

Pew Cuts

Pew cuts are created by shortening the ends of several pews so that users of wheelchairs can sit within the main body of the congregation, not in a designated section, and not be forced to block the aisles.

Pew cuts can be made by shortening the width of one or two pews by 36 inches, the space that a person using a wheelchair would occupy. If two adjacent spaces are provided, each wheelchair space can be a minimum of 33" wide.

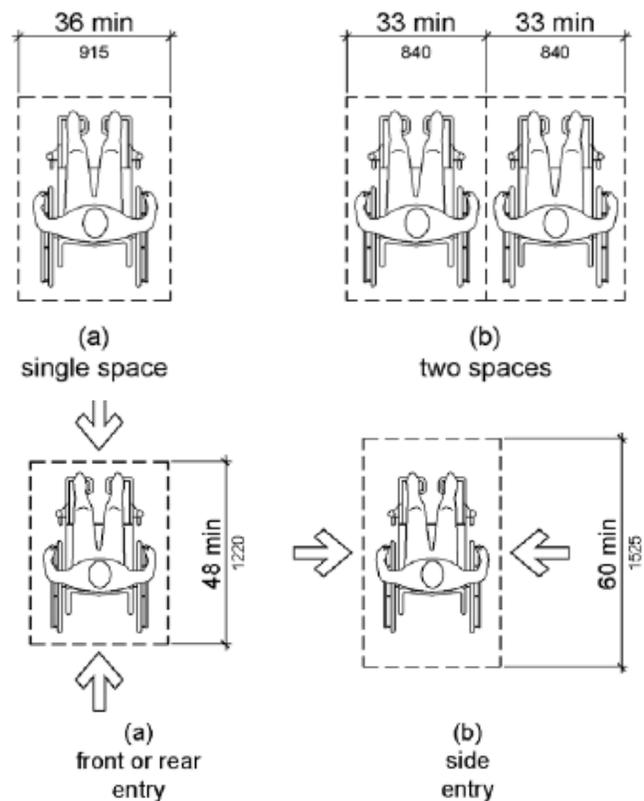


Two shortened pews midway down center aisle, Rose City Park UMC, Portland, OR

Pew cuts should be at least 48 inches deep if entered from the front or the rear of the pew section. If entered from the side, spaces need to be at least 60 inches deep to allow sufficient room for the person to turn and face forward.

A highly recommended practice before creating or making additional pew cuts is to ask current participants who use wheelchairs where they prefer to sit. People with disabilities need and expect to have the same kind of choices about where they sit that people without disabilities have. Choices will vary based on priorities. Some need space in the back for a quick trip to the restroom, while others need to be up front to read the pastor's lips. Most people prefer somewhere towards the center. Site lines are an important consideration, and center pew cuts in sloped sanctuaries offer the best chance to see the chancel, screens, etc., while remaining seated when others stand.

Shortening only one pew almost never provides sufficient space - the wheelchair will intrude on the leg space of someone sitting behind the person using the wheelchair.



Graphics showing measurements for single and double wheelchair seating and for front and side access



Two shortened pews, Chicago Temple UMC

The congregation is usually more accepting if the pew cuts appear planned, e.g. symmetrical cuts on the outside of the first row on both sides, symmetrical cuts on the center aisle midway down, and symmetrical cuts on the center aisle in the back. Having a choice of spaces communicates being expected and welcome to a guest who comes for the first time.

Since creating pew cuts is a service for faith-based organizations largely unknown in the secular world, you may not find vendors who specialize in this. Most churches either use members with carpentry skills, or hire a carpenter/ cabinet maker to do the work. The task can be as simple as removing the end of the pew, cutting the benches 36 or 66” shorter, and reattaching the end. Make sure there is sufficient bracing.

If you are concerned about losing seats in a crowded sanctuary, one option is to place chairs with armrests in the openings, and to have the ushers remove the chairs when needed to accommodate a person using a wheelchair, someone with a 4-wheeled walker or scooter, etc. Some people need the armrests and higher seating to be able to stand up, e.g. after hip surgery a higher chair with armrests is often needed, so having such chairs present provides additional seating access.

Wheelchair seating spaces should have an open space next to them. Consider placing a laminated "companion seating" card with the accessibility symbol on it on the pew next to the pew cut, or find another way to reserve the space.

When determining how many pew cuts/ wheelchair spaces to provide, start with the following ADA chart. If your congregation is aging, you may want to provide more than the ADA minimum number of spaces. Provide an equal number of chairs with armrests.

2010 ADA Standards Number of Wheelchair Spaces in Assembly Areas
Capacity of Seating (i.e. # of Seats) / Minimum # of Required Wheelchair Spaces

4 to 25	1
26 to 50	2
51 to 150	4
151 to 300	5
301 to 500	6
501 to 5000	6, plus 1 for each 150, or fraction thereof, between 501 through 5000
5001 and over	36, plus 1 for each 200, or fraction thereof, over 5000

Source: <https://www.ada.gov/regs2010/2010ADAStandards/2010ADAstandards.htm#sec221>

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