

Church for Everyone
Making your church a place that
people with disabilities will be
proud to call home

1 THE JOURNEY TO A CHURCH FOR EVERYONE

People with disabilities face numerous hurdles at church. Attitudes ranging from rejection to over-reaction create barriers to participation. Even the warmest welcome quickly grows cold where ramps are missing, toilets are inaccessible and sermons inaudible.

Learn how these attitudes and physical barriers turn people away from your church and discover how with a little training and simple adaptations, you can turn your church into a place everyone will be proud to call home.

This website www.rampup.co.za is packed with ideas to get you started on creating a congregation where everyone is valued - a congregation where everyone is able to participate to their full potential. We like to think of it as a journey to a church for everyone.

2 THE JOURNEY STARTS HERE

The story is told of a motorist who was lost on the way to the airport. The motorist stopped at a garage and asked for directions. [At this point in our story we realise that the motorist is a woman...] After listening to her request for directions, the helpful pump attendant said, "Well, I wouldn't start from here." 😊 The same is true when starting the journey towards an inclusive church. Don't start with negative definitions of disability, some of which you'll find on pages two and three of this document . These definitions stress negative issues, focusing on limitations rather than opening the way to possibilities. Plot your position on the map by referring to the following definition.

2.1 Definition of 'Disability'

Disability is often associated with mobility impairment, but it is a far wider concept.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities states that:

"Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others."

Apart from physical impairments, this definition includes sensory impairments – usually visual and hearing – and hidden impairments – for example mental illness, intellectual disabilities and conditions such as diabetes and epilepsy. People with severe disfigurements are also included, because they may be discriminated against on account of their appearance.

A common thread is that people with disabilities experience rejection and discrimination, irrespective of the nature of their disability.

2.2 Major views of disability

In addition to definitions of disability, there are also a number of views, sometimes called models, of disability. These views serve as subsidiary definitions and shape attitudes in powerful ways. These views are usually implicit rather than explicit in models of disability.

Each view is like a coloured lens through which disability issues are viewed. Different lenses give different perspectives, as they filter some information and highlight other issues, meaning that no single lens gives a complete picture.

The views are summarised below to show how different views lead to different approaches. Whilst these views are the subject of intense discussion, exploring this debate is beyond the scope of this document. The purpose of this summary is not to argue that one view is superior to or more helpful than another, but to highlight how different assumptions lead to different approaches, thus enabling the reader to explore their own preconceptions.

2.3 Disability is a medical issue

The medical view is probably the most common approach to disability. In terms of this view, people with disabilities are seen as “people with problems,” or as invalids who need to be cured. Disability is regarded as a medical or health problem needing a medical solution.

Attention is focussed on changing, improving and ‘normalising’ people through treatment. The focus is on what the person cannot do. The view assumes that things need to be done for people with disabilities and it is accordingly known as the ‘cure or care’ model.

This view is problematic in that it fails to recognise that most people with disabilities are not ill and seldom need medical assistance. It removes control from the individual, placing decisions in the hands of professionals.

2.4 Disability is a tragedy

Many people view disability as a tragedy and view a life lived with disability as a continuously dreadful experience.

The onset of a permanent and substantial disability, or the birth of a disabled child, is obviously a devastating event. However, people are resilient and it is

not appropriate to regard disability as intrinsically 'tragic'. The onset of disability requires adaptation and may result in the person needing significant assistance. However, the person learns to adapt to and accept their new situation, and having made peace with the new circumstances, moves on with their life, planning for and aspiring to personal growth and social integration.



From "Wendy", a blind friend in Bloemfontein.

A friend and I wanted to find the biltong shop in the mall. I took the lead, as I could see more than her and I know the mall well. The biltong shop has distinctive lights and when I saw something similar glowing in a shop window, I thought we'd found the right place, but when we entered, the distinctive smell of biltong was missing. I asked the woman at the counter where we were. "You're at the optometrist's - can I help?" We roared with laughter and I eventually said: "I think we're a little past your help." The only word the lady in the shop could utter was "Shame", not understanding the humour in the situation.

2.5 Disability has religious significance

In terms of this view, people with disabilities are seen as being in constant need of divine healing and are exhorted to exercise greater faith in order to be 'healed'. A lot of attention is given to seeking spiritual explanations and 'solutions' for disability. Life with disability is seen as a life of suffering.

However, everyone experiences suffering in some way and in different ways. Both disabled and non-disabled people suffer from the vicissitudes of life. We live in an imperfect world and no-one is exempt from suffering.

The suffering of disabled people may also be spiritualised by people who believe that "sanctification comes through suffering" and who believe in turn that this uniquely prepares people for a role in the church.

However, roles should be determined by aptitudes, interests and the gifts of the Holy Spirit and not by other people's perceptions of our spirituality.

2.6 Disability as incapacity

People with disabilities are viewed as passive, unable to make a contribution to life.

