for people who use wheelchairs for mobility?
Where are those spots located?

Are there ramps into all areas that you visit? What about the pulpit or other leadership space?

Are the rest rooms accessible?

Does the choir sing in an area accessible for wheelchairs or walkers?

Do people need to be able to read to participate in worship?

Are their religious symbols that tell a visual story?

Did you notice if hearing devices and large print bulletins are available?

How many of your 5 senses were engaged during worship? How?

What are some other ways that this congregation is aware ways to be inclusive of all people? (Example: some worship spaces now have designate “scent-free seating” for people with allergies or asthma).

Thank you for taking the time to think about and record this information. It will be interesting to compare our experiences.

Developing an Inclusion Committee/Task Force/Team

Instead of starting Disabilities or Special Needs Committee or Task Force, consider using the word Inclusion. If you already have a Disabilities or Special Needs Task Force, consider adding the word Inclusion. The word inclusion reminds us that our ministry is with the whole congregation and not focused on an individual with a disability. Think about your particular congregation and how to structure a working group within that framework. Here are some steps to follow to get started in this process.*

1. Check in with staff for information about Bylaws that speak to the establishment of committees or Boards in your congregation.
2. Select the individuals to make a presentation to Board of Trustees or other representative decision-making group in your congregation.
3. If possible talk with Board members ahead of time to assure approval. Get Board approval/endorsement.
4. Invite interested folks to join the committee. Think about a variety of expertise – architects, builders, educators, public service employee, parents and grandparents of children with disabilities, and youth or adult members with disabilities. (Remember – “Nothing about us without us”).
5. Insist that Administrative and/or clergy staff member be liaison to the committee and attend all meetings.
6. Have representation from governing board on the committee.
7. Publicize the first meeting as much as possible, especially in materials that are sent in the mail. There may be members who do not come to church regularly because of inclusion issues.
8. Spend time establishing a Mission Statement for the group. It will help with focus and goals.
9. Think about asking a facilitator to run the first few meetings.
10. Publicize Mission Statement, submit for endorsement at a congregational meeting (possible Annual Meeting).

11. Establish a list of goals/priorities for the committee, categorized into immediate and long range, with funding issues related to each priority and process/time line for each goal. Consider using an audit or assessment tool (see Audit section) to help set goals.
12. Collaborate with other groups in the congregation – you will find that almost all the committees will be connected to the Inclusion Committee – Education, Social Action, Building and Grounds, Youth, Curriculum, Evangelism, Publicity, etc.
13. Join the “A2A” network of the UCC DM. Network with other congregations, Associations, and Conferences who are actively engaged in becoming Accessible to All.
14. Funding is a key factor. Look for endowment or memorial funds that might be utilized for committees goals (particularly for physical plant modifications). Outside agencies may have funding and expertise for these kinds of tasks. Churches in renewal and new church starts may be eligible for funds from the UCC Evangelism Building and Development Ministry.
15. Plan various ways of Disability Awareness training, starting with church staff and lay leadership.
16. Report regularly to governing body.
17. Run a regular “column” in church newsletter or bulletin inserts.
18. Publicize actions and celebrate achievements!

Editor’s Note: The 2005 Accessible to All Resolution calls on each UCC Conference to convene an Inclusion Committee or Task Force and/or designate a contact person within the Conference to serve as a contact point for the UCC DM. This process works well for Conferences, Associations and other organizations.

*This list has been modified from one that is used by the Minneapolis Jewish Family and Children’s Services.

Healing in the Hands We Hold

A Liturgy for Inclusion

by

Rev. Jo Clare Hartsig

[This ritual was first used as the Invocation for an Interfaith Inclusion Conference. Participants were seated in rows with small cups of high quality olive oil passed from one to the other. Smaller groups could do this around a table or seated in a circle. Scented oils add another sensory element to the process as long as you check to make sure no one has allergic reactions to the scent. For larger groups, think about playing meditative music while hands are being anointed.]

