

## Approaches to Dismantling Ableism

### Actions

- Find an organization led by (not about!) people with disabilities and volunteer. Check your regional or local Center for Independent Living for suggestions.
- Plan a Disability Awareness Sunday service (per Paragraph 265 of the *UM Book of Discipline*) with special focus on ableism. Invite one or more persons with a disability to lead the planning, give the sermon and share their stories. Highlight a local arts or theater group that gives people with disabilities a chance to share talents and gifts. Involve Sunday School classes. See <https://umcdmc.org/worship/> for more ideas.
- If you are uncomfortable around certain groups of people, use the Etiquette and Communication suggestions at <https://umcdmc.org/resources/ways-to-welcome-all/etiquette-and-communication/> to increase your confidence and awareness.
- Come alongside people with disabilities for a joint community project, such as improving accessibility at a local park.
- Invite residents of a group home in your church neighborhood to participate with the congregation in service projects, picnics, outdoor worship services, and more, following Safe Sanctuaries guidelines for ministry with vulnerable adults.
- If your church has not recently completed an **Annual Accessibility Audit for Churches**, work with the Board of Trustees and others, including people with disabilities, to do the audit and set goals for your congregation. You may qualify for a Disability-friendly and Accessible church badge! See <https://umcdmc.org/resources/accessibility-and-united-methodist-churches/accessibility-audit/>.
- Develop authentic friendships, based on mutual interests, with persons with a different disability status than yours. Spend time together regularly, including accessing public locations such as restaurants and theaters.
- Read books and articles written by disability activists and subscribe to blogs written by these authors – see the **Ableism Resource List** for suggestions.
- Learn about disability-friendly language use and make sure your church does not use ableist language. The “Disability-friendly and Inclusive Liturgies” resource handout is coming soon. Check this for suggestions on proofing your order of worship and adapting language. Speak up when you encounter ableism in hymns and liturgies.
- Learn about variations on ableism such as audism (belief in the superiority of speech and hearing over sign language) and negative attitudes about neurodiversity.
- Use the **Able Privilege** activity to identify aspects of life in which you may have no idea you have unearned advantages. Try for heightened awareness as you travel around your community: notice where accessibility and welcome are lacking.

- Read through the **Ableist Microaggressions** document, then use the template to analyze a movie, incident, or story about ableism.
- Plan a group reflection discussion for your Sunday School class or small group. You might use the “**Can You Believe It?**” disability etiquette skit as a reader’s theater activity and review the reflection questions afterwards.
- Understand that many people with disabilities have experienced trauma throughout life, so learn about trauma-informed practices and incorporate these into your ministries.
- If you want to study in more depth, use *The Church and People with Disabilities* Mission study text by Bishop Peggy Johnson, and the Leader’s Guide and PowerPoint for a multiple-session class. See the **Ableism Resource List** for details.
- Commit to personal reflection, journaling, prayer, and setting goals. Consider the following questions:
  - What do I need to know or experience?
  - Where do I feel called to jump in and get involved? What tugs at my heart or keeps coming back in my thoughts?
  - Where do my gifts and passions intersect with the opportunities and needs that I perceive?
  - Have I run these ideas by someone with a disability, or with a different disability than I have?
  - How can I integrate what I am learning into my life and into our church ministry?
  - What is the first thing I am going to do? By what date do I expect to do it?
- Acquire an accountability partner and check in regularly.
- Discern how you might be called to become a disability ally. See the **Dos and Don’ts for the Disability Ally** handout for insights.
- Be honest and patient with yourself, understanding that dismantling ableism, like dismantling racism, is a life-long project and learning process.

### Resources (Ableism Toolkit)

- **Ableism and Disability Glossary**
- **Able Privilege** handout of reflection statements
- **Ableist Microaggressions** template and examples
- **Dos and Don’ts for the Disability Ally** tip sheet
- “**Can You Believe It?**” skit on disability etiquette, with reflection questions
- **Ableism Resource List** for handout references and more information
- **Approaches to Dismantling Ableism** - this handout

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The DisAbility Ministries Committee of The United Methodist Church is a partner ministry  
of the General Commission on Religion and Race