



Anabaptist
Disabilities
Network

Accessibility Study Guide

Written by Joanne Gallardo



Week 1:

Why Inclusion? The Theology Behind Our Work

Scripture passage

1 Corinthians 12:4–6, 12–26 NIV

⁴ There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. ⁵ There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. ⁶ There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.

¹² Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. ¹⁴ Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

¹⁵ Now if the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. ¹⁹ If they were all one part, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” ²² On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, ²⁴ while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, ²⁵ so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. ²⁶ If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

Discussion questions

1. How do you believe this Scripture to be relevant to a church made up of people with differing abilities? How do you believe this Scripture to be relevant to a church that includes people with disabilities? How is this Scripture relevant for a congregation with people who have a variety of abilities?
2. What abilities are celebrated in your congregation? What are some abilities that could be more celebrated?
3. What is the radical call from this Scripture passage?

Special Delegate Assembly Resolution Summary

During the Special Delegate Assembly in May 2022, the “Mennonite Church USA Accessibility Resolution” was brought to the delegate body. Its purpose was to encourage churches, agencies, and institutions to remove barriers that keep people with disabilities from fully participating in the life of MC USA. In the words of the resolution, the barriers can include “architecture, communication, and attitudes” (p. 1). The following paragraph is taken from the resolution itself: “This resolution affirms that people with disabilities are included within priorities expressed in MC USA Journey Forward:

- Experience and bear witness to the belovedness of all creation, acknowledging that all people are made in the image of God and are children of God.
- Follow Jesus: In his life and teaching, Jesus emphasized that God’s reign includes all people, especially those who have been marginalized or excluded. As an Anabaptist community of the living word, we will listen carefully to the voices of people with disabilities, to better understand the fullness of God’s love for us and the vision of God’s reign through Jesus Christ.
- Witness to God’s peace: We are called to extend God’s holistic peace to all. We bear witness to Christ’s gift of peace to the world by rejecting violence and resisting injustice in all its forms and in all places.
- Experience transformation: The Holy Spirit dwells in and among us, transforming us to reflect God’s love in unique ways. When our worship includes all people, the Spirit gathers the whole body of Christ, where our diversity reveals God’s beauty and enables us to more fully embody the grace, joy and peace of the gospel.” (pp. 1–2)

Discussion

1. What do you appreciate about this resolution?
2. What could be expanded?
3. How do you see this affecting your congregation?

Hearing from Others

Jennie Weiss Block is a disability professional who has an interest in theology. In her book, *Copious Hosting* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2002), she talks about the “theology of access.” As a Roman Catholic, she talks about disability being an illustration that “God’s ways are not our ways” (p. 91). She goes on to say, “Why a theology of access? Because the Gospel of Jesus Christ is a gospel of access; creating access for those on the margins is a Christian mandate” (p. 120). Block uses examples from the life of Jesus, and our Scripture passage from 1 Corinthians gives us insight into the theology of the early Church. For Block, the “accessible God” means that folks with disabilities should take their rightful place in the Christian community. To get there, we all need to do our part.

Discussion

1. Can you articulate your “theology of inclusion?” Can you articulate what your thoughts are on how God might feel about including all people in the life of the church?
2. What do disabilities tell us about God, aside from Block’s assertion that “God’s ways are not our ways?”
3. What is “our part?”

Reading

Read [“Stop Trying to ‘Heal’ Me”](#) by Damon Rose (BBC, April 28, 2019),

Discussion

1. Have you witnessed situations of “spiritual help” that Damon Rose described?
2. Part of Jesus’ ministry was healing people with disabilities. How do you see that playing out via language, mission, or unspoken expectations in your congregation?
3. What does *healing*, in the context of this article, mean to you? What is challenging about that language?

Check Out

[“Henri Nouwen on Downward Mobility,”](#) YouTube, May 12, 2017,

Week 2:

Listening to and Honoring Marginalized People Among Us

Scripture passage

Psalm 139 NIV

- ¹³ For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
- ¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.
- ¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place,
when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.
- ¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed body;
all the days ordained for me were written in your book
before one of them came to be.

