

# The Church and People with Disabilities

Awareness, Accessibility, and  
Advocacy

Book by Peggy A. Johnson





# **Session One: Awareness**



## **Chapter 1: Awareness**

## **Chapter 2: The Bible and Disabilities**

## **Chapter 3: Labels and Etiquette**



# Session One: Awareness



## Objectives:

- To verbalize comfort with disability etiquette and people-first language
- To understand the biblical and historical background for negative perceptions of persons with disabilities



# Objectives, continued



- To differentiate between healing and curing
- To identify collective and individual attitudes about disability that divide the body of Christ and to consider attitudes that bind us together



# Introductions



- Introduce yourself and, in one or two sentences, explain why you picked this class and what you hope to learn during our time together.
- Class leaders will introduce themselves and briefly explain why they are leading the course.

# Inclusive practices

- Room layout for mobility.
- Make your needs known.
- State your name so everyone knows who is speaking.
- Anything presented visually is described.
- OK to move around or stand if more comfortable.

# Inclusive practices

- Use of “fidgets” to help some of us pay attention.
- Inclusion means no “us” and “them”  
- we are all part of the body of Christ.
- Help each other – work in pairs.
- Find ways we can ensure that all voices are heard.

# Group Covenant

- Prayerfully come up with at least one ground rule for our work together, e.g. listen respectfully, keep what is said in the room confidential.
- Share your idea, and we will record each suggestion.



# Group Covenant

- Review the ideas – is anything important missing?
- As a group, select the items that will guide the group's interactions, and record them.
- Sign the covenant poster and keep it posted.

## John 9: 1-11\*

<sup>1</sup>As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. <sup>2</sup>His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” <sup>3</sup>Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him.

<sup>4</sup>We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. <sup>5</sup>As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” <sup>6</sup>When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes,<sup>7</sup>saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent).

Then he went and washed and came back able to see. <sup>8</sup>The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” <sup>9</sup>Some were saying, “It is he.” Others were saying, “No, but it is someone like him.” He kept saying, “I am the man.”

- <sup>10</sup>But they kept asking him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” <sup>11</sup>He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ Then I went and washed and received my sight.”

# **A Reading - Peggy A. Johnson**

“However, it is also true that even with great faith sometimes people are not healed. I attended a healing service when I was a young adult and asked to receive sight in my left eye. I was not healed that night and the people who prayed for me insisted that I was not healed because of my lack of faith.

They encouraged me to read the Bible more because, according to the apostle Paul, “faith cometh from hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17 KJV). That seemed to be more of a chastisement than an encouragement for me on that night. The interplay of faith and the works of faith in the act of healing leave us with curious dilemmas.

How much faith is enough in order to be healed? In my case I believe the faith was there but God's plan was such that healing was not the better gift for my life."<sup>3</sup>





# Prayer

Creator, forgive us for our lack of awareness in our perception of disability. It is our society's view on beauty and perfection that sometimes distorts our view of one another.

Please help us to remember that you created each of us and are at work in our lives in ways we may not understand. Open our insight to the divine beauty, gifts, and talents in each of us.

Amen.

# Opening Discussion

Discuss the following:

- Why do some people equate disability with sinfulness and insist that a person can be healed if she or he just has enough faith?
- What other negative attitudes about disability are based on traditional religious interpretations of the Bible?

Describe ways through which experiencing an illness or disability may bring glory to God.

## Opening Discussion, continued

- How does one deal with the healing narratives from a disability perspective? If you are blind and have not received your sight after prayers for healing, how do you experience this passage?
- Discuss the difference between “curing” and “healing” as explained in the story from Rev. Jonathan Campbell (p.10).<sup>4</sup>

## Opening Discussion, continued

- What are ways in which God brings healing as *shalom* or wholeness?
- How can the church help us experience God's healing in our lives?
- What are other sources of negative attitudes about disability?

## **Opening Discussion, continued**

- Discuss how much exposure to children and adults with disabilities you had when growing up.
- How much does the amount of contact between persons with and without disabilities vary with the decade in which members were in school?
- What attitudes about disability did you learn at home?

## Opening Discussion, continued

- If you have had a disability from childhood, were you in a mainstream classroom alongside typical students, or were you in a segregated setting? If you are comfortable doing so, share a little about your school experience.
- What role do popular media play in perpetuating stereotypes and influencing our attitudes?



# BREAK



# DVD – A Place for All

View or listen to *A Place for All*, 1:12 to 5:54.

- Can you identify examples of communication, architectural and attitudinal barriers to full inclusion?
- What do the Scriptures say about welcoming people with disabilities?





# Time with the Text

Approximately 20 percent of us within the United States live with disability.<sup>5</sup> As we age more of us will acquire disabilities. Yet fewer people (50 versus 57 %)<sup>6</sup> with disabilities attend worship at least once a month and fewer yet attend other events.

- What might be some reasons for this discrepancy?

## Time with the Text, continued

- The story about the young man who had a visiting evangelist pray that the “demon of [Down syndrome] . . . be removed from him” is powerful.<sup>7</sup> Many people with disabilities can relate similar stories.
- When is it, if ever, acceptable to offer prayers for healing of someone with a disability?
- How can we avoid abusive prayer?