Verses from Psalm 92 [this version is from *Psalms Anew*, St. Mary's Press, 1989, Christian Bros. Publications]

O Yahweh, it is good to give you thanks,
to sing psalms to your name, O Most High;
to declare your love in the morning
and your faithfulness every night,
with the music of the ten-stringed lute,
to the melody of the harp.
Your acts, O Yahweh, fill me with gladness;
I shout in triumph at your mighty deeds.
How great are your deeds, Yahweh!
How deep are your thoughts!

I lift my head high, like a wild ox tossing its horns;
I am anointed with fine oils.
I see the defeat of my enemies;
I listen for the downfall of my cruel foes.
The just flourish like a palm tree,
they grow tall as a cedar of Lebanon.
Planted as they are in the house of the Creator,
they flourish in the courts of our God,
bearing fruit in old age like trees full of sap –
vigorous, wide-spreading –
eager to declare that Yahweh is just,
my Rock, in whom there is no wrong.

We are the work of God's hands and it is in our hands to do God's work. I invite you this morning to consider your hands. Which is your dominant hand? Do you wear rings? Who do the rings bring to mind? What do your hands enjoy? What is difficult for your hands to do? Are there scars? Have you noticed changes in your hands over the years? Check out the nails. Are they painted and pretty? Nibbled and nervous? Wiggle your fingers. Look at your palms.

The best thing about hands – they are one way we encounter the world. They are one way we can connect with each other. The image of hands has become part of our common experience:
Hands on – an experiential way of learning
Hands down- all the way
Give 'em a hand- Helping out or applauding a job well done
Hand-out- giving something away
Left-handed compliment- an awkward way of saying something nice
All hands on deck – everybody show up
Hand to mouth existence- living by the labors of your own hands, living on a thin margin
Right-hand man – Main helper, reliable guy
Handicapped - cap in hand – image of begging for a living

A second element of our meditation today – oil
Oil is an ancient symbol of survival. Oil was necessary for heat and light. It was used for cooking. Oil was a precious commodity, used sparingly and reverently. Oil was used to set people apart to bless them for God's work. God's abundance is described in stories where oil is lavishly poured out in anointing. God's miracles are described with an oil lamp that burns for days and days instead of mere hours. Today we use this symbol of oil to prepare ourselves for this work of Inclusion. We give thanks for the help of many hands to bring us to this place. We will use this pure olive oil to rub into our hands, to nurture and inspire us for the shared work of welcome in our own Holy places.

When the person next to you has this little dish of oil, offer your hand – palms up or down, it doesn't matter. When you have the oil, remember just a little will go a long way – rub a small amount on your neighbor's hand passing along the energy, strength, and blessing we have as God's people together in this place. Pass along the dish and relax and enjoy the music.

There are several of us to help pass from row to row. If you do not wish to have oil on your hands perhaps you can still bless and be blessed by hands touching hands.

[Music plays while helpers make sure the oil pots are getting to everyone. Be aware of people who might need someone to hold the oil cup steady while they anoint their neighbor. People who may not wish to have their hands touched may opt for the more traditional oil on their foreheads. When all have been “touched” close with this or another Benediction]

Behold – the handiwork of God – prepared again to do God’s work.

...hold unfailing
your love
for one another...

Christ's Body

Christ's Body: Introduction

The final section of this study/action guide gives focus to our common life as the community of believers, as the Body of Christ. In I Corinthians, Chapter 12, the Apostle Paul uses this image to describe the early community, and the inherent value and variety in each member. Functionality comes into play as he reminds us that an ear would not be more important than an eye or a foot but that together, all parts create the whole and inclusive Body.

We most often invoke this image when we gather at the Table. It is where the broken Body is re-membered, the place where we celebrate our wholeness. In the sacrament of Holy Communion the Body of Christ is accompanied with the Blood of Christ, and we are reminded of the sacrifice and suffering of Jesus. For some of us, his suffering gives us ways to live in our pain. One friend who recently had to have a medication pump implanted in her body to address her chronic pain told me that even on her worst days that, "There is not a thing I feel that Jesus didn't feel already". To be accessible to all, we must honor both the joy and the anguish in the Body of Christ. What of the wounds in the risen Christ? Do they reveal his humanity or serve as proof of his divinity? There are now a number of scholars exploring questions like these studying disability and theology.