In churches, this may result in people focusing their energies on praying for a 'cure', rather than breaking down perceptual, attitudinal, and physical barriers to participation.

Whilst the church has a special duty of care towards vulnerable people, this duty should include looking for ways to empower people, rather than maintaining dependency.

2.7 Disability as an expression of society's attitudes (social model of disability).

This view shifts the focus from the individual to society's attitudes and the environment, contrasting sharply with all of the previous views. The social and medical views are often juxtaposed as representing the two poles of the "what is disability" debate.

The social view focuses on changing the environment so that everyone can participate on equal terms. It stresses the rights of people with disabilities and views disability as a part of diversity.

This view "argues that disability is a consequence of the environment and of discriminatory attitudes, policies and procedures. This means that people are not disabled by their impairments, but by the response of society, including the church, treating them as special and different because of their impairments, and excluding them through attitudinal and structural barriers."

This view helps the church to recognise everyone's uniqueness before God. It promotes respect for everyone as equal citizens in His kingdom, thus promoting the removal of barriers to participation.

2.8 We are all equal

None of us is exactly what God wishes us to be in body, mind and spirit. We must resist the idea of ranking people in the church according to appearance and ability. We share common ground in our vulnerability.

"Disability is not a "brave struggle" or "courage in the face of adversity" ...disability is an art. It's an ingenious way to live." - Neil Marcus

Dr. Reg Codrington's article, "The image of God in man" explores issues of disability and faith in greater detail.



John, a wheelchair user in Pietermaritzburg, wanted to cross the road and so lowered himself, with great effort, from the pavement to the road. A passerby saw him and assumed he was trying to get onto the pavement, so he grabbed John's wheelchair and yanked him back onto the sidewalk. He walked off with a cheerful "there you are!"

3 ROADBLOCKS

3.1 Attitudes

On most long journeys we would expect to encounter a roadblock or two. This journey to an inclusive church is no different.

Probably the biggest roadblock is one that is invisible. We're talking about attitudes:

"The church focuses on my limitations and I don't get a chance to exercise my talents - because I'm in a wheelchair, they think I can't help myself, let alone anyone else!"

As a leader in your church, you could do with help. The good news is that people with disabilities want to be part of a growing church and are ready to help your congregation reach the next level. However, peoples' talents may be ignored because they are blind or deaf and even when their gifts are obvious, members of the church tend to be unwilling to allow them to participate. In the words of a resident of Imbali:

"I walk on crutches, so they won't let me sing in the choir."

Society tends to be superstitious about disability. These superstitions may acquire a Biblical veneer. Even Christians may have misconceptions about the causes and implications of disability. As a matter of fact, some may even believe that their views have a biblical foundation. The members of your congregation aren't immune to these myths, which find expression in beliefs about the causes and implications of disability. Sin is often viewed as the cause of disability, implying that people with disabilities are worse "sinners" than other members, meaning that the congregation will discourage participation in church.

As a person in Stellenbosch said:

"I have no control over my outward appearance, but it's on my appearance that I am judged."

Sometimes rejection is extreme: here are some quotes from church members from various parts of South Africa:

"When I went to visit my pastor, he wouldn't let me inside his home. When I asked for water, they gave me the dog's bowl and told me to drink from it - they could have at least rinsed out the bowl first! All this because I walk with crutches."

"I took my disabled children to church. They made us sit on mats on the floor and when we left, they burnt the mats."

"When I arrived at church with my disabled baby, people told me my sin was the cause of my child's problems."

Other reactions are less extreme, but replace rejection with pity. The person may long to also use their talents in the service of the church but the church prefers to see disabled people as objects of ministry.

"People at church impose things on me. They don't think that I have a will of my own."

"The pastor told me that marriage is not for disabled people and he refused to marry us. We had to hunt around for a minister who was willing to preside at our wedding."

"People speak to me like I'm a child – just because I can't walk."

"The church sees me as a burden on society – they think I won't get anywhere with a government grant."

"I was told that my lack of faith is the reason why I can't hear."

"My church believes that only married people should be in leaders. With my disability, it is unlikely that anyone will marry me. That means I'll never get a chance to lead in the church."

"The church doesn't understand that I have aspirations – they think I should be content with my lot."

Where churches have changed their attitudes, they have discovered the joy of people with and without disabilities exercising their gifts in partnership and there are some churches in South Africa where people with disabilities are taking a lead.

A beautiful example of inclusion is a blind professional person in Port Elizabeth who has hosted her church's cell group at her home for the past ten years, providing refreshments and cooking meals for special occasions. This gracious hostess's love for cooking and entertaining means that catering for the cell group brings her joy and is never a burden. The cell group members have learnt at firsthand about independent living and this has demystified the concept of disability.

Her love for her fellow parishioners has led her to convene a fellowship group in the church and she arranges social activities for the entire congregation.

