

ACCESSIBILITY & DISABILITY COMMISSION

Results from the Survey done by the Accessibility Task Force in 2008

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Hospitality requires that our congregations go above and beyond the Americans with Disabilities Act (http://www.interfaithdisability.org/ada_and_religion.php)
- People with disabilities are the experts about welcoming and hospitality to people with disabilities -- engage them.
- Sometimes disabilities are invisible.
- Empathy / Sympathy for people who have disabilities
- Our congregations have to reflect GOD- (Would what we are doing in our congregations lead a visitor to the conclusion that GOD is "nice?")
- All People want to be valued (One Group highlighted **G**ifts **A**bilities **T**alents **E**xperience and **S**kills)- All Groups discussed getting people with disabilities involved on the basis of their gifts-possibly survey to discover those abilities
- Self-Advocacy –The voices of people with disabilities should be LOUDER and more evident- All groups mentioned advocacy - in one it was a fine line between pushing and convincing about the right thing to do.
- PEOPLE with disabilities are PEOPLE not their disabilities
- Access to facilities, programs, and transportation are important

- Create ALLIES (People who are aging and people with disabilities who share similar concerns)
- Shut-ins are really shut-out
- Community Support is crucial
(http://www.interfaithdisability.org/start_a_support_group.php?rid=2&mid=99)
- Build relationships across the congregations and in collaboration with fellow congregants -- develop strategies
- Open eyes (if possible), doors, and hearts to issues
- “If you build it they will come.”

COMMUNICATION

- Ensure that everyone is in the loop regarding your congregation’s accessibility – create a cheat sheet for receptionist, put a statement about inclusion on your congregation’s web site, in bulletins, newsletters, etc.
- Create a guide to your congregation’s accessibility / inclusion features
- Plan for the presence and participation of people who use service animals
- Ask questions about specific accommodations on your congregation’s membership form.

- Survey people with disabilities about accessibility / accommodations that need to be made. Ask them to rank the needs in order of importance to assist with prioritizing
- Every Group mentioned the importance of changing language around disability. Although there is much conversation regarding disability and language. Best practice in the disability community is person-first-language. This convention begins with the person first and then the disability. Person-first-language recognizes that disability is but one aspect of an individuals reality.
- Many participants wanted to encourage their congregations to adopt person-first-language.

RESPITE CARE

- Every group mentioned the importance of respite care
- Connect with & learn from congregations / organizations who are already offering respite
- A Success Story from Interfaith Disability Connection about a respite program
http://www.interfaithdisability.org/success_stories.php#Circle
- The Lutheran Church of the Resurrection (<http://www.e-lcr.org/svcmin-circlefriends.htm>)
- FOCUS (Families OF Children Under Stress)
<http://www.focus-ga.org/>
- Mount Bethel United Methodist Church
(<http://www.mtbethel.org/menu272/Special-Needs-Ministry>)

EDUCATION

- Start an inclusion committee that includes people with disabilities as the experts on accessibility. Recruit allies (people who are aging, family members, friends, etc.). Ensure that people with many different types of disabilities are represented
- Consider working with the existing hospitality committee in your congregation to integrate inclusion into the work already being done in your congregation
- [Contact](#) the Interfaith Disability Network for assistance with best practices in this area.
- Have your committee do an assessment of the current level of access/inclusion in your congregation to provide a baseline for improvement
- Offer people with disabilities opportunities to lead throughout the year (not just during disability awareness observances)
- Offer Disability Awareness Workshops in your congregation (IDC can provide guidance and assistance in this area)
Begin by educating children in your community- Provide training to ushers/greeters

SPECIFIC ACCOMMODATIONS

- Consider providing these specific accommodations in your congregation
- Interpreters for people who are deaf

- Large print for people who have difficulty reading printed materials
- Assistive listening devices for people who have difficulty hearing
- Instead of Saying “Please rise to sing” consider “please rise in body or in spirit.”
- Valet Parking for people who have difficulty walking from the parking lot to your congregation’s facilities
- Be Creative about transportation
- Programs for people who are deaf
- Take worship to the home of a person with a disability- invite congregation to attend
- Take the sacraments of the church to people who cannot receive them at the church
- Get youth involved supporting children with disabilities
- Offer an employment Support Group for people with disabilities in your community

FUNDING

- One participant gave his tithe to a fund that he created in the congregation to provide money for accessibility/inclusion projects.

- Engage individual groups within the congregation in helping to raise money for accessibility.
- Be innovative.

PARTICIPATION

People with disabilities want and need opportunities to serve. Think about the following:

Can a person with a disability

Be a clergy person in your congregation?

Be an acolyte in your congregation?

Serve on a committee in your congregation?

Chair a committee in your congregation?

Be included in a class in your congregation?

We hope these ideas will answer any questions you may have and give you a starting point for accessibility discussions at your house of worship.

The Accessibility/Disability Task Force 2008