



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

Accessibility Ministry

to promote accessibility for the disabled in church facilities



This Mission Module is provided through a Partnership with Association of Brethren Caregivers, of the Church of the Brethren, and Caregiving Ministries, a division of FamilyCare America, Inc.

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Purpose

The mission of the Disability Ministry is to continue the enduring sign of the belief that every person is a treasure, every life a sacred gift, every human being a unity of body, mind, and spirit.

The Disability Ministry seeks to bring 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 accessibility.
- Suggest methods and resources for retro-fitting congregational spaces.
- Suggest a Buddy System to encourage participation for all in church activities.



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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

Other Written Resources

Accessibility: A Guide for Churches (1997) jointly produced by the Episcopal and Catholic Dioceses of Minneapolis, St. Paul. Episcopal Disability Network, Minneapolis, MN. Call 1- 800-955-2445 to order.

Creating the Caring Congregation (1980) by Harold Wilke. Harold Wilke is one of the first to advocate for inclusion of people with disabilities into church life.

Dancing With Disabilities: Opening the Church to All God's Children (1997) by Brett Webb-Mitchell, United Church Press/Pilgrim Press. This book looks openly at church inclusion through the stories of children and adults with disabilities.

Different Members, One Body: Welcoming the Diversity of Abilities in God's Family (1998) by Sharon Kutz-Mellem. This book offers suggestions to churches committed to removing architectural and attitudinal barriers that prevent people with disabilities from full participation in church life.

The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability (1994) by Nancy L. Eiesland, Abingdon Press. This book was written to show that persons with disabilities contribute to a fuller understanding of what it means to be human.



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Congregational Evaluation

Are your facilities and programs accessible? Are your staff and lay assistants educated on how to assist? The following questions can help you to evaluate your congregation.

Physical Accessibility

- 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?

Congregational Life Accessibility

- Are ushers and greeters familiar with accessible features of the congregation (assisted listening devices, pew cuts, large-print materials)?
- Are persons with disabilities actively involved in the congregation (worship leaders, greeters, ushers, helping set up for meetings, etc.)?
- Are persons with disabilities included in regular or special Sunday school classes?
- Are deacons or other members available to provide periodic respite care for families of persons with disabilities?
- Does the congregation observe Disabilities Awareness Month (October)?
- Does the congregation's mission statement include persons with disabilities?



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Congregation Accessibility Evaluation

1	AWARENESS. Recognition by some congregation members or the ordained religious leadership that certain barriers were preventing children or adults with physical, sensory, psychiatric or intellectual disabilities from accessing a full life of faith (including worship, study, service and leadership)	not started <input type="radio"/>	getting started <input type="radio"/>	well on our way <input type="radio"/>	we're there! <input type="radio"/>
2	ADVOCACY (Internal). Growing advocacy within the congregation to welcome people with disabilities as full participants and to remove barriers (architecture, communications and attitudes) to this participation	not started <input type="radio"/>	getting started <input type="radio"/>	well on our way <input type="radio"/>	we're there! <input type="radio"/>
3	DISCUSSIONS. Concerns raised regarding ability of the congregation to meet the challenges (e.g., Are there enough people with this need to justify the expense? Will people with disabilities feel comfortable in joining us once barriers have been removed?) and then solutions identified--ideally with input from people with disabilities and other experts	not started <input type="radio"/>	getting started <input type="radio"/>	well on our way <input type="radio"/>	we're there! <input type="radio"/>
4	PLANS. Invitation of people with disabilities to join the congregation as full members (including participation in rites of passage and initiation), action plans devised to achieve barrier-removing goals, and formal commitment made to welcome people with disabilities	not started <input type="radio"/>	getting started <input type="radio"/>	well on our way <input type="radio"/>	we're there! <input type="radio"/>
5	ACCOMMODATIONS. Accommodations made to improve the participation of people with disabilities (e.g. large print bulletins, trained ushers, accessible parking spaces, ramps and pew cuts, improved lighting and sound systems, appropriate religious education for children with disabilities)	not started <input type="radio"/>	getting started <input type="radio"/>	well on our way <input type="radio"/>	we're there! <input type="radio"/>