Discussion

1. What does it mean to you to be “fearfully and wonderfully made?”
2. How does this Scripture resonate with your experiences with a disability and/or other peoples' disabilities?
3. How does this Scripture inform your view of your relationship with God?

Two interviews

Read these two interviews with persons who have disabilities, some of which may be considered “invisible.” Special care was taken to retain the true voice of the interviewee and how they answered questions. This may require the reader to make some connections or follow in a way that may not come as easily to some. You are invited to take this in as a learning experience.

Interview with Angela, 51

1. What has been your experience as a person who has mental illness in the Anabaptist tradition?

I've been a Mennonite about two years. My mental illness is a big part of why I chose to switch from my previous tradition to Anabaptism. I felt like there was more freedom to talk about it [mental illness]. I felt like when I spoke about it, it didn't change things between me and others, and it didn't feel like people were judgmental. I experienced judgment at previous churches. Where I attended before, there were a lot of subtle, hid-

den judgments. I had a friend who would say, “I prayed, and now I don’t get headaches.” I thought if I prayed, I wouldn’t have mental illness. I would say that’s something that stands out to me in the church I attended for 10 years; there was an expectation that if you prayed long enough that it would go away. Depression was a spiritual thing rather than a brain chemical illness. People said a lot of things like, “I watched you wear that depression coat, you chose to put it on.” Lots of misinformation and hurtful things were said. Once I came to the Anabaptist tradition, people had more awareness of what mental illness [is], and how to manage [it] and how to support one another. I went to a church where a good friend struggles with bipolar disorder, and she’s not able to attend anymore. But she’s very beloved in the congregation still. Her husband shared a year ago about her journey, and I found such camaraderie and solidarity — his standing up and talking about it was so relatable. The Anabaptist tradition gives so much more support than other places I’ve attended.”

2. Can you talk about a time where church got something “right” in terms of including people of all abilities?

One thing that stands out to me is having the disabilities I have, physical and mental, means sometimes I’m late. Mornings aren’t my thing. Physically, they’re harder. Mentally, they’re harder. And I love the people in my church community so much. They get me through the week! I’m much more enthusiastic about church now! Nobody has ever said a word to me about my lateness. I mentioned this to a friend of mine at church. She said, “You don’t have to worry about that here. It’s okay.”

There’s such an acceptance and whatever it is you have to bring is welcomed. Even with my physical challenges, there’s been lots of inclusion. There are ramps and an elevator in my church. People are very willing to help me with that. I was going through trauma recovery therapy when I started attending a Mennonite church. I was open about how difficult that was. Women came around, supported me, and prayed for me. That was meaningful. In a previous church, we were made to sit in the foyer when we were late. It’s a real contrast to when I’m late at my church now. People scoot over and help me find a seat.

Maybe this seems silly to some, but my mental illness is really a big deal. I’m hypervigilant with what’s happening around me. The light in the sanctuary is also a big deal. When it’s bright and open I can see what’s happening, I can see who’s there, etc. In a dark sanctuary, I don’t feel safe. I didn’t realize how bad a dark sanctuary was for me for many years.

I appreciate the open talking and open communication about mental health. There are sermons, messages, lament over trauma that has happened in the church. I’ve had people write my name on the rock that goes in for prayer to God to help me with my mental illness and that means a lot to me. It’s not “If you believe, you’ll get better.” It’s prayer and support. It’s been a great place to go to continue healing. In the timeframe I’ve been in this church, I’ve gone into remission [with my mental illness].

3. Can you talk about a time where church didn’t get something right when it came to including people of all abilities?

I really think that light is the biggest thing. It was almost a barrier for me. It kept me from really feeling safe at church for a lot of years. Also, the miseducation and information that people believed about mental health. Like “it’s you choosing your behavior. You don’t get up early enough. You come here sad.” There’s a misunderstanding that a person with a mental illness has any control over what’s happening to them. If I could control it,

I wouldn't choose it! I don't choose to be hypervigilant or have outbursts. There's things people think that are just wrong in terms of mental illness. In some church circles, there's a stigma against taking medication for it. I know a lot of people who've been told they shouldn't be on medication. My answer to that has been "if I had heart disease or diabetes, no one would think twice about me needing medication." My church now has been more open to learning how to embrace people, all people. That's obvious to me in hosting multiple AA and Al-Anon meetings. We had a beloved member who passed away who really facilitated Al-Anon in our church. What brought me to the building was an Al-Anon meeting with a friend. It felt like a safe place to be ... and anywhere you can talk about addictions is good.