In addition to these commitments, she finds time to edit the church's magazine, using screen reader computer software.

Her willingness to serve and her fellow believers' willingness to accept her have led to close friendships, meaning that there is always someone who is delighted to give her a lift to church.

Sadly, many people with disabilities never experience full acceptance at church, feeling left out, sidelined, invisible or on the other hand, treated as a special case, which implies being separated. There is the perception that the congregation never takes time to get acquainted or to develop an understanding of disability.

"I can participate in most activities at church, but I feel left out when it comes to the annual retreat. The place where we hold the retreat can't handle wheel chairs."

"People speak to my assistant, not to me – they behave as if I can't see or hear them."

"The pastor scolded me for having a baby – he thinks that because I have a disability I can't raise a child properly."

People's attitudes are often influenced by negative childhood experiences of disability. Someone who has not dealt with these experiences may harbour a resentful attitude towards people with disabilities.

Frank M... had a sister Nellie who was born with a disability, leading to her death when she was a teenager. Now in his late forties, Frank blames Nellie for depriving him of his parents' affection during his childhood and consequently views all disabled people in a negative light.

At work, he persists in pointing out the limitations of a blind colleague, disparaging her efforts to work around these obstacles. Frank ignores her consistent attainment of productivity goals.

He is a member of the church choir, where he is irritated by one of the tenors, who uses crutches. Frank complains that the young man sings too loudly and out of tune. In both instances, he spends a lot of time drawing attention to the limitations of these two people.

Frank's negative attitude influences the people around him. At work, some of his colleagues are focusing on the limitations of their blind co-worker and other choir members are starting to regard the tenor as a poor singer. Because most people already have prejudices towards disabled people, Frank's associates are readily influenced by his negative remarks.

Of course, not all blind people are workaholics and not all people with disabilities are good singers, but they are unique individuals and should be respected for their contribution to life and not pigeon-holed on the basis of their disability.

3.2 Prayers and healing

We'll explore the question of prayers and healing in more detail later in this document (section 7), but it is important to note the negative experiences of people with disabilities in this regard:

"When prayer time comes, people grab hold of my wheelchair and push me to the front. They assume I want to be healed – they don't realise that I have made peace with my situation."

"They told me my child would have been healed if I'd come to their church for prayer first."

"I battle with chronic depression and my church says it's because I don't believe in the power of God to heal me."

"The pastor picks on me from the pulpit and says I need to come forward for prayer – he wouldn't do that with other members."

"My pastor thinks I'm not really saved because I remained deaf after he prayed for me."

"I'm not sick. I don't need people to always be praying for me to be healed."

3.3 Architecture

When people think of improving access for people with disabilities, they usually think first of the changes which need to be made to buildings. However, we highlighted attitudes first, as we believe that once attitudes have changed, there will be a willingness to make buildings accessible.

The following quotes, again taken from a spectrum of church goers across South Africa, illustrate the physical barriers encountered at Churches:

"When I arrive at church in my wheelchair, people push me to the side. They say I'm in the way"

"There's no room for my wheelchair at the communion rail."

"When the hymns are projected onto the screen and everyone stands to sing, I can't see the words and I feel left out."

"I want to sit with my family, but there is no recess for my wheelchair next to the pews, so I have to sit on my own at the back."

"I hate it when people make a commotion to make place for me, running around and moving chairs. It draws attention to me and I feel embarrassed."

"I can't attend a wedding without first sending my husband to see if the church can accommodate me. I often miss out on family occasions like baptisms and confirmations because the churches have no ramps."

"The church doesn't understand that all the facilities need to be accessible – as a father with a disability, I want to visit my daughter's Sunday school class, but the Sunday school section has not been adapted."

"Access to the church is fine, but no-one has thought to modify the toilets."

"They built an accessible toilet for wheelchair users like me, but then they went and filled the room with all sorts of junk."

"They told me to leave my wheelchair outside as there was no room for it in the church"

"They want me to sit in the pew for communion. They don't understand that I want to go forward and receive communion with everyone else."

"People grumble when my guide dog comes into the church."

"My church thinks disability is just about wheelchairs. They've built a few ramps and think they have done their bit."

"My son has a disability that makes him restless. Church members get annoyed with him if he is agitated during the service. They feel he should stay at home. They don't understand how important it is for all of us to worship together as a family."

"I think people are afraid of me, because I remind them of their vulnerability. They look at me in my wheelchair and wonder how they will cope if they are paralysed."

"The rest of the congregation thinks that because my daughter is mentally disabled, she doesn't understand enough to be confirmed as a member of the church."

"People fuss over my autistic child. I know they mean well, but the rest of my children feel left out, like they don't matter."



Because I'm blind, we rely on friends to take us to church. One Sunday we had a power failure at our block of flats whilst our friends who had come to fetch us were visiting. When it came time to leave for the service, it was dark and the lift wasn't operating. The only way down the seven floors was via the staircase. Because nobody could see, we formed a train with me at the front leading the way. Talk about the blind leading the blind...