The image of many parts that function as one Body leads us to the ethical value of interdependence. Interdependence can feel very challenging to people who are brought up in this culture that overvalues independence and scorns the whole idea of "neediness". The "Needy" becomes a catch-phrase for those who can only receive. Hence, many of us reject the phrase "special needs". We prefer to think in terms of partnerships and mutuality. We wish to give and receive. We invite all members of the whole church to experiment with new ways and new words to claim our places as members, participants, friends, brothers, and sisters, children of God.

If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. (I Cor. 12.26)

Christ's Body

Part I

What We Believe

Christ's Body: What We Believe

I. Read "Encountering the Disabled God" by Nancy Eiesland. This article captures the main ideas of her book, *The Disabled God*.

II. Some questions to consider and discuss

1. Think about any images you have of the resurrected Jesus. Are there images in your church's setting that portray the Christ who has been raised? Are these images in any way broken or wounded? How does the image of a wounded and divine Jesus make you feel? [This is a good opportunity for people who are very visual thinkers to use drawing or other art materials to create this image of what Eiesland calls, "Jesus Christ the disabled God".]
2. The word "survivor" has taken on many meanings in our popular culture. List some of those meanings and how you hear the word used. How do these meanings for survivor contrast with Eiesland's view of the disabled God as a survivor?
3. The beginning of this article recounts the author's experience of Holy Communion as a "ritual of exclusion and degradation". How do you experience Holy Communion in your church setting? Imagine how others in attendance might experience this ritual. Think about architecture, mobility, intellectual capacity, literacy, age, sensitivity to wheat or alcohol, motor skills, etc.

III. To end this session allow the group to become quiet and prayerful. Ask one of the members to read the account of the Last Supper in Matthew 26.26-29. Close with silence or prayer.

The church has all too often been complicit in stigmatizing and oppressing persons with disabilities. Jesus invites us to a new way of healing, justice, and liberation.

Encountering The Disabled God

By Nancy Eiesland

I HAVE BEEN PART OF SEVERAL congregations whose practice of receiving Eucharist includes filing to the front of the sanctuary and kneeling at the communion rail. Often, because I am either in a wheelchair or using crutches, an usher alerts me that I need not go forward for the Eucharist. Instead, I am offered the sacrament at my seat after everyone else has been served.

The congregation is trying to accommodate my presence in the service. They are undoubtedly trying to be conscientious and inclusive in their own way. But in effect, they are transforming Eucharist from a corporate experience to a solitary one for me, from a sacralization of Christ's broken body to a stigmatization of my disabled body.

I am hardly alone. For many people with disabilities, the Eucharist—which should be the ultimate sacrament of unity of believers—is a ritual of exclusion and degradation. Access to this celebration of the body is restricted because of architectural barriers, ritual practices, demeaning body aesthetics, unreflective speech, and bodily reactions. The Eucharist becomes a dreaded and humiliating remembrance that in the church we are trespassers in an able-bodied dominion.

For many disabled persons, the church has been a “city on a hill”—physically inaccessible and socially inhospitable. This Eucharistic exclusion is symbolic of a larger crisis. Sadly, rather than offering empowerment, the church has more often supported societal structures and attitudes that have treated people with disabilities as objects of pity and paternalism.

The primary problem for the church is not how to “accommodate” disabled persons. The problem is a disabling theology that functionally denies inclusion and justice for many of God's children. Much of church theology

and practice—including the Bible itself—has often been dangerous for persons with disabilities. The prejudice, hostility, and suspicion toward people with disabilities cannot be dismissed simply as relics of an unenlightened past. Christians today continue to interpret Scripture and spin theologies that reinforce negative stereotypes, support social and environmental segregation, and mask the lived realities of people with disabilities.

