

# ARE ALL WELCOME?

Welcoming and  
Accommodating People  
with Disabilities In Our  
Faith Communities

# Objectives

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- Participants will increase their understanding of:
  - Communicating appropriately and creating a more welcoming and inclusive atmosphere
  - Providing physical access
  - Providing auditory and visual access
  - Identifying and reaching out to the disability community
  - Available Resources

# WE ARE EVERYWHERE!

- It is estimated that there are over 56 Million Americans with Disabilities
- **There are approximately 500,000 Mississippians with disabilities**
- Mississippi has the highest rate of individuals with disabilities per capita in the United States
- **Disability is the largest minority in the country**
- And the only one that anyone can join at any time
- **We will all face disability, either permanent or temporary, at some time**





85% of people with and without disabilities state that religious faith is important in their lives, but only 47% of people with disabilities attend church at least once a month.



# Basic Premises

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- ❑ Disability is a natural part of the human experience that doesn't diminish a person's right to live independently, exert choice and control, and fully participate in and contribute to their community.
- ❑ Disability is often a consequence of the environment. Architectural, economic and social barriers exist within society, not within the person.
- ❑ Children and adults who have conditions called disabilities are unique individuals with unlimited potential, like everyone else (Snow, 2008).

## Difference between inclusion and belonging:

- Are people with disabilities missed when they are not here?
- Are they valued for what they contribute to the church community?
- Do they serve on the altar, on the vestry on committees?

# Ensuring that people with disabilities feel welcomed.

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- When new members join, ask in a sensitive and dignified way if any accommodations would enhance their participation in the faith community
- Ask what steps people have taken to make them feel welcome and if anything made them feel uncomfortable or unwelcome
- Ask if anyone needs gluten-free sacrament or communion to let leaders know (Provide separately)
- Ask if they are involved in congregational programs and activities to the extent they would like

# Is my church:

- 1) A place where people with disabilities can come to understand God as “nice”?
  - 2) A place where someone using a mobility device, wheelchair, scooter, walker, cane, can enter, make friends, worship and use the restroom?
  - 3) A place where pain, difficulties and weakness can be revealed?
  - 4) A place where someone with a mental illness or psychiatric disability or cognitive disability is honored and welcomed?
  - 5) A place where someone with a hearing loss or vision loss or an older adult losing hearing and vision can suggest ways to improve lighting and sound?
  - 6) A place where no one is ignored or treated as a nuisance?
  - 7) A place where all children and adults, with and without disabilities, are included, affirmed, valued and enjoyed?
- Ask yourself, what do you do well at your church currently? Where could you improve?

# Accessibility Site Survey Tool

This tool has been created for purposes of this training. It generally follows the Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines and Standards. While churches are not required by law to meet these standards, following these guidelines will ensure that the vast majority of individuals with disabilities will be able to navigate independently throughout the property and utilize the resources available to them through the church.

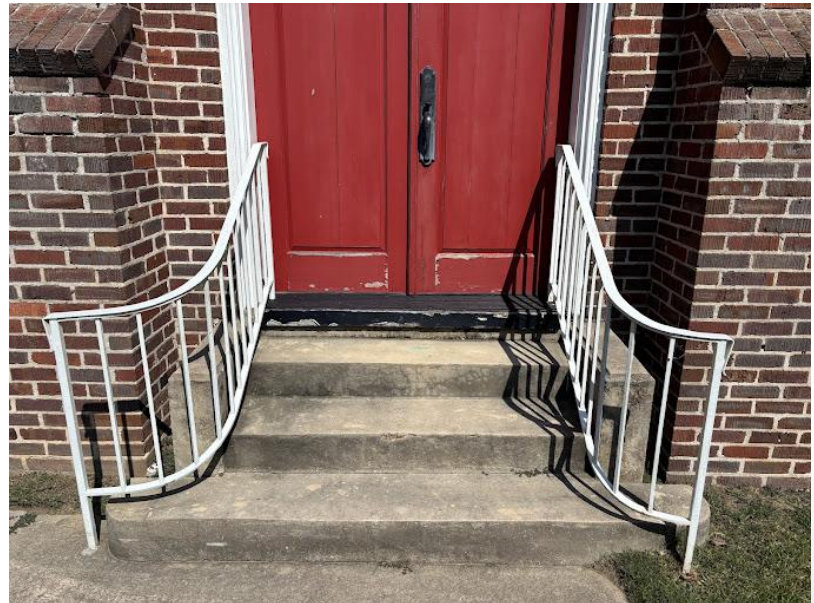
# Physical Access

- Parking
- Path of Travel
- Entrances
- Restrooms
- Public Spaces

**This is a good!**



# This is bad!



# Communication Access

- Hearing
- Seeing
- Understanding



[DeafVibes.com/hearing technologies](https://DeafVibes.com/hearing-technologies)



# Programmatic and Attitudinal Access



# RESOURCES

## Suggested Books –

- *My Body Is Not A Prayer Request; Disability Justice in the Church*, by Amy Kenny
- *The Bible Disability and the Church: A New Vision of the People of God*, by Amos Young
- *Autism Out Loud* by Adrian Wood, Carrie Cariello and Kate Swenson

## Documentaries -

- Change, Not Charity – streaming on PBS
- Crip Camp – streaming on PBS

## Websites -

[www.faithward.org/everybody-belongs-serving-together](http://www.faithward.org/everybody-belongs-serving-together)

[www.byfaithonline.com/welcoming-people-with-disabilities-into-church-life](http://www.byfaithonline.com/welcoming-people-with-disabilities-into-church-life)

[www.disabilityandfaith.org/respecting-neurodiversity-in-the-church](http://www.disabilityandfaith.org/respecting-neurodiversity-in-the-church)

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