



Center on Aging & Older Adult Ministries
General Board of Discipleship
United Methodist Church

Ministry Module

Ministry Modules are intended for use with the Leader's Guide. Appendices and Resources referenced in modules can be found within the Guide.

Safe Facility Ministry ***to promote safety for elders in church facilities***



This Mission Module is provided through a Partnership with Center on Aging & Older Adult Ministries of the General Board of Discipleship of the United Methodist Church and Caregiving Ministries, a division of FamilyCare America, Inc.

Caregiving
Ministries



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Purpose

The mission of the Safe Facility Ministry is to provide a safe environment for all within the congregation, particularly elders who need extra support for tired bodies .

The Safe Facility Ministry seeks to bring safe access for inclusion to all. It seeks to answer God's call to foster healing through worship by creating opportunity for all persons to participate fully.

Goals and Objectives

- To encourage participation of all members
- To promote inclusion of all God's people.

Parameters and Limitations

This ministry does not:

- Provide advice on building codes/ ADA.
- Substitute direction where applicable building codes requires permit or authorization by local authorities.

This ministry does:

- Suggest evaluation tools and areas to consider investigating for safety within the facility.
- Suggest methods and resources for retro-fitting congregational spaces.



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Suggested Process for this Ministry:

The Accessibility Ministry shall include professionals in health, legal, contracting, design or architecture, social service, and educational fields to address health needs within a congregation.

1. Educate the church as to what the Accessibility Ministry is and how it can improve the inclusion of all church members of all ages. Educate the congregation on disabilities, the American Disability Act and International Building Code.
2. Inform the congregation what can and cannot be expected from the Accessibility Ministry. This Accessibility Ministry is designed to foster accessibility for all members of the congregation, no matter what age or challenge they may be experiencing.
3. Survey the church for people who are willing and able to work in this ministry (see Appendix A).
4. Provide training to volunteers, informing them of the process of this ministry.
5. Survey homebound members for health concerns and needs.
6. Implement the program with a coordinator.
7. Identify physical barriers at church buildings, camps, locations for conferences that are restricting participation.
8. Identify other concerns, including attitudes and assumptions, that marginalize our disabled congregants that might make someone may not be able to do something or want to participate.
9. Schedule regular meetings for volunteers to increase knowledge of accessibility issues through in-service training and to discuss and work out problems with the Accessibility Ministry Team.
10. Implement program activities to promote exposure and draw support for this ministry. This may include:
 - an annual award, such as "Open Roof Award," to recognize districts and congregations that are making great strides in Disability Ministry
 - creation of a listserv so that individuals from across the denomination who are interested in disability ministry can discuss common concerns, share resources and network
 - provide audio taped readings of Scripture or worship services for people who are visually impaired
 - provide a Buddy System that connects families with disabilities to volunteers that provide help at meals, special events, etc.
 - provide large print bulletins at all worship events
11. Periodically evaluate the ministry. (See Evaluation Tool, p. 19, Administrative Guide.)



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RESOURCES

- American Association of People with Disabilities
- ARC
- American Foundation for the Blind
- Disabled American Veterans
- National Association of the Deaf
- Americans with Disability Act
- Health Department
- Area Agency on Aging

" . . . Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me" (Matthew 25:40, NRSV).

God cares for all and convicts our hearts to be loving and caring for all his children; for their spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being. Following is an addendum to the safe sanctuary policy, which has been addressed by The United Methodist Church.



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These are some suggestions to follow to ensure the safety of our senior adults:

- Adequate lighting should be available, indoors and out, to ensure safe passage in and around our church campus. Facilities are clean and well lit.
- Sidewalks should be kept safe and free of obstacles that might cause someone to fall (replace cracked sections, remove fallen limbs, etc.).
- Handrails should be installed where necessary in the choir loft or anywhere else there is a possibility of falling while negotiating stairs or passageways.
- For comfort, safety, and flow of traffic in the sanctuary, we should work to make space available at the end of several pews for wheelchairs. When serving Communion, the aisles are blocked for clear passage when we have a wheelchair in the aisle. This can be embarrassing for the person in the wheelchair as well as a safety hazard.
- Entry doors and interior doors need to be able to swing both ways as much as possible. People using walkers, canes, or wheelchairs cannot easily navigate doorways. Power assisted doors would be an option. Exits are clearly marked and free of debris.
- All people, including senior adults, should be aware of the dangers of walking alone on campus, especially after dark. We suggest that they not enter a dark building alone. In addition, it is best to have the last two people of a group leave the building and walk to their cars together. The best advice is to always have someone with you.
- We recommend two AED (Automatic External Defibrillator) lifesaving devices be installed, maintained, and available for use.
- Keyholders agree to abide by safe church policies.
- Fire extinguishers are clearly visible and in working order.
- Chemicals and poisons are properly labeled and stored.
- Food preparation areas are clean and health department guidelines for food preparation are followed.

Safety awareness classes should be offered one or two times per year to discuss safety issues relevant to senior adults. These classes may be conducted by knowledgeable church members or by city police, fire officials, or district parish nurses, or by other people brought in by the pastor of adult ministries.



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FACILITY EVALUATION

These questions are designed to identify unsafe conditions within your facility.

- How much of the building is wheelchair accessible (aisles – 36"; 5'x5' turnarounds)? Also check bathroom facilities and water fountains. The easiest way to check is to go around the building in a wheelchair.
- Are there places in the sanctuary for wheelchairs or are they relegated to a side aisle in the back?
- Is the sanctuary well lit?
- Is there handicap parking (8' wide spaces with 5' wide aisles)?
- Are there curb cuts or ramps for wheelchairs to enter the building?
- Are large-print materials (bulletins, hymnals, business meeting agendas) made available?
- Do stairs and ramps have handrails? Are they at appropriate heights (32" and 36" respectively)?
- Are the stairs well lit?
- Are ramps sloped appropriately (no more than 1' rise per 12' length)?
- Examine the doors. Are they 36"? Are they too heavy? Can they slam shut on a person? Door handles are easier for people to use than doorknobs.
- Does the church have a sound system? Are microphones used during all parts of worship and other church events? Are Assisted Listening Devices Available?
- Is transportation available to church events for people who can't drive?
- Are there visible signs indicating the location of accessible bathrooms, ramps, elevators, etc?



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