On those occasions when denominations and congregations make progress in asserting and implementing accessibility, it usually happens through a subtle but powerful paternalism of the able-bodied church, liberally “welcoming” those of us with disabilities. Even some of the best denominational statements articulating a theology of access still speak in the voice of the able-bodied community, advocating *for* persons with disabilities but not allowing our own voices, stories, and embodied experiences to be central.

The growing and dynamic disability rights movement in this country and around the world is raising crucial cultural and moral questions not simply about the meaning of disability, but the very meaning of embodied experience, human dignity, social justice, and community. It is a ripe moment for the Christian church to reflect on its own core values and traditions and allow the emergence of a theology of disability, with liberating meaning and power for all of us.

THE FIRST TASK IN DEVELOPING a liberating theology of disability is to identify and confront the key aspects of the church's disabling theology, beginning with its biblical roots. A common theme in the Hebrew Scriptures is the conflation of physical disability and “impurity.” The “holiness code” of Leviticus 17-26 communicates a strong message that physical disability is a distortion of the divine image and an inherent desecration of all things holy. Bodily unwholeness is “unclean” and needs to be kept at the periphery of the community. Leviticus 21:18-20 prohibits anyone “blind or lame, or one who has a mutilated face or a limb too long, or one who has a broken foot or a broken hand, or a hunchback, or a dwarf, or a man with a blemish in his eyes” from priestly activities or entering the most holy place in the temple. These and similar passages have historically been used to warrant barring persons with disabilities from positions of ecclesiastical visibility and authority.

Although the specific physical standards of such passages may not be retained as criteria for today's religious leadership, the implicit theology persists in church actions and attitudes. As recently as 1986, the General Conference of the American Lutheran Church declared that people with "significant" physical or mental disabilities would be barred from ordained ministry.

New Testament texts have also been read to support a link between sin and disability. Several Gospel narratives and even Jesus' own statements are ambiguous, sometimes upholding and sometimes discounting such linkage. Luke's account of the man with paralysis who is lowered through the roof of the house where Jesus is speaking has often been interpreted as a story of heroic helpers and a crippled sinner (5:18-26). Jesus' own words—"Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Stand up and walk?'" (5:23)—suggest some association between forgiveness and healing.

In John's story of the man by the pool of Bethesda (5:5-16), Jesus follows his healing with an apparent affirmation of the link between sin and disability when he tells him, "Do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you" (5:14). In John 9:1-3, however, Jesus offers a very different perspective. When his disciples ask whether the man's blindness is the result of his or his parents' sins, Jesus answers: "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him."

A different but equally troublesome biblical theme is the ideal of virtuous suffering. In passages such as Paul's account of the "thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor. 12:7-10), righteous submission to divine testing is upheld as a praiseworthy disposition for Christian disciples. Likewise, early interpretations of Job and the story of Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) purported that physical impairments were a sign of divine election by which the righteous were purified and perfected through painful trials. Disability is seen as a temporary affliction that must be endured to gain heavenly rewards. While more subtle, this theology of virtuous suffering has been no less dangerous. It has encouraged persons with disabilities to acquiesce to social barriers as a sign of obedience to God, and to internalize second-class status inside and outside the church.

The biblical theme of charitable giving has had equivocal outcomes for people with disabilities. In ancient societies, almsgiving provided a vital

means of survival for people deemed outcasts or who were without the means to provide for themselves. Yet as many of the biblical prophets proclaimed, the people of God forgot that such offerings were the rightful stipends of those who were socially or physically prevented from economic productivity; instead they pushed aside the needy and refused to establish justice “at the gate” (Amos 5: 12-15). Hence the system of charity; which had always included a requirement of justice, soon failed to accord dignity or even adequate provision.

From its inception, the Christian community has always acknowledged a special responsibility and mission to marginalized persons, including those who are physically unable to provide for themselves (Acts 6: 1-6). Furthermore, several New Testament passages link the notion of charity to healing. In the account of the disabled man at the Beautiful Gate (Acts 3: 1-10), Peter and John responded to a request for donations with miraculous action. As in this case, healings often restored the person not only to an able-bodied state, but also to social participation and religious inclusion.