## **Time with the Text, continued**

- Bishop Johnson lists examples of gifts that persons who have disabilities bring to their congregations.<sup>8</sup> We are called to look for and receive the gifts and graces of all of God's children.
- Briefly mention the gifts of persons within your congregation whose presence makes a difference and who happen to have a disability.

## **Time with the Text, continued**

- Why don't we want to be seen first as our diagnosis or disability or, for that matter, as having any label?
- Why is language choice important, even if the terms that are considered the best this year will undoubtedly change in the future?

## **Time with the Text, continued**

Our liturgies and hymns often correlate blindness with lack of spiritual awareness. E.g. in “Amazing Grace” the author wrote, “I once was blind, but now I see.” Our beloved historic hymns were written in a different era and no offense was intended. However, even contemporary hymns and liturgies may include phrases such as “forgive us for turning a deaf ear to the cries of the poor.”

## **Time with the Text, continued**

- Why are some people of faith comfortable using a person's condition (usually deafness or blindness) as a metaphor for sin if that condition happens to be a disability?
- Do we do that with other characteristics such as skin color?
- How can we increase our awareness and sensitivity to the impact of these metaphors on people with disabilities?

## **Time with the Text, continued**

- Can you think of famous people with disabilities who society deems super heroes because they accomplish something that people don't expect from a person who has a disability?
- How do you feel when someone puts you on a pedestal?
- What is a better way of honoring people who are in leadership roles, perform or compete well, or otherwise share their gifts with the community while living with a disability?

# Putting it All Together

Part of the group will perform a Reader's Theater of the skit "Can You Believe It?"

- How do you understand disability etiquette?
- During the skit, consider
  - Do you see yourself in any of these characters?
  - What are alternatives to the blunders made?



# Wrapping it Up

- Did the skit seem realistic?
- Did you see yourself in any of the characters or statements?
- Did you learn anything new?
- Why are some people offended when those of us with disabilities want to do things independently and turn down unsolicited help?

## **Wrapping it Up, continued**

What does it say about a conference or church's hospitality if

- events are held in places that aren't accessible?
- we show media that not everyone can follow, or say that some families can't attend worship and some children can't come to camp?
- What message does this kind of rejection send to people who aren't in our churches?

# Time to Contemplate

## Circles of Awareness

- In one circle list persons with disabilities in your family. Don't get hung up on the definition of *disability*, but think of people with visible or hidden disabilities who may need accommodations in order to participate or who have difficulty managing daily activities in typical ways and need technology or assistance for some tasks.
- Subsequent circles may overlap each other.

## **Circles of Awareness, continued**

- In the second circle list persons with disabilities among your friends and acquaintances.
- In another, list persons with disabilities in your workplace or other community organizations that you participate in.
- In still another, list persons with disabilities in your congregation.

## **Circles of Awareness, continued**

- Which circle has the most people?
- Do they overlap at all?
- Identify who is not at the table in your congregation.
- Who is missing
- Who is present but not fully involved in the life of the church?

# Call to Action

If time permits, begin work on the Annual Accessibility Audit. Complete the "Attitudes" section individually or in pairs if several are from the same church or need a reader.

Base your responses on your home congregation. Answer to the best of your knowledge.



# **Closing Devotions: Litany**

Group One: We recognize that God made all creation and saw that it was good.

**Group Two: As a diverse people of God who bring special gifts and evidences of God's grace to the unity of the Church and to society,**

Group One: we are called to be faithful to the example of Jesus' ministry to all persons.

**Group Two: Inclusiveness means openness, acceptance, and support**

Group One: that enables all persons to participate in the life of the Church, the community, and the world.

**Group Two: Thus inclusiveness denies every semblance of discrimination.**



Group One: The services of worship  
[fellowship, and educational offerings] of  
every local church of The United Methodist  
Church

**Group Two: shall be open to all persons.**

Group One: The mark of an inclusive society  
is one in which all persons are open,  
welcoming, fully accepting, and supporting  
of all other persons,

**Group Two: enabling them to participate  
fully in the life of the church, the  
community, and the world.**

Group One: A further mark of inclusiveness is the setting of church activities in facilities accessible to persons with disabilities.

**ALL: In The United Methodist Church inclusiveness means the freedom for the total involvement of all persons.**

**. . . Amen.**

# Help Us Accept Each Other

*The United Methodist Hymnal #560*

- 1) Help us accept each other  
As Christ accepted us;  
Teach us as sister, brother,  
Each person to embrace.  
Be present, Lord, among us  
And bring us to believe  
We are ourselves accepted  
And meant to love and live.

2) Teach us, O Lord, Your lessons,  
As in our daily life  
We struggle to be human  
And search for hope and faith.  
Teach us to care for people,  
For all, not just for some,  
To love them as we find them  
Or as they may become.

3) Let Your acceptance change us,  
So that we may be moved  
In living situations  
To do the truth in love;  
To practice Your acceptance  
Until we know by heart  
The table of forgiveness  
And laughter's healing art.