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6	WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT. Appreciation expressed for the changes being made and friendships extended to people with disabilities and their family members by increasing numbers within the congregation	not started <input type="radio"/>	getting started <input type="radio"/>	well on our way <input type="radio"/>	we're there! <input type="radio"/>
7	HURDLES Identification of architectural (e.g., elevator, accessible restroom, ramp to the altar, chancel or bimah), communications (e.g., sign language interpreter or alternative formats for materials), transportation (e.g., wheelchair accessible van), financial, or other barriers and ways found to move forward in spite of them	not started <input type="radio"/>	getting started <input type="radio"/>	well on our way <input type="radio"/>	we're there! <input type="radio"/>
8	INCLUSION. Increased participation of people with disabilities in worship, study, service and leadership, as well as increased comfort levels of members with a more diverse congregation	not started <input type="radio"/>	getting started <input type="radio"/>	well on our way <input type="radio"/>	we're there! <input type="radio"/>
9	OUTREACH (Local). Options explored and action plans formulated for partnership opportunities with local agencies and organizations serving people with disabilities	not started <input type="radio"/>	getting started <input type="radio"/>	well on our way <input type="radio"/>	we're there! <input type="radio"/>
10	LEADERSHIP. Recruitment of lay members with disabilities for leadership roles within the congregation and a willingness demonstrated to accept and accommodate an ordained leader with disability	not started <input type="radio"/>	getting started <input type="radio"/>	well on our way <input type="radio"/>	we're there! <input type="radio"/>



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11	NEW CONSCIOUSNESS. Resistant barriers of attitude within the congregation toward people with disabilities addressed (e.g., through adult education forums, consciousness raising by the leadership of the congregation, and one-on-one friendships)	not started <input type="radio"/>	getting started <input type="radio"/>	well on our way <input type="radio"/>	we're there! <input type="radio"/>
12	TRANSFORMATION. Ongoing transformation of the congregation (through enriched opportunities, responsibilities, and friendships) into a place where children and adults with disabilities are welcomed, fully included, and treated with respect	not started <input type="radio"/>	getting started <input type="radio"/>	well on our way <input type="radio"/>	we're there! <input type="radio"/>
13	ADVOCACY (External). An expanded advocacy role for congregation members regarding the needs and rights of persons with disabilities in the community-at-large	not started <input type="radio"/>	getting started <input type="radio"/>	well on our way <input type="radio"/>	we're there! <input type="radio"/>
14	OUTREACH. Successful strategies, insights, and effective practices compiled and shared with other congregations and communities	not started <input type="radio"/>	getting started <input type="radio"/>	well on our way <input type="radio"/>	we're there! <input type="radio"/>
15	SHARING THE STORY. The story of the transformation of the congregation publicized through articles, presentations, and/or media events	not started <input type="radio"/>	getting started <input type="radio"/>	well on our way <input type="radio"/>	we're there! <input type="radio"/>



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Funding Accessibility Adaptations

Funding can be a barrier to making necessary adaptations to facilities to programs to enhance participation by removing barriers. Here are some suggested ways to address funding restraints:

- Assess the needs of current members. If you have limited funds, it makes sense to use them where they will meet immediate needs.
- Start small. Printing large-print bulletins and purchasing a few large-print hymnals are inexpensive ways to improve accessibility.
- Create a non-lapsing fund in the church budget for accessibility improvements. Add a designated amount to the fund each year.
- For large projects, seek out external sources of funding. There may be grant money available.
- Host music-fests, potato bars, car washes etc. to raise money for a specific project.

More ideas for raising funds are available in:

Directory of Grants for Organizations Serving People with Disabilities (2000). Edited by Richard Eckstein. This book provides a directory of over 700 foundations that have a history of giving grants for disabilities issues.

Money and Ideas: Creative Approaches to Congregational Access (2001). Religion & Disability Program, National Organization on Disability. This booklet gives fund-raising and creative strategies to help churches raise money to become more accessible.



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Suggestions for Congregations to Promote Awareness

Awareness-Raising Activities

1. *Arrange a time to have an awareness potluck.* Split your group in half. One group is the caregivers and the other group is care recipients. Caregivers must get food for the care recipients and feed them. Discuss the experience afterward. How did this experience feel? If you were this dependent, would you stop going to church? What was it like to have someone totally dependent on you? Would you bring your family member to church if they required this much care? How could the church be helpful in a situation of so much dependence?
2. *Take a field trip through your church building in a wheelchair.* Have the group problem solve and really discover the obstacles together. Invite a physical therapist to join you, if possible.
3. *Invite a special guest with a leader dog or service dog.* Find out the difference between the two. Find out how to remove barriers for these brothers and sisters in Christ. Maybe someone in your congregation would be interested in becoming a foster puppy family. These families raise puppies for one year; then the puppies go on to be trained as service or leader dogs.
4. *Invite a group home for the developmentally disabled to come for dinner and an activity night.* Plan games that would include everyone. Advanced planning and research is very important. Consult a special education for game ideas. You might also visit the group home in advance to help begin relationships. Make sure staff comes with the group home residents. This is very helpful and important. You could have a campfire night. Sing all those favorite camp songs and tell those great stories!
5. *Have a "Book of the Week" club for children.* Highlight a special book for each week. Have children and adults read this book and recommend others. You could even start a "Special Needs" section in your church library.
6. *Host a "Special Olympics."* Try different games in a wheel chair, with a visual impairment, hearing impairment, or another disability. Encourage and help others. That is how we all win! Maybe your church could go as a group to a wheelchair basketball game. It is amazing to watch!