Subsequent church practice often lost sight of this broader vision. Historically, church-based charities have provided humane care, medical advances, and indispensable financial support. Yet this has often resulted in segregating people with disabilities from the Christian community rather than restoring them to social and religious participation. While engaging in individualistic charity and healing, the Christian church has neglected the social and political needs of people with disabilities, failing to place as central emphases political engagement and social inclusion.

Our task is not simply one of correcting some faulty texts or even of building greater architectural access. The Christian church must develop a theology of disability, emerging from the lives and even the bodies of those with disabilities. Such a theology must not be construed as a “special-interest” perspective, but rather an integral part of reflection on Christian life. We must come to see disability neither as a symptom of sin nor an opportunity for virtuous suffering or charitable action. The Christian community as a whole must open itself to the gifts of persons with disabilities, who, like other minority groups, call the church to repentance and transformation.

MUCH OF MY LIFE I WAITED for a mighty revelation of God. I did experience an epiphany, but it bore little resemblance to the God I was

expecting or the God of my dreams. Growing up with a disability, I could not accept the traditional interpretations of disability that I heard in prayers, in Sunday school, and in sermons. “You are special in God's eyes,” I was often told, “that's why you were given this painful disability.” Or, “Don't worry about your suffering now—in heaven you will be made whole.” This confused me. My disability had taught me who I am and who God is. What would it mean to be without this knowledge? Would I be absolutely unknown to myself in heaven, and perhaps even unknown to God?

I was assured that God gave me a disability to develop my character. But by age six or seven, I was convinced that I had enough character to last a lifetime. My family frequented faith healers with me in tow. I was never healed. People asked about my hidden sins, but they must have been so well hidden that even I misplaced them. The theology that I heard was inadequate to my experience.

In my teen years, I became actively involved in the disability rights movement—joining persons around the globe who were struggling for basic human rights for the now approximately 650 million persons with disabilities worldwide. Through this movement I came to understand why those of us with disabilities have such depreciated views of ourselves and lack genuine convictions of personal worth. I began to see the “problem” not within my body or the bodies of other people with disabilities, but with the societies that have made us outcasts and treated us in demeaning and exclusionary ways. I helped organize sit-ins to achieve access to public transit and public facilities and to promote human and civil-rights legislation.

For a long time, I experienced a significant rift between my activism and my faith. My activism filled me with a passion for social change that would acknowledge our full value as human beings. But my theological and spiritual questions remained unanswered: What is the meaning of my disability? The movement offered me opportunities to work for change that were unavailable in the church, but my faith gave a spiritual fulfillment that I could not find in the movement.

Yet I also had to name the ways in which Christian communities participated in our silencing. Within the church, often other people with disabilities were uninterested in political and activist matters. Many activists, meanwhile, saw

religion as damaging or at least irrelevant to their work. I felt spiritually estranged from God.

My return to intimacy with God began at an Atlanta rehabilitation hospital for persons with spinal cord injuries. A chaplain asked me to lead a Bible study with several residents. One afternoon after a long and frustrating day, I shared with the group my own doubts about God's care for me. I asked them how they would know if God was with them and understood their experience. After a long silence, a young African-American man said, "If God was in a sip-puff, maybe He would understand."

I was overwhelmed by this image: God in a sip-puff wheelchair, the kind used by many quadriplegics that enables them to maneuver the chair by blowing and sucking on a straw-like device. Not an omnipotent, self-sufficient God, but neither a pitiable, suffering servant. This was an image of God as a survivor, as one of those whom society would label "not feasible," "unemployable," with "questionable quality of life."

Several weeks later, I was reading in Luke's Gospel about an appearance of the resurrected Jesus (24:36-39). The focus of this passage is really on his followers, who are alone and depressed. Jesus says to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see."

This wasn't exactly God in a sip-puff, but here was the resurrected Christ making good on the promise that God would be with us, embodied, as we are—disabled and divine. In this passage, I recognized a part of my hidden history as a Christian.