4) Lord, for today's encounters  
With all who are in need,  
Who hunger for acceptance,  
For righteousness and bread,  
We need new eyes for seeing,  
New hands for holding on:  
Renew us with Your Spirit;  
Lord, free us, make us one!

# Assignment

Read Chapters 4-7, and catch up on the first part of the book if needed. Write down insights, stories that touch you, questions, and concepts you would like to discuss. Read with your heart as well as your mind, and pay attention to nudges through which God may be calling you and your church to engage in new ministries. Look for possibilities, hope, and opportunities for transformation.

# For Next Session

- Be prepared for outdoor time during the next session, so come with a sweater, umbrella, sunscreen, or whatever you need to be comfortable outdoors during the Accessibility Tour.
- Let your leader know if you need mobility assistance (such as use of a golf cart) for the Accessibility Tour.





# Optional Activities

Explore a website for more information on attitudes and language, for example *Disability Is Natural*:

<http://www.disabilityisnatural.com/>, or the UM Committee on DisAbility Ministries' article on "Communication and Etiquette with Persons with Disabilities"

<http://www.umdabilityministries.org/2404.html>.

- Read through several hymns to determine whether they are inclusive or could be hurtful toward those of us living with disabilities. In addition to the use of *deaf* or *blind* as synonyms for sinful, look for verses that portray people with disabilities as weak and needing to be served, versus inclusive language that calls all of us to serve each other within the body of Christ. Commit to using disability-inclusive and empowering language in your own speaking and writing.

- Look up other references to disability in the *Book of Discipline* or the *Book of Resolutions*. What guidelines do you find that are surprising? Is everything that is mandated consistently carried out? See the disability study web page for a listing of disability references.
- Research or poll people about attitudes regarding disability in your local church, community, or in a specific cultural group, and summarize your findings.

# Session One: Copyrights & Permissions

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1. Reading: Peggy A. Johnson, *The Church and People with Disabilities: Awareness, Accessibility, and Advocacy* (New York: United Methodist Women, 2014), 8.



## Copyrights & Permissions, continued

Closing Litany adapted from *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, Paragraph 140.

“Help Us Accept Each Other”

Words: Fred Kaan

Music: John Ness Beck

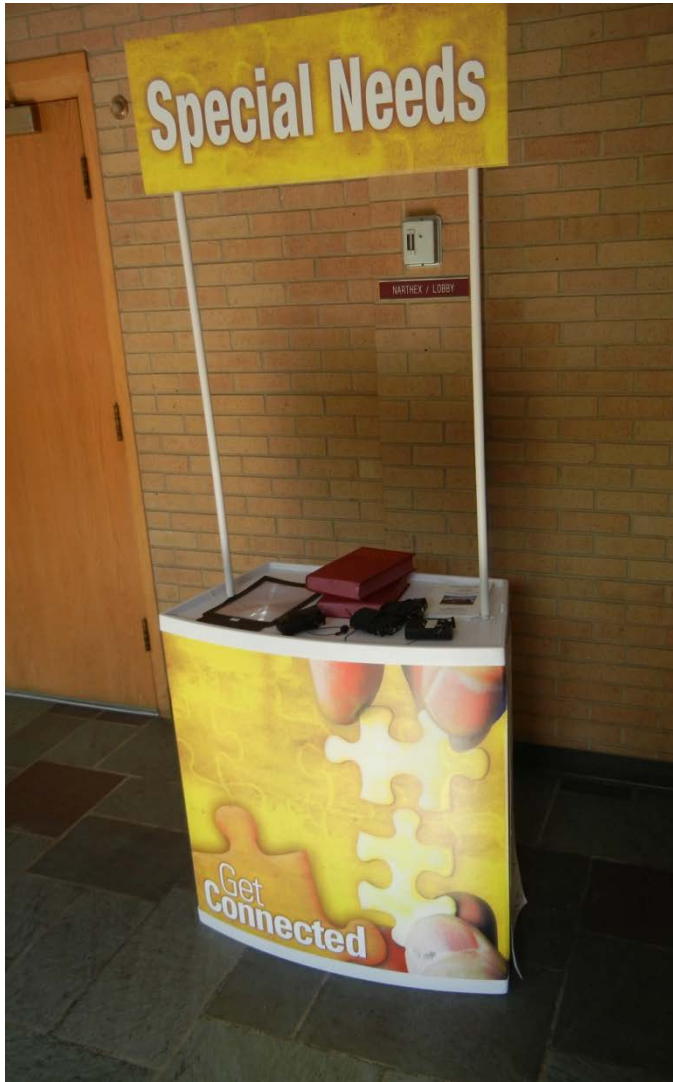
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6. Ibid.; for example, see 27, 30, 50.















# Session Two: Accessibility



- **Chapter 4: Deaf Culture**
- **Chapter 5: Hard of Hearing and Late-Deafened**
- **Chapter 6: Vision Loss**
- **Chapter 7: Mobility Challenges**



# Session Two: Accessibility



## Objectives:

- To recognize the role that environmental modifications, technology, and task adaptations play in enabling many persons with disabilities to live full, satisfying lives



# Objectives, continued



- To carry out a functional accessibility audit with a focus on safety and access for persons with mobility and vision losses
- To describe the difference between communication needs and identity of persons who are part of the Deaf culture, persons who are hard of hearing, and persons who are late-deafened

## **Scripture: Luke 14: 12-24\***

<sup>12</sup> He said also to the one who had invited him, 'When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. <sup>13</sup>But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. <sup>14</sup>And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.'

