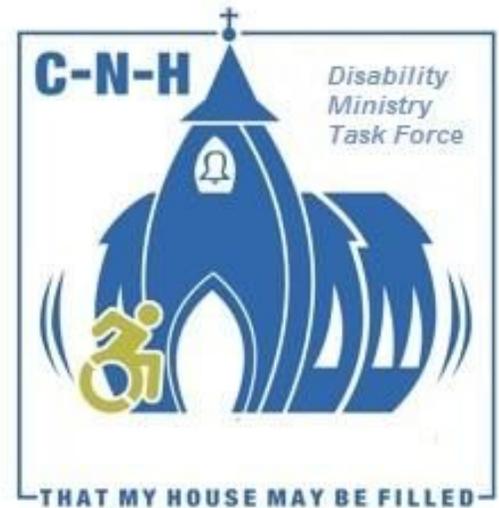


Disability Ministry Task Force

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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 second in a 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.

Sympathy versus Empathy

One definition of the word sympathy is, "A feeling of pity or sorrow for the distress of another." It is very familiar to people with disabilities. While this may be well intended, it can be felt as pity and can be hurtful when expressed as pity. While the cause of the disability and the continuing complications associated with the disability may be difficult for the person with the disability and those close to the person with a disability, pity is not what the person wants or needs. Empathy is defined as, "The ability to identify with or understand another's situation or feelings." While nobody can know how a person with a disability feels about their disability, trying to look through the eyes of the person with a disability is the first step in showing compassion for the person with a disability.

Defining a Disability

It is important to remember that in the context of the Americans with Disability Act (ADA), "disability" is a legal term rather than a medical one. Because it has a legal definition, the ADA's definition of disability is different from how disability is defined under some other laws.

The ADA defines a person with a disability as a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activity. This includes people who have a record of such an impairment, even if they do not currently have a disability. It also includes individuals who do not have a disability but are regarded as having a disability.

The following are some definitions of key words related to defining a disability:

The definition of an **impairment** is, "The state of being diminished, weakened, or damaged, especially mentally or physically."

The definition of a **disability** is, "A disadvantage or deficiency, especially a physical or mental impairment that interferes with or prevents normal achievement in a particular area."

The definition of a handicap is:

- (1) A disadvantage experienced by a person due to impairment or disability, which reflects interaction and adaptation to the person's surroundings, to which may be added stress, which reflects the person's subjective response to the impairment.
- (2) Inability to carry out normal social roles because of an impairment or disability handicap.

While there is not enough space to define all physical or developmental disabilities, the following is a link to the Specialized Ministries Information Sheets from the LCMS web site <http://lcms.org/socialissues/disability>. It includes information about people who are blind, people who are deaf, people with developmental disabilities, people with mental illness, and people with mobility disabilities.

Autism Spectrum Disorder is becoming more diagnosed and more prevalent in the population. The following is a link to a four minute radio broadcast by Joni Eareckson Tada about the response of a pastor when a family with a child with autism came to the church. <http://www.joniandfriends.org/radio/5-minute/autism-and-your-church/>

Disability Friendly Language

If you haven't noticed the language being used to describe people with disabilities in this article, 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.