The foundation of Christian theology is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Yet seldom is the resurrected Christ recognized as a deity whose hands, feet, and side bear the marks of profound physical impairment.

THIS WAS MY EPIPHANY. The resurrected Christ is a disabled God—one who understood the experience of the others in my Bible study in the rehab center, as well as my own. Encountering this disabled God became for me the source of a "liberation theology" of disability. Jesus Christ, as a living symbol of the disabled God, shares in the human condition; he experiences in his embodiment all our vulnerability and flaws. In emptying himself of divinity, Jesus enters the arena of human limitation, even

helplessness. Jesus' own body is wounded and scarred, disfigured and distorted.

In his ministry, Jesus builds community and experiences human solidarity with those who are disabled, socially stigmatized, and denied their full human dignity and capacity. Jesus Christ the disabled God is consistent with many images of Jesus in solidarity with all those who have struggled to maintain the integrity and dignity of their bodies in the face of injustice and bodily degradation.

Jesus Christ the disabled God repudiates the conception of disability as a consequence of sin. Our bodies participate in the image of God, not in spite of our impairments and contingencies but *through* them. For many people whose disabilities keep them from participating fully in the church or from feeling fullbodied acceptance by Christ, accepting the disabled God may enable reconciliation with their own bodies and Christ's body, the church. Hence, disability not only does not contradict the human-divine integrity, it becomes a new model of wholeness and a symbol of solidarity.

The disabled God is a survivor. In our society, "survivor" is contaminated with notions of victimization, radical individualism, and alienation, as well as with an ethos of virtuous suffering. In contrast to that cultural icon, the image of survivor evoked here is that of a simple, unselfpitying, honest body, for whom the limits of power are palpable but not tragic. The disabled God embodies the ability to see clearly the complexity and the "mixed blessing" of life and bodies, without living in despair. This revelation is of a God who is for us, one who celebrates joy and experiences pain not separately in time or space, but simultaneously.

The disabled God is a God for whom interdependence is a necessary condition for life; a fact of both justice and survival. The disabled God embodies practical interdependence, not simply willing to be interrelated from a position of power, but depending on it from a position of need. For many people with disabilities, mutual care is a matter of survival. To posit a Jesus Christ who needs care and mutuality as essential to human-divine survival debunks the myth of individualism and hierarchical orders in which transcendence means breaking free of encumbrances and needing nobody.

This disabled God makes possible a renewal of hope for people with disabilities and others who care. This symbol offers us a liberating realism

that accepts our bodily limitations as part of the truth of being human. At the same time, this hope pushes us toward social and interpersonal transformation, toward a justice of access and mutuality that is free from barriers that exclude, constrain, and humiliate us. It situates our hope in the reality of our existence as ones with dignity and integrity. It affirms that our nonconventional bodies, which oftentimes dissatisfy and fail us, are worth the living.

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES are part of the sacramental body of Christ in the church. So it is painful and tragic that the bodily practice of the ritual of Eucharist, as I described, often serves to stigmatize and exclude those with nonconventional bodies. The Eucharist is a remembrance of a broken body—and a celebration of the miraculous liberation that wells up from that broken body.

The church—made up of all of us—is beautiful and broken, impaired but powerful, complex and gifted. It is this body, the church, which incarnates the disabled God for our world. It is this body which is called to follow in the liberating ways of Jesus Christ the disabled God, who embodied a commitment to justice, and who challenged all structures, social codes, and rituals of degradation that deny the full personhood of marginalized people. This liberating mission is only possible when sisters and brothers with disabilities are integral to the life of the community—when our voices are heard, our experiences honored, and our gifts allowed to flourish.

-Travelers Together, *the study guide based on this issue features this article.*
For a free copy call 1-800-700- 9280.

The Other Side -September and October 2001

Christ's Body

Part II

What We Know

Christ's Body: What We Know

Resources

The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability, Nancy Eiesland, 1994, Abingdon Press, Nashville.