<sup>15</sup> One of the dinner guests, on hearing this, said to him, 'Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!' <sup>16</sup>Then Jesus\* said to him, 'Someone gave a great dinner and invited many. <sup>17</sup>At the time for the dinner he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, "Come; for everything is ready now."

<sup>18</sup>But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, “I have bought a piece of land, and I must go out and see it; please accept my apologies.” <sup>19</sup>Another said, “I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please accept my apologies.” <sup>20</sup>Another said, “I have just been married, and therefore I cannot come.” <sup>21</sup>So the slave returned and reported this to his master.

Then the owner of the house became angry and said to his slave, “Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.” <sup>22</sup>And the slave said, “Sir, what you ordered has been done, and there is still room.” <sup>23</sup>Then the master said to the slave, “Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled. <sup>24</sup>For I tell you, none of those who were invited will taste my dinner.” ’



# Who is My Mother, Who is My Brother?

(The Faith We Sing # 2225)

- If possible, use the ASL video clip of a Deaf-style format for this song. Find it at :  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TyVyNQq000>.
- Sign, clap, or drum to keep the beat, or find other ways to participate



# **Who is My Mother, Who is My Brother?** (The Faith We Sing # 2225)

1)

Who is my mother,  
who is my brother?  
All those who gather round Jesus Christ:  
Spirit-blown people  
born from the gospel  
sit at the table, round Jesus Christ.

2)

Differently abled,  
differently labeled,  
widen the circle round Jesus Christ,  
  
crutches and stigmas,  
culture's enigmas,  
all come together round Jesus Christ.

3)

Love will relate us --

color or status

can't segregate us, round Jesus Christ:

family failings,

human derailings --

all are accepted, round Jesus Christ.

4)

Bound by one vision,  
met for one mission  
we claim each other, round Jesus Christ:  
here is my mother,  
here is my brother,  
kindred in Spirit, through Jesus Christ.

# Prayer

God of all persons, thank you that we can come together with others and worship in the church.

Help us to overcome self and really encounter each other so that we may assist each other in our worship and work.

Thank you for transforming us when we come together as a body to praise and worship in your name.      Amen

# Opening Discussion

How might we understand the parable:

- Who is the host? Who is the servant?
- Who are the guests who reject the invitation?
- Who are the poor and lame and blind?
- What does the banquet feast represent?

## Opening Discussion, continued

Luke is writing to a fellowship of mostly Gentile believers<sup>1</sup> who had forgotten that they were to associate with all kinds of believers, not just the wealthy.<sup>2</sup> Jesus turned the accepted conventions upside down when he suggested that people from the margins should be the guests at the great banquet.<sup>3</sup>

- What does this passage suggest for our churches in the twenty-first century?



## Opening Discussion, continued

- When was the last time you compelled someone to attend worship?
- What would it mean to compel someone with love? What would it mean to compel someone who has a disability and might face barriers in your church?
- What might be barriers to worship in your setting?
- How can we help people outside the church be receptive to our invitation to God's party?

# Checking In

- Did any class member complete an optional assignment and want to briefly share findings or experiences?
- Does anyone have new insights about the materials and concepts presented in the first session?

# DVD – *A Place for All*

- View or listen to *A Place for All*, 19:56 to 23:59 to learn more about Bishop Johnson and her work with people who are Deaf.
- Discuss this material along with the book discussion in the next section.



# Deaf Culture

- Is the information on Deaf culture new to you? What are the hallmarks of Deaf culture, and why is this concept important to Deaf persons who identify with the culture?
- Share insights on effective use of interpreters and why Deaf persons may or may not be comfortable in your congregation.
- Is most information in your worship services is presented visually or auditorily? How easy or hard it would be for a Deaf person to follow?

# Hearing Loss: Background Information

People who develop a hearing loss significant enough to impact church participation seldom learn sign language and wouldn't benefit from learning because family and friends do not communicate in sign language.<sup>4</sup>

Up to 90 percent of persons with hearing loss stop attending worship when they can no longer hear the message.<sup>5</sup>

- How does your church make it easy for you or others to participate despite a hearing loss?
- Share efforts your congregation has made.
- These may include measures such as assistive listening devices, sermons available in print form, all videos captioned, acoustical measures such as sound baffles, consistent microphone use for speakers as well as the audience, or good lighting on the speaker's face.

# Low Vision and Blindness

- How can members who have low vision or are blind participate fully in worship, service, and fellowship in your congregation?
- Tell what their church is doing:
- Measures could include providing large-print, Braille, and digital versions of the bulletin and newsletter.

# **Low Vision and Blindness**

- Other measures might be an accessible website, transportation, Braille or digital hymnals, ADA raised-letter and Braille signage, describing visual events like a children's pageant, and reading aloud anything projected in print only format.
- Volunteers may be available to guide, introduce, and read or take notes for a person who is blind.



