

Ministry with persons with disabilities and their families



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Brief Outline



- **Understanding disability**
- **Types/language**
- **Changes over the years**
- **Disability models**
- **Responses of the church to disability**
- **What does inclusion look like?**
- **Barriers to community/inclusive?**
- **Ministry “with” persons with disabilities and their families- what our communities look like**

Goals in this ministry:



- **Educate ourselves**
- **Advocate and remove barriers**
- **Be a friend.**
- **Help one another to live ordinary lives**
(more from Bill Gaventa)

YOUR Congregation



What disabilities are present in your congregation?

Under ADA, an individual with a disability is a person who:



- (1) has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities;**
- (2) OR (2) has a record of such an impairment;**
- (3) OR (3) is regarded as having such an impairment.**

There are many types of disabilities, such as those that affect a person's:



- Hearing
- Vision
- Movement
- Thinking
- Remembering
- Learning
- Communicating
- Mental health
- Social relationships

(Source: Center for Disease Control)

Kinds of Disabilities (contd.)



Simply put, disabilities can be:

- **Physical, emotional, psychological, intellectual.**
- **They can be congenital (at birth)/ developmental, or acquired- meaning they develop after birth.**

CURRENT FACTS



- 10% of US Population- requires assistance of person or device
- 18% of US Population (1 in 6) experience disability on a continuum
- By 2055- 54 million (estimates)

-US Census


(SOURCE: US CENSUS)

Acquired Disability:



According to the [*Council for Disability Awareness*](#), just over one out of four of today's twenty-year-olds will become disabled before they retire.

25%

- 
- **It's a factor that everyone will face at some point.**
 - **Fluid category- acquired disability always possibility**
 - **Hard to say, “Disability doesn't affect me.”**
 - **As the body of Christ, hard to say, “Disability doesn't affect us.”**
(Much of this from Deb Creamer)



- If you are not part of a family with a person with disabilities, statistics show, you probably will be.
- AND YET... our churches and theologies are organized around a theology of ability
- AND YET... church is typically not listed as one of the stronger supports in a family's life with a person with a disability

Think of your community...



- **What kinds of disabilities do your church members have?**
- **What kinds of supports do they have?**
- **How many people with disabilities in your communities are not in your church, or any church? Why?**

Language of Disability



- **Old terms: handicapped, crippled, retarded**
- **New: Person first , “person who is blind;” “boy with autism” - instead of “blind person” and “autistic boy”**



- Disability identity, as both a label and a form of self-understanding, depends a great deal on the interpretation of others. One is disabled insofar as he or she appears disabled...to be disabled is to be labeled so, typically by a medical practitioner or social service/governmental agency. In this way, disability identity is intricately related to medical, economic, and political issues. Similar relationships can be seen within other identities...To be a person with a disability has much to do with the extent and degree to which one is understood or treated as having a disability. Disability identity also depends on societal understandings of normal.

Deborah Creamer, Disability and Christian Theology: Embodied Limits and Constructive Possibilities (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 6.

A few models of disability



For our purposes today:

- Medical Model of Disability (diagnosis)
- Social Model of Disability (attitudes)
- Moral Model of Disability (for example, sin)

For more: <http://www.disabled-world.com/definitions/disability-models.php>

From scripture...



- *“Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image” (Genesis 1:26)*
- *“The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. . . . those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable.” (1 Corinthians 12:12, 22)*
- *“For we are what [God] has made us, created in Jesus Christ for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.” (Ephesians 2:10)*

Scripture, contd..



- *“Now there are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit . . . ”* (1 Corinthians 12:4)
- *“To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good . . . ”* (1 Corinthians 12:7)
- *“Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.”* (1 Peter 4:8-9)
- *“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.”* (1 Peter 4:10)

(See more: <http://network.crcna.org/disability-concerns/biblical-perspective-disability-and-inclusion>)

Points of interest:



- Some people who care about disability/theology will say it is the most important set of theological reflections in 21st century- especially when we think about ramifications of social marginalization in the church
- Some call disability the “great equalizer” among all faiths, denominations; it is not race, class, gender, ethnicity or sexual orientation specific



- **Educate ourselves**
- **Advocate and remove barriers**
- **Throughout it all, be a friend.**
- **We must help one other to live ordinary lives.**

Three main barriers exist to the full participation of people with disabilities in faith communities:



- **Barriers of architecture:**

- Steps leading to entrances
- Doorways too narrow to accommodate wheelchairs
- Interior stairways
- Stairs to the altar
- Pews with inability to get wheelchairs around

- **Barriers of communication:**

- Too small of print
- Sound system is not amplified

- **Barriers of attitude:**

- Inaccurate judgments of person with disability
- Prejudice
- Unexamined ideas



- **How has your church responded?**
- **Architecture**
- **Communication**
- **Attitude**



“The church often gets to first base and believes the work is done.”