4 CHOOSING A ROUTE

When I was a child, if you told someone you were going from Johannesburg to Cape Town for your holiday, the big question was whether you were travelling via Bloemfontein or Kimberley. If you had extra time for your trip, you could leave the N1 at Colesberg and travel via the Garden Route.

Likewise, there are several routes to creating a welcoming church. To get started, talk to people about how their disabilities affect participation in the church. Don't assume that everyone experiences things in the same way. Some disabilities are not outwardly obvious, but may have a deep impact on how people interact with others at church and whether they are able to attend church at all. If you already have members with disabilities, consider including them in your initiatives. Sometimes the Kimberley route will be better than going via Bloemfontein, but don't make assumptions.

Whichever route you take to the Cape, the same conditions apply. Obey the speed limit, take rest stops and make sure you have enough fuel in the tank for those long stretches through the Karoo.

Similarly, there are a few principles to keep in mind when developing an inclusive church, which we will now explore. These principles form the foundations of churches where everyone is welcome, affirmed and able to participate. Everyone should be welcomed unconditionally into church, where we are one body and Christ is our head.

The theme for Ramp Up, "Room for More", is drawn from chapter 14 of Luke's Gospel, and specifically verse 22. The astonished servant finds that despite having brought a multitude of 'outcasts' to his master's feast, there is room for plenty more people at the banquet. This parable speaks of the breathtaking generosity of the host, who orders his servant to go beyond the boundaries of the village in search of more guests for his feast. This is a banquet at which even strangers from beyond the village are welcome. This parable challenged Jesus' audience to think in new ways about who belonged in the Kingdom of God. It also reminds us to ensure that that we continue to extend an

unconditional welcome to everyone to be part of the church and especially those people who are often excluded by society.



People often assume that because I am blind, I am also deaf. While I lived on my own, I had to pair my socks - an exercise which I was not good at. As I was travelling to a function, a lady yelled in my ear, "You're wearing an odd pair of socks!" To which I replied equally loudly, "I know. I have a similar pair in my drawer at home."

4.1 Principles for developing an inclusive congregation

4.1.1 Lead with prayer

Prayerfully reflect on the opportunities that lie before your congregation. You will need people to assist you in developing an inclusive congregation. Pray for volunteers to participate in welcoming and including people with disabilities and their families. Pray about the relationships that will emerge from putting your calling into action. Exciting possibilities are opening for your congregation.

4.1.2 Focus on people, not programmes

Ministry with and to people with disabilities does not require new programmes; rather work to include everyone in existing activities, ensuring that people with disabilities can participate anywhere they would like to. This implies that people with disabilities are integral to the process, taking leadership in initiatives for inclusion.

4.1.3 Learn from others

Contact other churches and disability organizations to learn from their successes and challenges.

4.1.4 Think differently about disability

A good verse from the Bible to bear in mind here is: 1 Samuel 16:7b: . . . Man looks at the outward appearance, but I [God] look at the heart.

An example of starting to think differently about disability: Members of your congregation may have reservations about people with intellectual disabilities participating in the worship service and other activities. They may ask questions such as:

"Do they get anything out of the sermon?"

"Do they grasp the meaning of baptism and the significance of communion?"

“Will other members of the congregation be welcoming?”

Questions like this reveal that church members may have different expectations for people with intellectual disabilities. These expectations may create barriers to participation. Rephrasing these questions is an important strategy for helping people to think inclusively.

One could rephrase these questions as follows:

“How much is anyone else taking away from the sermon?”

“Does everyone have to grasp all intricacies of our doctrine in order to partake of the sacraments - to what extent do any of us grasp the full significance of the sacraments?”

“Does everyone always feel welcome at church?”

Spirituality is not irrelevant for a person with intellectual disability. Faith is not diminished by someone’s ability to grasp doctrine or to express their beliefs in the same way as everyone else.

For example, a lady in her early twenties has an intellectual disability. She is not able to talk or communicate meaningfully, though she seems to follow conversations and is sensitive to people’s moods. One day she went with her parents to visit her father’s terminally ill colleague, who was apparently indifferent to God. As they left home, she picked up a Bible and signalled to her mother that they should take it to the dying man.

Faith in God involves more than knowledge. It includes the elements of trust, loyalty and commitment to God. It incorporates part idea, part emotion, part commitment and part action. It is something known and also something experienced.

Church members may also voice the following concerns:

- “These renovations seem a bit much. After all, we don’t have any people with disabilities in our congregation.”
- “Our church isn’t big enough to have a disability ministry.”
- “I know he’s a little old, but he would be best cared for in the nursery.”
- “Will Sam always be like this? Will he ever grow out of his child-like condition?”
- “Why must her dog be allowed inside the church? Surely she could come inside without it?”

