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Planning Accessible Meetings and Events: A Guide for Congregations

"God's various gifts are handed out everywhere; but they all originate in God's Spirit. God's various ministries are carried out everywhere; but they all originate in God's Spirit. God's various expressions of power are in action everywhere; but God's self is behind it all. Each person is given something to do that shows who God is: Everyone gets in on it, everyone benefits. All kinds of things are handed out by the Spirit, and to all kinds of people! The variety is wonderful." (1 Corinthians 12, *The Message*)

As Christians, we acknowledge that God created each person in God's own image, and that God has given each person gifts and abilities that can be used to build up and edify the Body of Christ. However, physical, psychological, and attitudinal barriers in meeting spaces and gatherings can impede the use of these gifts. When someone cannot enter a space or participate in an event, we not only deny them welcome; we deny the gathered group the gifts and abilities of that person.

In thinking about disabilities, a helpful perspective is that we are all "temporarily abled," and accessibility will become more of an issue for each of us as we move throughout our lives. When special care is taken by those of us without disabilities to ensure our meetings spaces and gatherings are accessible to those of us with physical, mental, and emotional disabilities and our families, we move closer to what the writer of 1 Corinthians was envisioning for the Body of Christ: "Everyone gets in on it, everyone benefits." That heartfelt desire to help everyone feel that they belong is essential to true accessibility.

What follows is some excellent technical advice on how to make people with various "disabilities" feel welcome and able to participate with your group. We appreciate your interest in increasing accessibility and encourage you to consult with ADN further if you have questions.



How do I use this information?

This guide is intended to be a brief check-list for persons or committees as they plan and prepare for meetings or events, enabling planners to make their meeting or event as accessible as possible to people with disabilities.

But it's too much!

Not every meeting or event requires every possible measure of accessibility. Consider your audience, assess their accessibility needs, and seek to provide the best accessibility services you can.

Self-Guided Accessibility Evaluation for your Church Meeting Space

- Clearly marked location for audio/visual assistive technology
- IT staff and assistance are available as needed
- Microphones for presenters and lay speakers in the congregation
- Adequate maneuvering-room for scooters and power wheelchairs
- Adequately-spaced seating for all mobility needs
- Raised platform area for presenters to be visible to audience, and wheelchair access to the raised area
- If the room is large, simultaneous video projection of the presenters
- Text captions of spoken words of presenters in near-real-time

Welcoming People of All Abilities to Your Church Meeting

Provide Greeters at each entrance to welcome guests and act as "Accessibility Volunteers" for your congregation. Below is a list of actions these Greeters may do:

Provide Descriptive Information

- To help orient attendees who are blind or have low vision to the building, it may be useful to provide some descriptive information.
- Include "big picture" information: the layout of the facility and surrounding area, including landmarks and their relation to each other
- Include specific directions for getting to and from one area of the building to another. For example, directions from the lobby, elevators, stairs, or other common "starting points" to specific meeting rooms, sanctuary, or other spaces

Offer to Assist

- Those with mobility limitations may appreciate having someone walk with them around the new space. Offer to walk them into the sanctuary or to the Sunday School classroom.
- Place wheelchairs at entrances to the building for attendees to use



- Those who struggle with anxiety induced by new situations or many people may appreciate a friendly face to greet them and explain how the service/meeting time will progress, how to find a space to sit, and who they may know in the congregation.