*-Brett Webb-Mitchell,
Disability Advocate*

**“OF ALL THE BARRIERS TO
FULL PARTICIPATION AND
INCLUSION, THE BARRIER
OF UNEXAMINED
ATTITUDES IS THE MOST
DIFFICULT TO ADDRESS.”**

**— GINNY THORNBURGH, DIRECTOR
OF THE AAPD INTERFAITH INITIATIVE**

Inclusion: everyone's work



- Call of the church to welcome all members
- Call of each to be who one is created to be
- Communities thrive when people share gifts.

- Beyond rights! To love and respect

Sometimes we have to get creative!



- **Beyond accessibility- have the ramp, but do you have the respect?**
- **Have the rights, but is there respect and dignity?**
- **Being inclusive is a body-building exercise.**

Your ideas?



ASK:

- Is this a place where people feel welcome, or a place where a variety of persons can use gifts?

Random list:

- Enlarge the print size of the bulletin
- Ensure the use of a microphone
- Change wording from “All stand” to “Stand or remain seated”
- Invite a person with an intellectual disability to be a greeter
- Try a body prayer

- **Be a friend-** start a circle of support

Things to do:

- **Accessibility Survey**
- **Sunday School Programs- supports**
- **Respite for families-**
- **Connections with social service agencies**
- **Provide Spiritual and Emotional Support- from your strengths**
- **Providing Resources and Informational support**
- **Worship styles**
- **Circles of Support- Mennonite Church**
- **Friendship programs**
- **Advocates in church- check in with families**
- **Develop Relationships**

Circles of Support



- **Develop models of friendship.**
 - Connect persons with similar interests.
 - Circles of Support

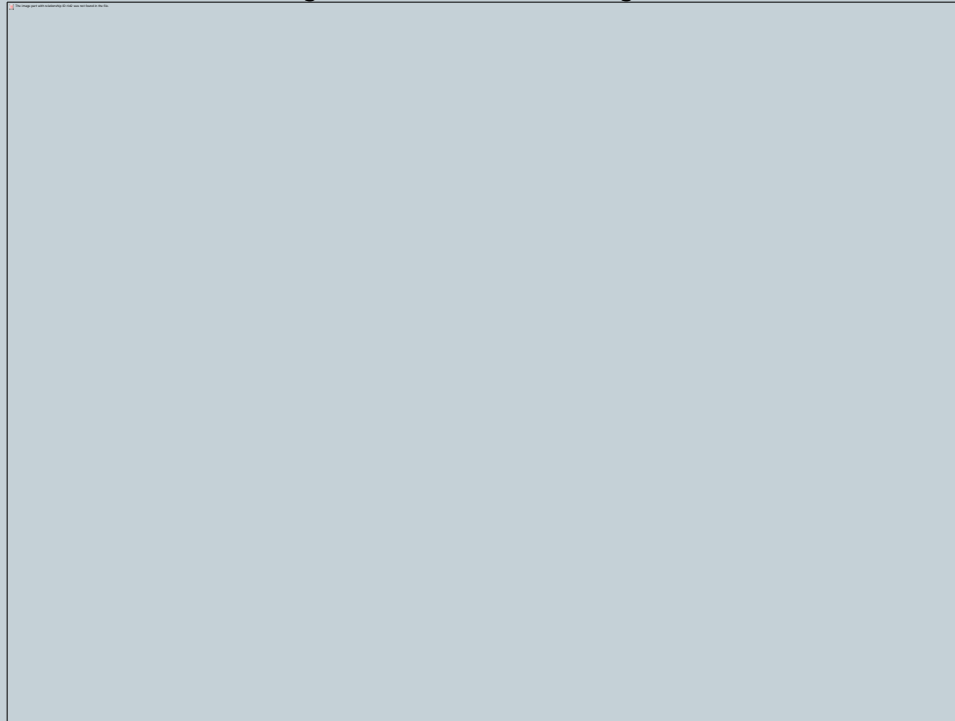
“It is wonderful to be surrounded by people who aren’t sorry for what you cannot do.”

-Bill Gaventa

Being a friend...



...might be the best way to serve your sister or brother.



Think about...



- **The gift of “having an ordinary life”**
- **How can we make our churches as inclusive as public places– moving past only accessibility?**



Disability networks/resources:

- **umdisabilityministries.org**
- **Adnetonline.org**
- **Accessibilitynetwork.net**
- **BethesdaInstitute.org/Theology**
- <http://faithanddisability.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Disability-and-Faith-Resources-on-Spiritual-Supports.pdf>



Additional information, clarifications, and continued conversation:

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Thanks!