# Self-acceptance and Advocacy

- Many of us who acquire sensory or mobility challenges take a while to accept these changes and to acknowledge that we need accommodations.
- How can the church be supportive and invite members to advocate for ourselves?



# Assignment for Session Three

Read Chapters 8-10. Write down insights, stories that touch you, questions and concepts you would like to discuss.

Read with your heart as well as your mind, and pay attention to nudges through which God may be calling you and your church to engage in new ministries. Look for possibilities, hope, and opportunities for transformation.

# Break



# **Accessibility Awareness Tour**

- Leave the classroom for an awareness tour of the building and campus.
- Use the Accessibility Awareness Tour form.
- Divide into teams, each of which may focus on specific assigned areas.
- Each team needs a tape measure and clipboard.
- Share problems or examples of accessible design that you discover.

# Optional Activities

- Continue to be alert for accessibility challenges for the rest of the time together.
- Have someone gather your accessibility findings to present to the meeting site administration.
- If several participants know some sign language, form a sign choir and offer to share in one of the plenary worship sessions.

# Closing Devotions

Gather back together and offer a prayer of thanks for all the means by which campuses, church buildings, and programs can facilitate participation by all of us, and for the people who make these changes happen.



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“Who Is My Mother, Who Is My Brother”

Words: Shirley Erena Murray

Music: Jack Schrader

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<http://www.umcdhm.org/3004.pdf>, ii.













## **Session Three: Integration**



- **Chapter 8: Cognitive/ Intellectual/ Developmental Disabilities**
- **Chapter 9: Mental Health**
- **Chapter 10: Family Issues and Long-term Support**



## Session Three: Integration



**Objectives:** Participants will understand that

- Disability ministry means an attitude of integration in which there is no place for “us” and “them,” and all persons are welcomed and incorporated as members of the body of Christ.

# Session Three - Objectives

- Congregations can learn to identify, nurture, and use the gifts of persons with all kinds of disabilities in the service of God.
- Leaders strengthen worship and education through employing all the senses and engaging heart and body as well as mind and spirit.



# Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:12-26

If possible, use the multi-media video reading of this scripture from *The Message*, found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MexBDXKdJbc> or have someone read this aloud.<sup>1</sup>

Narrate the printed captions between the segments: “The three things you can’t say.

- 1) The church doesn’t need me.” (Read at the beginning of the video or group reading.)
- 2) “I wish I were somebody else.” (Read at 1:03 or before verse 14.)
- 3) “I don’t need you.” (Read at 2:15 or before verse 21.)

# 1 Corinthians 12: 12-26\*

- <sup>12</sup> For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. <sup>13</sup> For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.
- <sup>14</sup> Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many.

<sup>15</sup>If the foot were to say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less a part of the body. <sup>16</sup>And if the ear were to say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less a part of the body. <sup>17</sup>If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?

<sup>18</sup>But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. <sup>19</sup>If all were a single member, where would the body be? <sup>20</sup>As it is, there are many members, yet one body. <sup>21</sup>The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you', nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.'

<sup>22</sup>On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, <sup>23</sup>and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; <sup>24</sup>whereas our more respectable members do not need this.

But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, <sup>25</sup>that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. <sup>26</sup>If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

# **Many Gifts, One Spirit**

*(United Methodist Hymnal #114)*

- 1) God of change and glory,  
God of time and space,  
When we fear the future,  
give to us your grace.  
In the midst of changing ways  
give us still the grace to praise.

## *Refrain*

Many gifts, one Spirit, one love known in  
many ways.

In our difference is blessing, from diversity  
we praise

One Giver, one Lord, one Spirit, one Word  
Known in many ways, hallowing our days.  
For the Giver, for the gifts, praise, praise,  
praise!



2) God of many colors,  
God of many signs,  
You have made us different,  
blessing many kinds.  
As the old ways disappear,  
let your love cast out our fear.

## *Refrain*

Many gifts, one Spirit, one love known in  
many ways.

In our difference is blessing, from diversity  
we praise

One Giver, one Lord, one Spirit, one Word  
Known in many ways, hallowing our days.  
For the Giver, for the gifts, praise, praise,  
praise!

3) Freshness of the morning,  
newness of each night,  
You are still creating  
endless love and light.  
This we see, as shadows part,  
many gifts from one great heart.

## *Refrain*

Many gifts, one Spirit, one love known in  
many ways.

In our difference is blessing, from diversity  
we praise

One Giver, one Lord, one Spirit, one Word  
Known in many ways, hallowing our days.  
For the Giver, for the gifts, praise, praise,  
praise!

# Prayer

Creator of us all, remind us that you are in charge. Beautiful people, divinely created by you, have been sent into this world for your plans, regardless of the shape of the body. Many prayers would be answered if people were given a chance to show your glory.

Amen.

# Opening Discussion

In your small group, discuss

- What does it mean to you to be a part of the body of Christ?
- If Jesus showed up disguised as a stranger, what would he learn from your congregation about the makeup of the body of Christ?

When the Scripture refers to the “members that seem to be weaker,”<sup>2</sup> we need to remember that this weakness is society’s preconception, not a statement of fact.

