

Disability Ministry Task Force



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.*

This is a continuing series of articles about reaching out to people with disabilities to welcome them into the Church of Christ. The goal is to start and continue 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 Friendly Language

If you haven't noticed the language being used to describe people with disabilities in past articles, the word "people" is the first word when describing people with disabilities. Though a change in grammar or the use of various words may seem like a small detail, it can show respect or a lack of understanding to the person with a disability.

Using people first language shows that the person with a disability is a person first and the disability is secondary to who the person is. Instead of saying a "blind woman", say, "the woman who is blind." Instead of saying "the wheelchair user", say "the person who uses a wheelchair."

When referring to a person who uses a wheelchair, do not say "the person who is confined to a wheelchair."

The person is not "confined" to the wheelchair, but uses it as a mobility aid to make life better for the person. A person in a third world country without a wheelchair may be "confined to his house" because he doesn't own a wheelchair. However, when the person is given a wheelchair, he has been given the gift of freedom to leave his home and become a part of society. As one wheelchair user puts it, "I personally am not 'bound' by my wheelchair. It is a very liberating device that allows me to work, play, maintain a household, and connect with family and friends, and 'have a life.' "

Other hurtful terms include brain-damaged, slow learner, or retarded. Using people first language would include, "a man with a brain injury" or "a child with a developmental disability." Using the word "retarded", though still in use as a medical term, is hurtful to people with learning disabilities and their family members.

A last note to lighten up the article is "handicapped parking places." First, the word "handicapped" should not be used and should be replaced with "disabled." Even then, a "disabled parking place" would mean that the parking place is "disabled." A lengthy description would be, "a parking place reserved for people with disabilities." Look at the signs going into parking lots

that refer to parking restrictions for parking places reserved for people with disabilities and the requirement to show a placard or other designation in the license plate. "Disabled parking" is close enough for most people.

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.