4. What do you want people to know about what you bring to the church?

I have gifts and talents that for many years were not accepted because they didn't fit into the right box. That doesn't negate those gifts. I think I bring compassion and empathy for others. I also bring wisdom and knowledge for my experience and self-education. I bring awareness to what kinds of things can be triggering for people with trauma. I recently heard a sermon that was triggering to me. I had the ability to know I was safe enough to let the worship leaders know. They both expressed that I educated them. There's space for mutual growth. I still have things that I bring that no one else does, like drum circles and art group. It's great to have a safe community that welcomes those things and encourages them.

Interview with Leanna, 30

1. What has been your experience as a person who is neurodivergent in the Anabaptist tradition?

As a pastor's daughter, more expectations were placed on me. My bad experiences were as a kid at church. I felt like it was hard to meet expectations, but also to be as successful as my brother. [Me and my brother's] lives are just completely different. We have different minds and levels of learning. He met the expectations of my parents and the church. Lots of people go up to him at church and talk to him and his family. I'm not going to have a family. I've had to separate myself from others' expectations in the last five years to become a happier and more successful person. I meet my own expectations.

At church, I haven't always felt welcomed, specifically being autistic. Being bipolar and autistic go hand and hand with how I communicate. If I have a problem with someone, I don't know how to do handle it without overstepping boundaries or hurting feelings. It's hard to communicate to my family and the church about the mental health aspect of who I am. It's harder to understand being multi-diagnosed with mental health diagnosis, but also with my having autism and fibromyalgia.

It can be hard to stand up for a song in church, and sometimes I need to lean on the pew or ask someone for assistance. I feel like I stand out. I'm very aware that my physical health has been not as noticeable because you can't see it.

In youth group, it was hard. People would be in cliques, and I would scatter myself around to each group. At winter retreats, I felt like I was a loner. Sometimes people didn't welcome me because I couldn't understand how to play a card game fast enough. I didn't understand what they were talking about in regard to academics. I couldn't understand their "language."

Personalities in my youth group definitely clashed. I was trying to learn what my niche was in the church without overstepping people's boundaries as an overly empathetic and

emotion person. How do I communicate my wants and needs to the church if I'm not getting what I need (on youth trips) or in youth group?

A lot of [things] were discussed with my pastors, and we would come up with signals at [youth] conventions if I had my limit stress-wise or was overstimulated. I used a hand signal, and that was helpful. But it didn't fix everything.

Now, as I've grown up, I've learned how to communicate and fend for myself, and how to live on my own. Even my friend of five years said, "You've grown up really fast in the past five years!" It's amazing how much better the church understands me.

Recently, in relation to one of my parents about a specific incident, I had a panic attack. It took a half hour for me to process that. They said, "We can't take you on a trip if you blow up." As if I try! It's hard to be understood with my mental health diagnoses. Borderline personality disorder was my most recent diagnosis, along with PTSD. [My parent] asked why, what happened? They would ask if it was something they did. They thought, "Couldn't be us, we treat you so well." We have an understanding now, though. My parent had no idea what I was trying to tell her in the beginning. I felt excluded and it's sometimes why I lash out.

As a Christian, I feel more depressed because I might be looked at as "sinning" when I lash out or am upset. I've been trying a lot of meds and counselors. It's complicated. How do you talk to your family about mental illness? We clash. I went to a Christian high school and there were more expectations, and it's hard blend in when you're me. It's intense to be in a class of under 50 with a mental illness. I was very divergent. Atypical. And easy target for the boys. They played a lot of jokes and pranks. It was bad. I felt really targeted as a kid. If I was neurotypical, I might have been treated differently. I had to really fight my way to make friends and the right decisions. I didn't get invited to parties; I didn't know cuss words. At that time, I was very sheltered, and I was made fun of.

However, I went to a Mennonite church when I was at college. It was very welcoming, and they pretty much knew my entire family. Some people knew more than others about the relationship I had with my parents. Sometimes that was hard.