- What does it mean that all of us are indispensable to the whole?
- How do we find our strength in our weakness?

## Opening Discussion, continued

In mainstream culture within the United States, independence is praised and dependence is feared.

- Is the concept of interdependence a more Christian approach?
- If so, what might interdependence look like in the life of your local church?



## **Opening Discussion, continued**

How does your congregation discern and employ gifts of all members? Is there a process to make sure that members of all ages and abilities have a chance to give and receive?

# Checking In

- Are there insights you have gleaned from our time together so far and from walking around the campus after our last session?
- Share one or two sentences if you'd like to do so.

# Overview

- Review the wide variety of cognitive, intellectual, and developmental disabilities mentioned in Chapter 8.
- What are similarities and what are differences in the needs of those of us who have one or more of these disabilities?

# Cognitive Disabilities

- In what ways does your congregation support people with cognitive and developmental disabilities?
- Are members with disabilities integrated, or is interaction with typical peers limited?

# Cognitive Disabilities

- Give examples of how persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities grow spiritually and contribute to the faith development of congregations.

# Autism Spectrum

Nearly every church has been or will be touched by the autism epidemic.

- Share experiences, with a focus on what families see as areas in which the church can be of support.
- What might be some needs of parents and siblings, as well as of the child or young adult with autism?

# Dementia

The number of persons with Alzheimer's and related dementias is on the rise.

- Would the couple in the Lansdowne church<sup>3</sup> experience the same level of care from your congregation?
- How does your church support caregivers and persons with dementia?

# Mental Illness

Mental illness affects a significant part of the population, yet often stays hidden in the church family.

- Why does the stigma persist, even in the church?



# Mental Illness

- Describe ways that your congregation reaches out to individuals and families living with mental illness.
- In what ways do you support the mental health of your pastor and congregational members?



# Group/ Project Sign Up

- Select a group to join for the second half of the session.
- The groups do not have to be equal in size (you can also work alone), nor does every project have to be carried out.
- Do have a group plan the Bible study skit to use in the devotions at the end of the session.
- Make sure someone studies the baptism documents.

# Group/ Project Options

- Prepare “parts of the body” scripture skit
- Review baptism documents
- Learn how to become a Caring Congregation
- Determine reading level of material
- Research multisensory worship
- Design a poster or banner about inclusion/integration

# Break



# DVD – *A Place for All*

View or listen to the DVD segment found at 14:37 to 19:24.

- What did this nursery school do to promote integration of Max?
- Who benefited from having Max included in the school?



# Group or Individual Projects

- Prepare “parts of the body” scripture skit
- Review baptism documents
- Learn how to become a Caring Congregation
- Determine reading level of material
- Research multisensory worship
- Design a poster or banner about inclusion/integration

# Project Report

- Report your findings briefly to the class, showing rather than telling to the extent possible.
- Allow time for two-four minute reports when the groups are finished.
- The skit group doesn't report now.

# Circles of Awareness

Refer back to the circle exercise from the first session.

How well are members who have intellectual disabilities and mental illness integrated into the life of your faith community?



# Circles of Awareness

Can you identify persons in your community who are affected by disability who would benefit from the support and love of your congregation?

What might you be called to do in response to your answers to these questions?

# Call to Action

- If time permits work individually or in pairs on the remainder of the Yes/No questions in the Annual Accessibility Audit.

# Closing Devotions

- Skit version of 1 Corinthians 12: 12-26.

# Child of Blessing, Child of Promise

*(United Methodist Hymnal # 611)*

- 1) Child of blessing, child of promise,  
Baptized with the Spirit's sign,  
With this water God has sealed you  
Unto love and grace divine.
- 2) Child of love, our love's expression,  
Love's creation, loved indeed!  
Fresh from God, refresh our spirits,  
Into joy and laughter lead.

3) Child of joy, our dearest treasure,  
God's you are, from God you came.  
Back to God we humbly give you:  
Live as one who bears Christ's name.

4) Child of God, your loving Parent,  
Learn to listen for God's call.  
Grow to laugh and sing and worship,  
Trust and love God more than all.

# Optional Activities

- Complete any research or project that was started in class but not finished.
- View online information on **respite** ministries, for example at St. James United Methodist Church in Tampa:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cg4wyguPHzY>

# Optional Activities

- Read the article on developing a comprehensive congregational dementia ministry in <http://archive.constantcontact.com/fs110/1104745249463/archive/1112122873581.html>.
- Research other faith-based resources for churches to address mental health needs at <http://www.mentalhealthministries.net/> and <http://www.pathways2promise.org/>

# Assignment for Session Four

- Read Chapters 11-13. Review the sections on **Advocacy** in previous chapters. Write down insights, stories that touch you, questions, and concepts you would like to discuss. Read with your heart as well as your mind, and pay attention to nudges through which God may be calling you and your church to engage in new ministries. Look for possibilities, hope, and opportunities for transformation.
- If time permits, complete the remainder of the Annual Accessibility Audit questions.



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3. Johnson, 46.