Church traditions linking disability to parental sin, lack of faith or rejection by God cause people with disability to question the meaning of life, the meaning of divine love, their self-worth and even the existence of God. However, our worth is not determined by our skills and abilities and God does not limit His love to people who meet certain physical criteria.

People with disabilities are sometimes viewed as invalids and because of this misunderstanding, it is assumed that congregations that do not have professional care-givers are unable to open their doors to everyone.

4.2 Build differently

Details regarding physical access are dealt with in "Buildings for Everyone".

All parts of the church and its facilities should be accessible to people using wheelchairs and other mobility devices. This applies to all doorways, ramps, passageways and toilets.

However, there are less obvious physical issues, which affect the participation of people with disabilities. These are pointed out in the following section referring to small adaptations in the worship service that will allow all people to participate.

4.3 Worship differently

People with disabilities may be excluded from the sacraments if unable to participate in the customary way and where leaders are unwilling to adapt traditions.

For example, a child with autism was denied communion; a pastor refused to marry a couple with disabilities; and an adult with severe disabilities was not supported whilst grieving the death of a parent as the church assumed he couldn't fully comprehend the significance of death.

Other examples are: many churches project the words of choruses and hymns onto a screen. People with visual impairments, the elderly and people with dyslexia cannot read the screen and feel excluded. This can be rectified by providing hymn sheets for people who prefer them, or, as in the case of the Worcester Vallei Dutch Reformed Church, providing Braille hymnbooks.

People with hearing impairments benefit from assistive listening systems and sign language interpreters. We've prepared a separate document, called "Accessible churches for people with hearing impairments", giving details of how to create an environment where your deaf members can participate.

4.4 Interact differently

Many people ignore people with disabilities, because they don't know how to interact with them and/or their families. The following tips will help you to feel more comfortable in welcoming children and adults with disabilities:

- Hospitality begins with a simple 'Hello"! A warm greeting and hearty handshake require no specialised training and should be dispensed generously. Introduce yourself and wait for the person with a disability to introduce him/herself to you.
- Adults with disabilities are first and foremost adults. Do not interact with them as you would with a child.
- Avoid being condescending in your speech or tone. Some Afrikaans speakers have the tendency to use diminutives like "liefie" and "my skatjie" when interacting with a disabled person, trying to convey compassion. However this is condescending and should be avoided.
- If you introduce yourself to a person with a disability using your title, also address the disabled person by his/her title. Don't say: "I am Mrs Watson. Good day Philip". If you introduce yourself using your title and surname, address the person with disability in the same way, saying: "I am Mrs Watson. I am pleased to meet you, Mr Smith".
- Always look at and speak directly to the person with a disability, rather than interacting through the family member, personal assistant, or companion.
- Greet people with disabilities as you would greet anyone else, even if they are unable to communicate verbally. Do not assume that they cannot understand you. It may take people with intellectual disabilities longer to do or say certain things. Patiently offer them your attention.
- When speaking to a person who stutters, do not complete their sentences. Nine out of ten times you will be wrong and the person with the speech impairment will be frustrated. Wait patiently for the speaker to finish talking.
- Grant every person the opportunity to do as much for themselves as possible. Ask a person if they would like assistance with a task, but wait until your offer is accepted before providing any help. Don't feel offended if your offer is turned down - it is the person's right to do so.

- If you are experiencing trouble understanding someone, it is fine to ask them to repeat what was said. On the other hand, if the person with disabilities does not understand you, rephrase your questions and comments differently.
- When you are in the presence of a person with a disability, do not talk about them as if they were not there.
- Treat every person with respect, even if their participation looks a bit different. Give hymnals, prayer books, Bibles and other material to everyone, regardless whether or not you believe they can read.
- When you observe a person with intellectual disability engaging in behaviour that is not appropriate, provide clear, but non-judgemental feedback. A person with a learning disability may speak to themselves out of boredom during the service. Touch the person and speak softly, telling him/her what the message is about.
- Don't ignore people with disabilities. Acknowledge their presence normally as you would anyone else's, and try to include them in whatever activity you are doing.
- Don't hesitate to use words like 'see', 'walk', 'listen', when communicating with people with disabilities. People with disabilities use these words themselves, because they share mother earth with you.

☺ Daniel (a blind person):

I was accosted by a group of street evangelists who prayed for my sight to be restored.

After they had prayed, they told me:

"You're blind because you have no faith."

I wangled a lift home from town with one of these ladies and when we reached her car, I snatched her keys, ran round the driver's side and got in. When she asked me what I was doing, I told her:

"The Lord says that if I drive your car with you beside me, He will restore my sight."

She was not happy, so I challenged her:

“Don’t you have enough faith to help me get my sight back?”

5 TUNE THE ENGINE FOR THE LONG JOURNEY

Once a route has been chosen for the journey of inclusion, it is helpful to have a well-tuned engine for the long haul.