I still have fears of being neglected. I also worry, "Am I a failure to my parents?" Am I not a good enough Christian because I lash out? If I'm not 100% happy, is that a sin? Everybody sins. Is the illness I can hardly handle a sin? I was having dark thoughts. I thought it was getting better. Bipolar is not my choice! BPD is not my choice! If it's a sin, Jesus died for our sins. The church over the last decade has become a more positive place for the neurodivergent. People are understanding better and doing research. At my church, we got a new lift! We're thinking outside the box. Intergenerational [programs] are more inclusive for people like me. I feel everybody is accepted now. I've decided to stay at my church and I'm attending more.

2. Can you talk about a time where church got something "right" in terms of including people of all abilities?

I feel like they get inclusivity right. I feel very more a part of the church, more welcomed, more blended in. I don't feel like I stand out as much. More people have come into the church that are diverse. It's not like my church did things wrong the whole time, but it was a lot of trial and error for me personally. Music was one way I fit in during childhood, and people would thank me for singing. Back then, it wasn't as it is now. I was a zebra in a bunch of flamingos!

3. Can you talk about a time where church didn't get something right when it came to including people of all abilities?

I was dating someone moderately autistic. He came to my church every Sunday. It wasn't even his own denomination. Now he took things literally, and I do too a little bit. The pastor decided the youth group should discuss sex ed. [my boyfriend] said, "Now that we learn how to put a condom on, let's have sex." He took it as education on how to literally do it, right now. That wasn't the point of the discussion. We were the only couple in the class.

Anything that the leaders choose to do in front of atypical or mentally ill people was more complicated than it seemed. We're kind of fragile, oblivious, and naive. As a teen, that lesson was the last thing I needed. As an autistic person, I can't jump into things like that.

Another time, it was [the youth] convention. In general, there here were a lot of [rifts] in my youth group and with the pastors. We disagreed. It was vocalized that we needed to share about [youth] convention. Some in my youth group seemed to have a very negative experience. I was offended that in such a spiritual place, they were so narrow minded about others' feelings. I was offended with the strong things against the convention. I accepted Jesus at a convention! Good can happen there, and it caused a lot of friction coming back from it. I love worshiping at convention; it was always part of my life. I was defensive about it and had a big opinion!

4. What do you want people to know about what you bring to the church?

I want them to know every person brings a gift into the world. We are all God's creation. We're talented but in very different ways. We may not be book smart or be able to communicate well. But we still feel and are very much human. Maybe we're more alike [with neurotypical people] than some people think. It's just my brain! For me, my gift is caring for elders and animals. I have a natural caregiving spirit. I don't see myself doing anything else for the rest of my life. I can memorize things left and right in nature too, that's a gift I bring. We all don't have to pray to God in the same way. We don't even have to use certain words. God can be found everywhere. You don't need to be the same to praise God, so why don't we praise God together?

Discussion

1. What are some similarities in Leanna and Angela's stories? What are some differences?
2. What did you learn from their examples of the church doing well with including people of all abilities?
3. What did you learn from the situations when the church didn't get inclusion right?
4. From these interviews, what would be helpful for your church to know?

Hearing from Others

In her book, *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability* (Abingdon Press, 1994), Nancy Eiesland states, "Many churches think they've done enough for the disabled if they provide toilet access and a ramp to get into the building" (p. 50). Eiesland states that Christ himself was disabled, having borne the scars of crucifixion at his resurrection. Eiesland herself grew up with a congenital disability and underwent years of surgery, braces, and joint replacements. She felt she "was a bother" and things needed to be "reinvented" for her. Traditional Christian theology, she explains, tends to further marginalize people with disabilities rather than include them, as people are seen as "divinely blessed or damned," which she asserts is not reality (p. 91). With this comes a

“theology of perfection,” which connotes physical wholeness. Eiesland reflects that her theology and her writing are not meant to scold the church; rather, they serve to open the congregation’s eyes to the realities of what people with disabilities experience in the life of the congregation.