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“Child of Blessing, Child of Promise”

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## **Session Four: Advocacy**



- **Chapter 11: Veterans with Disabilities**
- **Chapter 12: Ordained Ministry**
- **Chapter 13: Conclusion and Commencement**



# Session Four: Advocacy



## Objectives:

- To verbalize awareness of discrimination and disadvantage that people with disabilities, including veterans, experience and how faith communities can make a difference
- To be prepared to advocate in one's local church and community to improve accessibility and integration
- To envision the gifts that a pastor living with or affected by a disability would bring to one's congregation

## **Scripture: Mark 2:1-12\***

1 When he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. <sup>2</sup>So many gathered around that there was no longer room for them, not even in front of the door; and he was speaking the word to them. <sup>3</sup>Then some people came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them.



<sup>4</sup>And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay. <sup>3</sup>Then some people came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them.

<sup>5</sup>When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” <sup>6</sup>Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, <sup>7</sup> “ Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

<sup>8</sup>At once Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were discussing these questions among themselves; and he said to them, “Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? <sup>9</sup>Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven’, or to say, ‘Stand up and take your mat and walk’?

<sup>10</sup>But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the paralytic— <sup>11</sup> “ I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home.” <sup>12</sup>And he stood up, and immediately took the mat and went out before all of them; so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this!”

# **Together We Serve**

(The Faith We Sing # 2175)

- 1) Together we serve,  
united by love,  
inviting God's world  
to the glorious feast.  
We work and we pray  
through sorrow and joy,  
extending God's love  
to the last and the least.

2) We seek to become  
a beacon of hope,  
a lamp for the heart  
and a light for the feet.  
We learn, year by year,  
to let love shine through  
until we see Christ  
in each person we meet.

3) We welcome the scarred,  
the wealthy, the poor,  
the busy, the lonely,  
and all who need care.  
We offer a home  
to those who will come,  
our hands quick to help,  
our hearts ready to dare.

4) Together, by grace,  
we witness and work,  
remembering Jesus,  
    in whom we grow strong.  
Together we serve  
in Spirit and truth,  
remembering love  
    is the strength of our song.



# Prayer

To sit at the feet of Jesus listening to spiritual insights is a beautiful blessing.

It is in these moments that we hear how to advocate for each other.

In the name of your Son, give us wisdom and knowledge to bring about positive change.

Amen.

# Opening Discussion

In your small group, discuss the following:

- Put yourself in the place of the man being carried. What are you thinking, feeling, doing, and saying? What do you want to have happen?
- Now put yourself in the place of the friends or relatives who were carrying the man. What are you thinking, feeling, doing, and saying? What do you want to have happen?

## Opening Discussion, continued

- Who was in the way, blocking access to Jesus? Was it just the crowds? Who else was there?
- Why did the friends choose the roof entrance? What does that mean for us in the church today? In what ways are we called to carry persons?
- Why did Jesus first forgive the man and then heal him?
- What does this passage tell us about the character of God?

# Checking In

- Does anyone have final insights that you have gleaned from our time together?
- Did anyone do an optional assignment and want to briefly share?

# Time with the Text

The numbers of veterans returning from war zones with physical and emotional disabilities are staggering.<sup>1</sup>

- Has your congregation started any form of ministry, such as those shared by Bishop Johnson, for returning veterans?
- What else could we be doing?

## **Time with the Text, continued**

- What are soul wounds?<sup>2</sup>
- Are secular counselors able to help heal soul wounds, and if not, what is the place of the church in addressing the needs?
- At the same time, how can we ensure access to needed professional counseling?

## **Time with the Text, continued**

- What factors limit access to and willingness to accept treatment for mental illness and other emotional needs such as post-traumatic stress disorder and the aftereffects of trauma?
- How might stigma and fear play a role in a person's reluctance to seek out mental health services?

# Employment

Employment opportunities are limited for persons with a disability, and organizations may encourage persons to apply for disability benefits rather than continue to seek work.

- How might we advocate for employment opportunities within and beyond the church?
- How can the church help pastors on clergy medical leave and parishioners on disability status stay engaged in the life of the church and community?



# Housing

A higher percentage of persons with disabilities live in substandard housing and in unsafe neighborhoods with fewer opportunities than persons without disabilities.<sup>3</sup>

- How can the church get involved with increasing the amount of safe, affordable, accessible housing available?
- Share information about programs in your community.

# Health Care Access

Health care access is often limited for persons with disabilities.<sup>4</sup>

- What can churches do to decrease the discrepancies and provide improved access to holistic services to improve health in mind and body?

# ADA Background

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was first implemented in 1990. Denominations lobbied for churches to be excluded from the law.

Our churches are urged to carry out or exceed its provisions, as we have a moral imperative to make our facilities open to all of God's children.

# Accessibility

- Why are new churches still being built that lack access to the chancel and choir areas?
- How many churches purchase a new parsonage with accessibility in mind?
- Why should a parsonage be accessible?



# Break



# DVD – *A Place for All*

View or listen to 40:17 to 44:55 of the DVD.

- Why is it important for youth with disabilities to have role models of pastors with disabilities?
- Do people need to be in community for a full experience of worship?
- In the examples shown, how do you imagine the participants with disabilities became involved with the churches?



# Advocacy

*Advocacy* means various things to different people.

