

# FIRST STEPS IN BECOMING A DISABILITY-FRIENDLY CHURCH



## 1 Extend a warm welcome to everyone

Practise hospitality. Demonstrate that people with disabilities are loved and included in your church. *Ask* people what will help them to feel at home.

## 2 Accessible buildings

ASK persons with disabilities whether changes need to be made.

You may need to modify access to the entrance, the sanctuary, restrooms and meeting rooms. Are the grounds user-friendly for disabled people?

## 3 Make sure everyone can get involved in worship

Can everybody participate in the service? People with hearing or visual impairments may need to sit near the front to see the speaker. For wheelchair users, shorten some of the pews so that they don't sit in the aisles. Provide a 'buddy' for those who need assistance

A 'buddy' can help people get involved, e.g. by taking a disabled child to the Sunday school classroom or just be ably befriending a person with an intellectual disability.

## 4 Involve youth and other groups in the church

Invite a disability expert to teach in your church about promoting an understanding of disability. The youth can do activities that enhance this learning process.

## 5 Provide opportunities for persons with disabilities to use their gifts

Find ways for disabled people to participate in the life of the church. E.g. a wheelchair user may want to teach Sunday school, but they will need an accessible classroom; a blind person can serve as an elder because of his leadership gifts.

## 6 Provide disability-friendly materials

Have large print Bibles or song sheets available. People with hearing impairment may need a written summary of the sermon.

## 7 Communicate and interact in ways that strengthen relationships

Treat persons with disabilities with respect. Speak directly to the person with the disability, not through their family or caregivers.

Build relationships with disabled people who attend church and give them an opportunity to speak about their experiences in the church. Reach out to families with disabled members. Find out about disabled people in the community and explore ways to support them.

## 8 Seek and practice a Biblical understanding of disability that is liberating

Persons with disability long be included and to participate in an unconditional way.