Discussion

1. Have you ever been “othered” by feeling that you were a bother due to physical, mental, or emotional limitations, or been a caregiver for someone who has? Describe that experience and how that made you feel.
2. The idea of achieving perfection is very difficult, not only for people with disabilities. Can you talk about how the need to be “perfect” has affected you in your life?
3. How might you address this eye-opening message with your congregation?

Check Out

[“What Adam Taught Me: 1994 Award Speech”](#) by Henri Nouwen, Henri Nouwen Society, posted July 14, 2020.

Week 3:

What Does Inclusion Look Like?

Scripture passage

Galatians 3:26–29 NIV

²⁶ So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, ²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Discussion

1. What is Paul telling us about being “other” and being “baptized into Christ?”
2. Share with others in your group a story about inclusivity being done well in a congregational setting.
3. Share an example of when inclusivity was not done well in a congregational setting.

Activity: Recognizing Privilege Exercise

The following list is from “The Invisible Crutch,” by Rioiriri, posted on April 3, 2009. <https://rioiriri.blogspot.com/2009/04/invisible-crutch.html> Many of us can forget we have privileges like these on a regular basis. Check off each statement that is true for you.

- ☐ I can, if I wish, arrange to attend social events without worrying if they are accessible to me.
- ☐ If I am in the company of people that make me uncomfortable, I can easily choose to move elsewhere
- ☐ I can easily find housing that is accessible to me, with no barriers to my mobility.
- ☐ I can go shopping alone most of the time and be able to reach and obtain all of the items without assistance, know that cashiers will notice I am there, and can easily see and use the credit card machines.
- ☐ I can turn on the television and see people of my ability level widely and accurately represented.
- ☐ I can be pretty sure of my voice being heard in a group where I am the only person of my ability level represented—and they will make eye contact with me.
- ☐ I can advocate for my children in their schools without my ability level being blamed for my children's performance or behavior.
- ☐ I can do well in a challenging situation without being told what an inspiration I am.
- ☐ If I ask to speak to someone “in charge”, I can be relatively assured that the person will make eye contact with me and not treat me like I am stupid.
- ☐ I can belong to an organization and not feel that others resent my membership because of my ability level.

- ☐ I do not have to fear being preyed upon because of my ability level.
- ☐ I can be reasonably assured that I won't be late for meetings due to mobility barriers.
- ☐ I can use most cosmetics and personal care products without worrying that they will cause a painful or dangerous reaction.
- ☐ I can usually go about in public without other people's personal care products causing me painful or dangerous reactions.
- ☐ My neighborhood allows me to move about on sidewalks, into stores, and into friends' homes without difficulty.
- ☐ People do not tell me that my ability level means I should not have children.
- ☐ I can be reasonably sure that I will be able to make it to a regular job every day.
- ☐ I know that my income can increase based on my performance, and I can seek new and better employment if I choose; I do not have to face a court battle to get an increase in my income.
- ☐ My daily routine does not have to be carefully planned to accommodate medication or therapy schedules.
- ☐ I can share my life with an animal companion without my ability to care for them being called into question due to my financial and ability situations.
- ☐ If I am not feeling well, and decide to stay in bed, I will likely be believed and not told that I am lazy and worthless.

Discussion

1. What surprised you about this exercise?
2. If you feel comfortable, talk about the privileges you do and do not have. How do you feel about them? Do you think about these privileges or are they just a "given" for you?
3. Were there times when you had these privileges but lost them? Were there times you haven't had these privileges but gained them?

Check Out

["Rev. Kendrick Kemp on Black Liberation Theology of Disability: The Heumann Perspective,"](#)
January 18, 2021.

Week 4:

What Can Our Congregation Do?

Scripture passage

Amos 5:21–24 NIV

- ²¹ “I hate, I despise your religious festivals;
your assemblies are a stench to me.
²² Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings,
I will not accept them.
Though you bring choice fellowship offerings,
I will have no regard for them.
²³ Away with the noise of your songs!
I will not listen to the music of your harps.
²⁴ But let justice roll on like a river,
righteousness like a never-failing stream!

Discussion

1. Talk about the importance of advocacy overall, for all people.
2. Have there been times when you’ve been an advocate? Has someone been an advocate for you?
3. What do you think *justice* means for people with disabilities?

