

C N H D I S T R I C T

Disability Ministry Task Force *Special Edition*



Disability Ministry Task Force

Mission: *To equip the Church to reach out, include, and encourage full participation of people with disabilities and their families in the life of Christ's Church.*

Vision: *To see people with disabilities and their families welcomed and included as members of Christ's Body, the Church.*

Dear CNH DMTF Friends,

This is the first in a series of articles about reaching out to people with disabilities to welcome them into the Church of Christ. Most pastors in the CNH District have been introduced to Disability Ministry through presentations at Pastors Conferences, and in particular, at the May Pastors Conference that was focused on many aspects of Disability Ministry. At the 2012 CNH Convention, the resolution to form a Disability Ministry Task Force was overwhelmingly approved, recognizing the need to welcome people with disabilities into the church. The next step is to share the vision with the members of congregations and find a champion who is willing to step forward and start addressing the needs of people with disabilities so that no person or family affected by a disability is turned away from the Church of Christ.

Disability Ministry Awareness

The following verses are a reminder of the need for a disability ministry in every church.

Luke 14:21-23 *"Go out **quickly** into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame."* "Sir" the servant said, "what you

ordered has been done, but there is still room." Then the master told his servant, "Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full."

Mark 2:3-5 *"Four men arrived carrying a paralyzed man on a mat. They couldn't get to Jesus so they dug through the clay roof above his head. Then they lowered the sick man on his mat, right down in front of Jesus. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralyzed man, "My son, your sins are forgiven."*

Also see:

John 9:1-3, Romans 12:3-5, 1 Corinthians 12:12-20, Matthew 28:19-20, 2 Corinthians 1:3-5, Galatians 6:2

How do you look at people with disabilities?

1 Samuel 16:7 *"But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."*

2 Corinthians 4:18 *"So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."*

Church Facility Survey

Once the need to welcome people with disabilities into your church is embraced, the first steps may be to perform a Church Facility Accessibility Survey of your church and determine how friendly your church campus is to people with physical disabilities. Don't think that all is lost if you find a long list of improvements that could be made to make your church the most accessible church ever built. Consider making programs accessible as a first step. This could be as simple as moving a program from an inaccessible room to an accessible room if a person who uses a wheelchair wants to attend the class.

A common misconception is making a church accessible is that the cost is too high, especially for smaller churches. Look at Five Myths of Starting a Disability Ministry (<http://www.joniandfriends.org/blog/myths-disability-ministry>). Perhaps the first place to start is the sanctuary. This is the place where everybody should be welcome. At least one area, and preferably a variety of options, for people who use wheelchairs and walkers should be available to use. If chairs are used in the sanctuary, having the ushers move a chair for a person using a wheelchair is easy. If the sanctuary has permanent pews, a relatively easy solution is to shorten a pew or two so that a person in a wheelchair can sit next to family members and friends and not block the aisle. This will accommodate not only the people who currently use wheelchairs, but also people who use walkers and want to keep their walkers next to them and not have their walkers put somewhere else in the church during worship. As the population ages and start needing to use walkers and wheelchairs, these modifications will be used by more people.

Think about the logistics of Holy Communion. Holy Communion is first and foremost receiving the body and blood of Jesus in and with the bread and wine. But it is also a fellowship with people and most people want to receive communion at the altar and with fellow believers. If the altar has steps to the communion rail, then communion can be given at the end of distribution at the bottom of the stairs to the altar. Logistics of minimizing the distance needed to move to the communion rail and return to the seating area without disturbing the flow of the members can be overcome by bringing the communion rail to the floor level, by making cut outs in pews, and having people who use wheelchairs commune first. Communion can also be brought to people where they are seating if that is the preference of the communicant. Ask the people with

the disabilities how they would like to receive communion. Have a "can do" attitude rather than coming up with reasons why it won't work.



Pew removed and pew shortened to accommodate people who use wheelchairs

Two small steps to start a disability ministry:
Church Facility Accessibility Survey:
<http://www.joniandfriends.org/education-and-training/>
Church Survey: Assessment Tool
<http://www.lcms.org/socialissues/disability>
Remember, if you reach out to just one person with a disability, you have started a disability ministry.

Please let the Disability Ministry Task Force (DMTF) know about the physical accessibility of your church (disability-min@cnh-lcms.org). The DMTF would like to add to the CNH website churches that are disability friendly in any way so that people with disabilities can find your church and know that they are welcome. The DMTF is ready to come to your church to make a presentation on disability ministry and how your church can become an irresistible church to people with disabilities.