- What are forms of advocacy that we might engage in as a response to what we have been studying?
- What organizations might we approach to learn more or partner with?

# Priorities

A church can do many things to become more accessible without spending money.

However, some accessibility modifications are expensive, and grant funding is rare.

- How often is accessibility, especially the installation of an elevator, the top priority in a capital funds campaign?
- How might tensions around priorities get resolved?



# Guidelines

Bishop Johnson provides guidelines for developing a local church disability ministry.

She highlights the importance of prayer in every stage of developing a process, planning, implementing, and assessing the congregation's efforts to become increasingly inclusive and accessible.

- Offer examples of prayer making a difference in ministry development.

# Putting it all Together

Divide into small groups for the following:

You are on the Staff-Parish Relations Committee and have just received word that your new pastor has a disability, or someone in his or her family has a disability. You are excited, because you have heard great things through the conference grapevine about how effective and engaging this pastor is. The pastor's skills and gifts appear to be just what your congregation needs to move forward.

## **Putting it All Together, continued**

- In your small group identify accommodations the church may need to make in order for this appointment to be successful and how you would find out the information you need to be prepared.
- Make sure your group has a recorder and a reporter.
- Spend 20 minutes discussing, then report back in 2 minutes or less.

## **Putting it All Together, continued**

- Don't focus only on the church building and parsonage—consider schedule flexibility, core tasks and tasks that could be shared with lay people, transportation, and support for the pastor and his or her family.
- Are there attitudes in the congregation that need to be addressed?
- How could the challenges that the pastor faces prove to be a gift to the congregation and increase the effectiveness of the pastor's ministry?

- a pastor who is legally blind
- a pastor who has a hearing loss that cannot be fully corrected with hearing aids
- a pastor who has a loss of lower body function and uses a manual wheelchair proficiently
- a pastor who has bipolar disease under good control
- a pastor who has a neurological disease that causes fatigue, tremors, and some difficulty walking long distances or managing multiple flights of stairs
- a pastor with a child who has autism
- a pastor whose spouse uses a wheelchair and needs some care and support from the pastor

# Call to Action

- Open to the last page of the Annual Accessibility Audit.
- Based on your findings so far, write at least three goals for your local church, and at least one action item (a first step to get things moving) per goal.
- Commit to helping with one of these goals.

# Body of Christ

- Pick a body part that reflects your gifts and calling.
- Write your goal and your name on the paper cut-out or a sticky note.
- Find a prayer and accountability partner, share goals with each other, and devise a method for staying in touch and holding each other accountable.

# Closing Prayer

- Form a circle and contribute sentence prayers as you feel comfortable doing do. The person praying may hold a cross (or other object) while speaking or praying silently, then pass this to the next person around the circle to hold while praying.
- You may want to ask God for strength and guidance for implementing changes needed or offer thanks for new learning and opportunities.



# Sent Out in Jesus' Name

*(The Faith We Sing # 2184)*

Sent out in Jesus' name,  
our hands are ready now  
to make the earth the place  
in which the kingdom comes.  
The angels cannot change  
a world of hurt and pain  
into a world of love, of justice and of peace.  
The task is our to do, to set it really free.  
O help us to obey, and carry out your will.

Enviado soy de Dios,  
mi mano lista está  
para construir con El  
un mundo fraternal.

Los ángeles no son enviados a cambiar  
im mundo de dolor por un mundo de paz.  
Me ha tocao a mí hacerlo realidad;  
a yúdame, Señor, a hacer tu voluntad.



# Assignment

- When you return home, gather people to carry out the actual Annual Accessibility Audit. Include someone from the Trustees, persons with disabilities who can provide firsthand knowledge, and people with professional experience such as occupational or physical therapists and architects.
- Commit to praying that your congregation and conference will become increasingly welcoming and inclusive.
- Pray for your accountability partner.

# Optional Follow-up Activities

Read the “Statement in Solidarity” for employment of people with disabilities:

<http://www.aapd.com/what-we-do/interfaith/idad-statement-of-solidarity.html>.

List paid positions in your church that could be filled by a person with a disability. How could your church take on an intern who needs to learn job skills to be employable? Can you reach out to employers who are members of your congregation and help them consider hiring persons with disabilities?

Read Resolution 3002: “United Methodist Implementation of the United Nations’ Standard Rules of the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities and the Americans with Disabilities Act,” *BOR*, pages 180-181 or online at <http://calms2012.umc.org/Text.aspx?mode=Petition&Number=213>. Ask persons living with disabilities how well ADA standards are followed in your congregation and conference. Interview persons with different disabilities, including people who have vision loss and are Deaf, people with mobility challenges, and parents of children of all ages with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Ask for input on priorities for changes needed. Communicate your findings to the respective administrative body.

Find out if your annual conference has a committee on disability concerns (which may have a different name) and what resources they offer. If you can't locate such a committee, find out what committee carries out the duties outlined in the 2012 *Book of Discipline* ¶ 653, (pages 490-491) that reads: "There shall be in each annual conference a committee on disability concerns or other structure to provide for the functions of this ministry and maintain the connectional relationships" and lists the committee roles.

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