Creating an enabling environment for people with disabilities to participate in all activities of the church life is an ongoing and sustainable process. Ensure that all facilities and activities are physically accessible and user-friendly for people with disabilities. People with disabilities should be able to serve in the church, receiving and giving ministry like any other member.

Involvement should be possible at all levels: home cell groups, Sunday school classes, church choirs, youth groups, groups involved in hospital visitation, missionary support groups and prayer groups. People with disabilities may also want to serve as ushers, speakers, or prayer leaders. The secret to inclusion is for everyone to practice hospitality and openness.

This process of inclusion can be sustained when we accept one another as equals and learn from one another through dialogue. It is in the process of “give and take” that we discover the beauty of each one’s humanity. It is therefore imperative to create opportunities for dialogue among people with disabilities and non-disabled people.

5.1 Story telling

Story telling is a powerful way in which to introduce new ideas about people with disabilities. These stories serve as rich sources of information. By listening attentively, we can identify issues which require action.

5.2 The importance of conversation

Conversation regarding disability can be enriching and liberating for everyone. At the heart of this dialogue is the desire to get to know one another as equals.

- Parents can talk about how best to support families with disabled children.
- Members of the congregation can talk about the impact people with disabilities have had on their lives

- Youth and adults with disabilities might talk about their spiritual journeys.
- People with and without disabilities will be pleasantly surprised at how they complement each other's experience and spiritual insight.

Questions can stimulate discussion and enhance the inclusion of people with disabilities. Questions may address the following issues:

Perceptions of disability:

- What is your experience of how people with disabilities are treated?
- People with disabilities are often rejected because of their appearance. What is your response to this?
- How do you think having a family member with a disability will affect a person's view of disability?

Fears and feelings:

- What role does fear of the unknown play when we encounter differences, like a person with disability?
- What can we do to conquer these fears of the unknown?
- What are the effects of hanging on to your fears of the unknown?

The Christian community:

- How do we create fellowship amongst people of diverse abilities, appearance, backgrounds and views?
- How can people from diverse groups meet one another halfway?
- What strengths can we find in the Christian faith to address problems of separation or "otherness" and then grow in hospitality and unconditional welcoming?
- How do you see the inclusion of people with disabilities in the ministries of the church? What can be done to ensure that everyone is able to exercise their God-given gifts, to minister to others and not only being ministered to?

A natural place to use stories is in sermons. Use stories about hospitality, community and inclusion. Include people with disabilities in stories and prayers.

However, don't re-enforce negative images of people with disabilities as happened when a pastor in Johannesburg illustrated the perfection of the Paschal Lamb by saying that

"A lamb wearing dark glasses and walking with a white cane would be rejected by the priest."

He said this knowing that one of his blind parishioners was in church that day. It was only because of her husband's encouragement that she didn't leave the church, as she was deeply hurt by these comments.

In many other activities of the church there are opportunities to tell and listen to stories regarding disability: home cell groups, youth activities, women's groups. Once you have developed the sensitivity to listen well, such stories become a rich blessing.

5.3 Openness in dialogue

No training is necessary to interact with people with disabilities. Welcoming a visitor with disability is no different to welcoming anybody else. Ask how the week has been and talk about your week. Ask about interests and hobbies. You could even talk to a blind person about TV programmes like *Sewende Laan*. It is through everyday interaction that you communicate the worth you attach to someone.

However, as we do with everyone, we grow in sensitivity to the needs of each person. Therefore, it is respectful towards people with disabilities to familiarise oneself with the following:

- A basic understanding of the different kinds of disability.
- Terminology that respects the dignity of people with disabilities – see section 4.4 and section 8 of this document.
- A Biblical and liberating view of disability – see Bible study materials.

5.4 People with disabilities who are not part of the church

Be mindful of people with disabilities in the community who may want to become involved in the church but who may not feel ready. Don't assume that you know the reasons for their hesitancy. Rather create opportunities for interaction in order to build a relationship of mutual trust. Eventually it will be possible to talk about issues related to disability, faith, inclusion and belonging.

6 PADKOS FOR THE JOURNEY

Where would a South African road trip be without padkos? No journey is complete without the kids fighting in the back over a packet of slaptjips, Ouma with her box of the hottest samoosas Ladysmith could muster, Pa moaning about the ice-cream spilt on the upholstery and Ma trying her best to cut a strip of biltong from the toughest piece of beef this side of Laingsburg? Padkos

is the practical stuff that sustains us and you'll need some practical things to happen to complete this journey.

6.1 Transport

If you invite people with a disability from your community to your church, ensure that your guests have accessible transport. Some visitors might come with their friends or family members, while others may be living on their own and need to be fetched. People living in rehabilitation and retirement centres may have access to transport provided by the centre.