Autism and Worship

Katherine Bale, a Christian living with autism, wrote “17 Ways to Make Your Church Autism-Friendly” ([Premier Christianity, April 27, 2017](#)). She described her experience in worship in this way.

Before the service, I’m sitting in my seat at church: one or more people are talking to me; the band is playing; the minister is walking in; there’s lots of moving visuals on the screens; several people are wearing strong perfume; there’s loud noise from the heating system; unpleasant colored electric light. And I am sitting there unable to filter out sensory information that I don’t need and feeling increasingly tense. By the time the minister starts, I’m not capable of paying attention, and it takes a while to be able to calm down and focus. So, there is a lot of hard work for me to do before I can even start to join in with a worship service.

Bale also encourages congregations and especially leaders to educate themselves about autism spectrum disorder. There should be an understanding that some churchgoers with ASD may not be “awkward, unfriendly, or rude on purpose”; rather, they are using their executive function skills to be able to survive social situations that may cause them to feel uneasy.

Bob Smietana discusses ways to be inclusive in “Few Churches Are Autism Friendly” ([Lifeway Research, July 30, 2018](#)). He explains there is a high standard for certain behavior at church, and children are especially under a microscope. Parents sometimes feel shame for outbursts or meltdowns that can happen anytime. Smietana relates the story of DeAnna Gibson, a parent who felt the church could not be accommodating to her autistic child. She shared her thoughts and struggles with some congregants. They set up a buddy system, two teenage girls and their moms, who meet DeAnna’s son Zeke after Sunday school and sit with him during the worship service. These folks made sure Zeke had everything he needs with ongoing support. This also allowed Zeke to have instant friends in his “buddy” group. “Churches don’t need to have all the answers,” Gibson said, “but they do need to be willing to help. . . . All children matter to God,” she says, and this includes involving the gifts autistic children bring to the church.

Discussion

1. Brainstorm some concrete ways your congregation can be open to people with disabilities. What can be done in the short term? What can be done in the long term?
2. Talk with your pastor or other leaders about your experience and what you’ve learned. Is there a way to put accessibility into action?
3. How can you fully include the gifts people with disabilities bring in the life of the church? Brainstorm concrete ways to invite people to participate.

The Morality of Food

by Joanne Gallardo

A statement I hear a lot in churches is “this potluck is going to make me fat!” Or “ugh, I’m getting so fat,” as if gaining weight or having more weight on our bodies is a moral failing. During a time in my life where I was the sickest I had ever been, I was losing weight rapidly. I was told by doctors and church members alike of how “good” I looked and how proud they were of me. In reality, I was miserable. A good friend of mine who is a double-lung transplant recipient has a hard time keeping weight on her body when she’s feeling unwell but will often hear compliments on how slender she is. People with eating disorders and disordered eating are a part of our congregations. If we don’t promote “body neutrality” or “body positivity,” many can leave church feeling ashamed, as if they’ve done something wrong. Even our potlucks can cause an issue for some folks. People can have health concerns that are not related to weight, and one’s weight isn’t always related to one’s lifestyle. Do an internet search of “body positivity” and “body neutrality” and see how having an ethic of “all bodies are good bodies” might fit with thoughts about God and how you do church together in your congregation. In the meantime, remember the following:

- Someone’s weight is none of your business.
- Find something else to comment on about a person if you notice a change, such as their intelligence, kindness, or creativity.
- Make space for every size in your church. This includes chairs, bathrooms, space for mobility aids to maneuver around, even spacing between persons in your church is important.

Check Out

[“Casual Ableist Language,”](#) April 5, 2016

Helpful Resources for Further Study

Eiesland, Nancy L. *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability*. Abingdon Press, 1994.

Hardwick, Lamar. *Disability and the Church: A Vision for Diversity and Inclusion*. InterVarsity Press, 2021.

Johnson, Janeen Bertsche. "Autism in Our Youth Group." The Gathering Place, May 12, 2016, <https://www.anabaptistdisabilitiesnetwork.org/Resources/DisabilityTopics/Autism/Pages/Autism-in-Our-Youth-Group.aspx>

Kenny, Amy. *My Body Is Not a Prayer Request: Disability Justice in the Church*. Baker Publishing Group, 2022. E-book.



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