

## More Than Fifty Ways to Make Your Church Accessible With Little or No Cost Involved



1. Purchase large-print copies of the hymnal and other books used in the services.
2. Consider replacing fixed pews with flexible seating. This will turn your worship space into multipurpose space, which will allow persons who disabled to participate fully in the life of your congregation.
3. Cut the ends of several existing pews so that people using wheelchairs may be seated with their families and friends rather than in specially designated, segregated sections.
4. If these are steps to your chancel and sanctuary, consider having a Communion Station on the floor of the nave. This allows young children, elderly peoples, and persons with disabilities to receive the Sacrament in exactly the same way as the rest of the congregation.
5. Involve people with disabilities in all planning for architectural modifications.
6. Think about converting two side by side bathrooms into one accessible unisex bathroom. Allow enough space for a wheelchair to turn around, and be sure to allow transfer space on both sides of the toilet. Make sure that grab bars are properly installed.
7. Provide a paper cup dispenser near your water fountain. This will transform an inaccessible fountain into one accessible to wheelchair users.
8. If people using wheelchairs volunteer in your office, consider raising the height of your work surfaces so that the wheelchair can fit comfortable at desk or table.
9. Suggest that your hearing-impaired parishioners sit close to the front of the nave where they can see the preacher and lectors. Ask the preacher and lectors to speak distinctly and slowly and to look frequently at the congregation since much lip reading takes place with persons whom are hearing impaired.
10. Install long-handled door hardware, which is easier for everyone to use, especially those with impaired hand function.
11. Survey your microphone and sound system to make sure it meets the needs of those with high-frequency sound loss. Consider purchasing assistive listening devices as an aid for people with hearing loss.
12. Apply brightly colored, textured strips at the tops of stairs to indicate that stairs are being approached.
13. Take altar flowers and service bulletins to people who are sick or shut-in.

**Accessibility** is not a minority issue – it is about fairness and good manners, and it benefits everyone.

14. Provide regular transportation to services and other parish activities for persons who are elderly or without transportation.

15. Maintain regular communion with persons who cannot attend services so that they may continue to feel part of the parish.



16. Include children in plans to visit nursing homes and persons who are shut-in.

17. Discover and utilize sources of large-print, taped or Braille books, magazines, Bibles.

18. Develop a Christian Education day in which participants explore life as a person with a disability. Use wheelchairs, canes, crutches, blindfolds, etc. for these simulations.

19. Invite outside speakers to visit the church and talk about issues and needs of persons with disabilities.

20. Show one or more of the excellent videotapes available about disability concerns.

21. Plan an adult education segment to discuss the non-architectural barriers to inclusiveness.

22. Remove snow and ice promptly from all sidewalks and parking lots.

23. Make a survey of current church lighting to ensure that the wattage is high enough and that the placement of fixtures ensures maximum visibility.

24. Make yourself knowledgeable of the needs of those persons with invisible handicaps such as diabetes, epilepsy, high blood pressure, mental illness, etc. In an adult education session, share information about these disabilities.

25. Develop discussion about and/or group support for people with conditions such as diabetes, cancer, epilepsy, stroke, etc.

26. Hold all fellowship activities and meetings in areas accessible to all.

27. Encourage one-to-one relationships between persons who are elderly and young or young couples.

28. Enlist the expertise of your parishioners (carpenters, plumbers, contractors, persons with disabilities, teachers, social workers, nurses) to accomplish simple accessibility and awareness tasks.

29. Develop a section of resources on disability concerns for your parish library.

30. Look for educational opportunities about disabilities and disability issues in your community.

31. Encourage parishioners to designate memorial gifts for accessibility issues in your community.



32. Organize a Beep-baseball game, inviting one of the organized teams of blind people to play a team of your own blindfolded parishioners.

33. Visit accessible churches in your area.

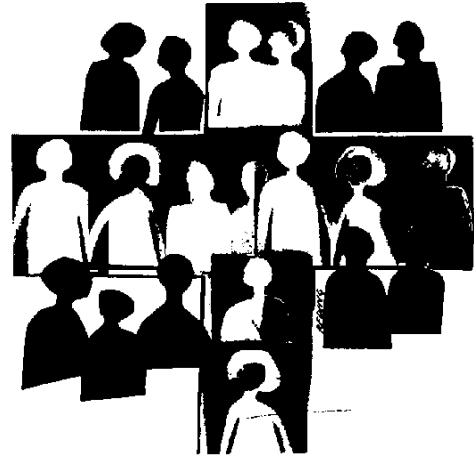
34. Consult with local nursing homes to ascertain whether your parish might establish a ministry to and with their residents.

35. Share your facilities with organizations which serve persons who are disabled.

36. Consider getting involved in congregate dining, Meals on Wheels, or your own meal program for persons in need.

37. Set aside a bulletin board to display information and materials related to your accessibility project.

38. Explore ways to including members of your parish who are disabled in the education, fellowship and ministry as well as in the worship of the congregation. You might consider training them as lay readers or Chalice bearers, asking them to teach in the church school program or to volunteer in the church office.



39. Seek ways of working with other denominations in your community on projects related to disability access and ministry.

40. Volunteer time at a day-care center, hospital, or rehabilitation center so that you may come to know and understand persons with disabilities better.

41. If you have persons with visual impairments in your congregation, install signage in Braille or raised letters.

42. If you have persons in your congregation who are deaf or severely hearing-impaired, install a light, rather than sound, cued fire alarm. Use care to select an appropriate mode, since some light frequencies can trigger seizures for persons with epilepsy.

43. In the context of a Bible study or perhaps in a sermon, explore the differences between “healing” and “cure.” All people can receive God’s healing grace; not all persons will be cured.

44. Since many members of your congregation are employers and two-thirds of all severely disabled people are unemployed, become knowledgeable about issues around employment of persons who are disabled, both from the employers’ and the employees’ viewpoints.

45. Develop a team of parishioners willing to write and call elected officials to lobby for legislation in the areas of accessible transportation and housing, employment for all who wish to work, and other issues pertinent to persons who are disabled.

46. Survey your neighborhood to learn whether there are unmet needs, especially among persons who are elderly, homebound, or have disabilities.

47. Many recreational activities such as Cross-country skiing, canoeing, roller-skating, and camping can be enjoyed by persons who are disabled, especially if they are partnered with someone. Encourage your parishioners to look for the fun and fulfillment in these kinds of opportunities.

48. Educate yourself and your parishioners about environmental illnesses. Survey your cleaning supplies with mindfulness toward environmental sensitivities.
49. Suggest that your parishioners monitor the quality and quantity of perfume, hair spray, or aftershave they use.
50. Designate your church facilities as a non-smoking area.
51. Let your denominational office know about your hopes and concerns for action in ministry with persons who are disabled.
52. Understand, accept, and celebrate your own limitations.

These materials provided from *AWARENESS: A Manual for Ministry of Accessibility*, June 2001, Tennessee Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church.