It will be helpful to have a support team to offer lifts to new members and other people with disabilities. It will be easier on your volunteers if they take turns to fetch people from home, rather than having people depend on only one person for transport.

6.2 Include everyone in your work parties /church activities.

People with disabilities can be included in work parties. It is empowering to assist other people and it promotes a sense of inclusion. Esmé, a wheelchair user from Randburg says: "I like it when the church invites me to join them to repaint the hall or decorate the Sunday School classes".

6.3 Include everyone in your interest groups

People with disabilities don't want to be separated, so look for ways to make all groups, like groups for singles, accessible. Help everyone to participate in group activities. At family picnics, for example, make sure that everyone has an opportunity to contribute to the refreshments. People will feel excluded from the group if told not to bring anything. All of us desire to be needed. It is important for people with disabilities to be part of the peer groups to which they would have belonged to were they not disabled. Peer group support is important to everyone.

An excellent example of an inclusive activity is the Alarga Stroll – the 'Walk to Emmaus' for people with disabilities. ['Alarga' is Spanish for 'to care']. The 'Walk to Emmaus' / 'Alarga Stroll' allows participants to experience and practice God's love in a practical manner.

In 2001, the first Alarga Stroll took place at the Cyara conference centre at Hekpoort in the Magaliesberg.

Alarga is a time of learning for those who serve and those being served, allowing everyone to discover their worth in Christ. Prayer is an integral part of the weekend.

The Alarga Stroll allows people with disabilities to minister with non-disabled people on the ministry team. Mr Eric and Mrs Pat Pollock, whose contact details can be found

on the list of contacts in Resourceful people, will be happy to provide you with further information.

6.4 Offer to take people shopping

People with disabilities who live independently may appreciate help with activities like shopping. Help may not be needed on every occasion, but your assistance may be valued say once a fortnight. Ask if help is needed and discuss payment for fuel and parking.

6.5 Offer to help with sewing and maintenance around the house

Although some people with disabilities are good at sewing and knitting, others may appreciate your help. Other people may need assistance with maintenance around the house, like fixing dripping taps. Allow the people you help the opportunity to do something for you in return.

6.6 Visiting people at retirement centres

People living in retirement centres appreciate receiving visitors. They need to know that other people are still interested in them. Often they want to talk about the past and need a listening ear. People with disabilities can be part of these visitation teams. People in retirement centres miss their pets and talking to a guide dog may bring them pleasure, so including a blind person with their guide dog in the team is a great idea.

6.7 Reading mail to blind people

While some people with visual impairment are not computer literate, many others make use of computers and scanners to read their printed mail. However, handwritten letters and notes cannot be scanned and blind people will appreciate your help in reading them aloud. If a partially sighted person cannot read the mail by means of a magnifier, he might also ask for assistance.

Please accept the person's hospitality if they offer to make you tea or coffee. If you don't, the person may feel that you believe they are a "welfare case" and that you don't value him/her as a person.

6.8 Respite Care

You could start a respite care ministry in your congregation.

There are many opportunities for rendering respite care in South Africa. Members of your group could join non-profit organisations in providing respite care to people with HIV and AIDS, cancer patients, the elderly and people with dementia.

Other members could offer to relieve families who are caring for family members with severe disabilities. For example, a volunteer could look after a child with a disability, while the family goes shopping,

6.9 Employing people with disabilities

Business owners in your congregation could employ people with disabilities who meet the requirements for the specific posts. Your aim should be to empower people by regarding them as employees, and not as welfare cases. In this way you do not only include people with disabilities in your church, but they are also included in the greater community outside the church walls.

7 JOURNEYING PRAYERFULLY

Most of us set out on long journeys with prayer. One of the joys of mission work is that people always gather around you and pray for you before you set off for your next destination. It is a great blessing to hear people pray for you so specifically and lovingly.

However, as mentioned earlier, the question of faith, prayer and disability is one which causes people with disabilities much anguish, as they may have at some time felt coerced into prayer and been hurt in the process. People who remain disabled after prayer are often blamed for the lack of "healing". If you want to pray, then you need to do so with respect, sensitivity and humility. This is not an issue which you should deal with flippantly. If, after prayerful preparation you still wish to ask the person for permission to pray with them, test your motives by asking these questions:

- How well do we know each other?
- Why do I want to pray? Is it out of pity?
- Do I think this person is less worthy because they have a disability?
- Do I believe this person has a disability because of his or his family's sin?
- Do I see the person as a human being with potential, despite the disability?
- Do I want to be recognised as a faith healer?

If you know the person well, and you are fellow believers, and you want to pray with them concerning the disability, first ask if you may do so. If the person is not comfortable with your suggestion, accept their wishes and don't make them feel guilty about declining. People with disabilities live full lives and need intercession for the issues which face every other person. Don't assume that their prayer lives are focused on their disability. Under no circumstances should people with disabilities be compelled to take part in prayers. Many

people have had negative experiences of having their wheelchair grabbed and being pushed to the front of the church. This practice is unacceptable. If a disabled person does come forward for prayer, give them time to talk about their prayer requests. Do not assume that you know why they have asked for prayer.