This volume is an excellent resource for thinking through theological questions as they relate to disability. Seminarians, Conference Ministers, and others who work with the ordination process can learn from the perspective of people with disabilities who have a call to ministry; valuable invitation for listening to the “voices” of people with disabilities, and taking action to enhance the experience of the whole community of believers.

Human Disability and the Service of God: Reassessing Religious Practice, Nancy Eiesland and Don Saliers, ed., 1998, Abingdon Press, Nashville.

This book is formatted in 14 separate essays, each taking on a specific task or idea. Included are powerful examples of prayer and liturgy, Biblical essays, practical theology, and cultural analysis. We can get an instant appreciation of the width, depth, and variety in the field of theology as it relates to disability.

A Healing Homiletic, Preaching and Disability, Kathy Black, 1996, Abingdon Press, Nashville.

This is a book for those who love preaching, from the perspective of the pulpit or the pew. The healing narratives are explained and the various meanings of the presence of individuals who are blind, who have paralysis, leprosy, or mental illness in Biblical stories. This book will encourage preachers to take on some of the difficult questions disability presents in our own lives as well as in our faith stories.

Making a World of Difference, Christian Reflections on Disability, Roy McCloughry and Wayne Morris, 2002, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, London, UK

This British publication is worth the extra effort it may take to find it. It is a superb introduction to many of the topics mentioned in this resource. There is also a global perspective to the issue of disability that is directly related to poverty rates, violence, and warfare.

I Call You Friend A Liturgy of Welcome

Designed by Heather Luehrs and Ann Ito, UCC DM

[Especially good for groups, conferences, retreats, etc.]

Leader: Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." Then the man said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed." Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. Genesis 32:24-30

Each person shares his or her name and where he or she is from—and the community responds:

We bless you.

All: Opening Prayer

Gentle God, You have gathered Your friends together on this day to share our names, our lives, our experiences, our hopes and dreams. Grant us grace in our communications and deliberations as we move forward with our work and refreshment as we join each other in sharing and play. In Your Name, we pray. Amen.

Reading: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends...." John 15:12-16

Reflection: Please take a few minutes of silence to reflect on friends in your life: friends who play special roles in your life; friends who share your daily and ordinary journey; friends who live apart and share on special occasions; friends who are lost or departed.

The community shares names (only) of friends to hold in prayer.

Leader: Loving Friend, Hear and bless these sacred names of our friends, those whom we have shared out loud and those whose names who remain in the silence of our hearts.

All: Bless these friends, Amen.

All: Prayer of Sending Forth:

*We are all on a journey together...
To the center of the universe...
Look deep
Into yourself, into another.
It is to a center which is everywhere
That is the holy journey...
First you need only look:
Notice and honor the radiance of
Everything about you...
Play in this universe. Tend
All these shining things around you:
The smallest plant, the creatures and
objects in your care.
Be gentle and nurture. Listen...
As we experience and accept
All that we really are...
We grow in care.
We begin to embrace others
As ourselves, and learn to live
As one among many...*

Anne Hillman



Joining the “A2A” Network

Thank you for your interest in becoming accessible to all as part of God’s extravagant welcome in your congregation. We hope that “Any Body, Everybody, Christ’s Body” has served you well. Currently we have plans to have everything available on www.uccdm.org to be downloaded and used by individuals and groups throughout the United Church of Christ. We will also have printed versions available by ordering through our offices in Cleveland (800) 537-3394.

We would enjoy hearing how you used these materials and where you are on your journey to accessibility to all. In order to network amongst our churches and other organizations and to be inspired by and to learn from one another, we want to start an A2A Network. We also want to have the resources to support this network with some staffing to be of greatest use to the members.

Therefore we invite congregations who are willing to begin the process to be A2A to register with the UCCDM and consider sending a contribution of \$100.00 to UCCDM c/o Rev. Peg Slater, Minister for Diversity and Inclusion Coordinator, 700 Prospect Ave., Cleveland, OH, 44115-1100

Please feel free to contact me with your responses.