Disabled people are blamed for not having enough faith, or for not having any faith at all if they are not 'healed' after prayer. Many have fled the church because of these experiences.

A blind lady from Johannesburg was taken to a prophet in Nigeria for prayer. She was left on her own in a room, waiting to be taken into the church. No one spoke to her because they believed that she was blind because she was 'full of sin'. This experience caused her deep anguish for months after her return from Nigeria.

A disabled person says "The minister and congregation must stop making me the object of their prayers and feel-good actions, forever wanting to heal me, believing that I'm sick or being punished by their loving God. This is patronising, not to mention arrogant. They'll never say this to my face, but that's what they believe."

8 TALKING TO ONE ANOTHER ALONG THE ROAD

I've been on a number of long hikes and at some stage, someone's enthusiasm falters. The right word spoke in the right way does marvels to rekindle energy and the willingness to see the trip through to the end. These words of encouragement do much to keep the party together on the trail through the mountains.



One of my blind friends worked at the bank opposite Germiston police station. She was walking with her guide dog past the police station on her way to work when someone asked her:

"Is your dog looking for explosives?"

The right words can do much to make sure all your members stay together on this journey. It is important to use inclusive language in welcoming people with disabilities in your congregation. The appropriate use of language is important in order not to reinforce negative stereotypes. People with a disability are more concerned about the attitudes expressed in your tone of voice than your words. If you are uncertain about what to say, the simplest way is to ask.

8.1 Language reflects our attitudes

- Language should be:
 - Personal - 'person with a disability' rather than 'disabled person'
 - Positive - 'has a disability' rather than 'afflicted with a disability'
 - Precise - 'wheelchair user' rather than 'confined to a wheelchair' or 'wheelchair bound' [Wheelchairs provide a degree of independence: "If it wasn't for this wheelchair, I'd be stuck in bed all day"]
- Use 'person with a disability' rather than 'handicapped', with its implications of charity and begging.
- Remember that we are talking about people. Terms such as 'the disabled', 'the sick', 'the blind', 'the deaf' and 'the afflicted' are impersonal and imply groups separate from the rest of society.
- Avoid attaching labels to people with a disability. Labels are for jars - not people!
- Don't describe people by the condition they have, because by doing so they are deprived of their identity. An 'amputee' is a person with prosthesis; an 'arthritic' is a person with arthritis; a 'spastic' or 'epileptic' is a person who has cerebral palsy or epilepsy.
- Don't use negative images; 'suffering from...', 'a victim of...', 'crippled by...', 'afflicted by...'



Sometimes people ask me whether my other senses have become sharper since losing my sight. "Definitely my sense of taste!" is my reply.

8.2 Avoid certain words and phrases

Words and phrases to be avoided:

- Don't say 'cripple'... Say 'person with a disability'
- Don't say 'mentally retarded'... Say 'person with a learning disability'
- Don't say 'spastic'... Say 'person with cerebral palsy' or 'physical disability'
- Don't say 'carer' or 'caregiver'... Say 'personal assistant' (A personal assistant is employed by the person with a disability who pays for services rendered – they are on mutual ground. The terms 'carers' or 'caregivers' emphasise dependency and neediness.)

- Don't say 'disabled parking'... Say 'accessible parking' (It is accessible to wheelchair users who drive their cars and need wider spaces to disembark from the car into the wheelchair.)
- Don't say 'disabled toilet'... Say 'wheelchair accessible toilet'

9 LIST OF SOURCES

- ALL WELCOME – A Best Practice Guide to Including Disabled People in the Life of the Church. Through the roof ministries – Working with Churches in the UK.
- ASSISTING BLIND PEOPLE IN THE WORKPLACE: ORIENTATION AND GUIDELINES. The South African Library For The Blind.
- DIFFERENT MEMBERS, ONE BODY - Welcoming the Diversity of Abilities in God's Family. Edited by Sharon Kutz-Mellem. Produced in partnership with the Commission on Enabling Ministry Services. Copyright 1998 Witherspoon Press.
- disability SADA_profile.pdf.
- DISABILITY AWARENESS SUNDAY - A PLANNING GUIDE FOR CHURCHES; Copyright CBM Australia; Luke 14 - Disability Inclusive Christian Communities 2009.
- DISABILITY MINISTRY SUNDAY. Joni and Friends Ministries. USA.
- INCLUDING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN FAITH COMMUNITIES, Erik W. Carter. PH.D. Paul H. Brookes Co. 2007.
- SEEKING SIGNS AND MISSING WONDERS. Disability and the Church's Healing Ministry. By Geoffrey. Lay Monarch Books 1998; First published 1998 ISBN 1854244175