Blessings in your work and witness,

Rev. Jo Clare Hartsig, UCC Disabilities Ministries
(952) 476 – 4782
maddenuf@aol.com

2511 Woodruff Spur
Wayzata, MN 55391



Yes! We want to be part of the A2A Network

Congregation/Other _____

Address _____

Contact _____

Phone/email _____

Clergy _____

Phone/email _____

Which committee, board, or ministry in your setting is the logical place for people to work on issues of access, inclusion and support for your members?

Group _____

Convenor or Contact _____

Does your Conference or Association have staff or Board members with particular expertise in disabilities awareness or advocacy? If so, who?

Name/Contact Info _____

Name/Contact Info _____

Who are community partners for you in this work? Be specific.

What is the most immediate access or inclusion issue in your setting?

Which disabilities are represented in your membership? (Don't worry about specific labels, for example, "limited mobility" or "learning disability" is adequate)

Anything else you would like us to know?

Please return this registration and check for \$100.00 to
UCC DM, c/o Peg Slater,
700 Prospect Ave.,
Cleveland, OH, 44115.

Someone from the UCC DM Board will be contacting you.

Thank You!



A2A Process Checklist

After study, reflection, discussion, and working with allies in the disability community, our congregation is ready to be considered “Accessible to All”. This means more than having a ramp to us. Not only will we continue to make our building more accessible, we have taken steps to do the same with all other aspects of our life as a community of believers.

We are ready to commit some financial resources to support the A2A Network within the United Church of Christ and we invite partnership with a UCC DM staff person in this work. Our congregation will be listed in the web directory as an A2A church, designated by a blue square with “A” for Accessible to All. This symbol says we are working on this commitment and have an organized structure in place to assure that the issues of access and inclusion remain part of every aspect of our common life.

_____ We have made a financial contribution to UCC DM to join the A2A Network.

_____ We have completed a building and program audit.
[Several different audits are mentioned in this packet.
Your score is less important than the willingness to survey and assess places where improvement is needed]

_____ We have identified _____ things to change this year.

_____ We have identified _____ things to change in 2 years.

_____ We have identified _____ things to change in 5 years.

_____ We have included “Practical Helps...” (in packet) and other disability information in our Ushers and Greeters training.

_____ Our church celebrates Access Sunday

- _____ We have an Inclusion Committee and/or an Inclusion Coach at our church.
- _____ We know who we can call on (special ed teacher or therapist who works in the field) for help in designing church school programs and modifying resources if necessary.
- _____ We know where to find American Sign Language Interpreters and their fee schedule.
- _____ Our governing body has endorsed becoming A2A.
- _____ We have completed the entire A2A Study Packet, “Any Body, Everybody, Christ’s Body”.
- _____ We have used or modified worship resources to reflect our commitment to becoming A2A.
- _____ We have notified our Association and/or Conference that we are beginning the A2A process.
- _____ We advertise our church as being accessible/inclusive.
- _____ Our web site is accessible (is programmed so people with visual challenges are able to use screen readers and other technology to navigate the web site).
- _____ Our church publicity describes our congregation as “Accessible to All”.

As we work together on parts of this checklist, we will discover other accomplishments and goals for our congregation. This list can get us started. Some of these goals may not be appropriate for our setting. In becoming Accessible to All we are committing ourselves to a process and attitude and not merely an outcome.

Let the Whole Church say, “Amen”.

Date _____

Them vs. Us: A Litany

Where do I fit in?

A group of any size can be divided into these two parts for this litany. It is based on a poem by Simone Poortman.

Them

Us

Where do I fit in?

Them: If I am one of “them”, they are “us

Us: If I am one of “us”, who are “they”?

Them: Being one of “us” is only half”

Us: I miss “them”

Them: Only when I am one of “them” can I be part of the
Complete “us”

Us: I know both: “them” and “us”

Them: How do I dare to become one of “them”
To become one of “us”?

Us: How do I dare to become one of “them”
To become one of “us”?

ALL: *We are both them and us.*
Amen.

This poem was shared during the 2006 World Council of Churches gathering in Brazil. Simone Poortman is from the Netherlands and is part of the WCC Disabilities Caucus.