
HERE I AM

INCLUSION AND ACCESSIBILITY IN THE CHURCH

The Rev. Rebecca C. Warlow, Deacon

AGENDA

- Some facts about disability
- Jesus, disability, and inclusion
- Why think about inclusivity and accessibility in the church?
- Ideas for enhancing accessibility and inclusivity

A FEW FACTS ABOUT DISABILITY

- The CDC reports that 1 in 4 people have a disability. 85 million people in the United States
- Disabilities impact people across all demographics – gender, race, income, education, location, religion, age
- There are thousands of disabilities and chronic illnesses
- Some disabilities and chronic illnesses are visible and others are invisible

JESUS AND PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

³⁰ Great crowds came to him, bringing with them the lame, the blind, the maimed, the mute, and many others. They put them at his feet, and he cured them
~Mark 5:30

- Jesus had great compassion and love for people with disabilities. Nearly two thirds of Jesus' miracles involved people with disabilities
- He recognized that people with disabilities are made in the image of God as we all are

JESUS AND PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Jesus went up to Jerusalem.² Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew^[a] Beth-zatha,^[b] which has five porticoes.³ In these lay many ill, blind, lame, and paralyzed people.^[c] ⁵ One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. ⁶ When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be made well?” ⁷ The ill man answered him, “Sir,^[d] I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am making my way someone else steps down ahead of me.” ⁸ Jesus said to him, “Stand up, take your mat and walk.” ⁹ At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk. ~John 5:1-9

- Jesus gave people with disabilities a voice and he listened to what they wanted. In this story from John,
- Jesus doesn't assume that the man wanted to be healed. Instead he asks him “Do you want to be made well.” and listens to what the man needs

JESUS AND PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

⁴⁰ A man with a skin disease came to him begging him, and kneeling^[a] he said to him, “If you are willing, you can make me clean.” ⁴¹ Moved with pity,^[b] Jesus^[c] stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, “I am willing. Be made clean!” ~Mark 1:40-45

- People with disabilities are often treated differently simply because people make assumptions about them.
- In Jesus’ time people with disabilities and disease were often shunned or separated from their community.
- In Mark we can see that Jesus willingly and lovingly touches and engages with people with disabilities or illness.

JESUS AND PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

⁴⁹ Jesus stood still and said, “Call him here.” And they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take heart; get up, he is calling you.” ⁵⁰ So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. ⁵¹ Then Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man said to him, “My teacher,^[h] let me see again.” ⁵² Jesus said to him, “Go; your faith has made you well.” Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way. ~Mark 10:49-52

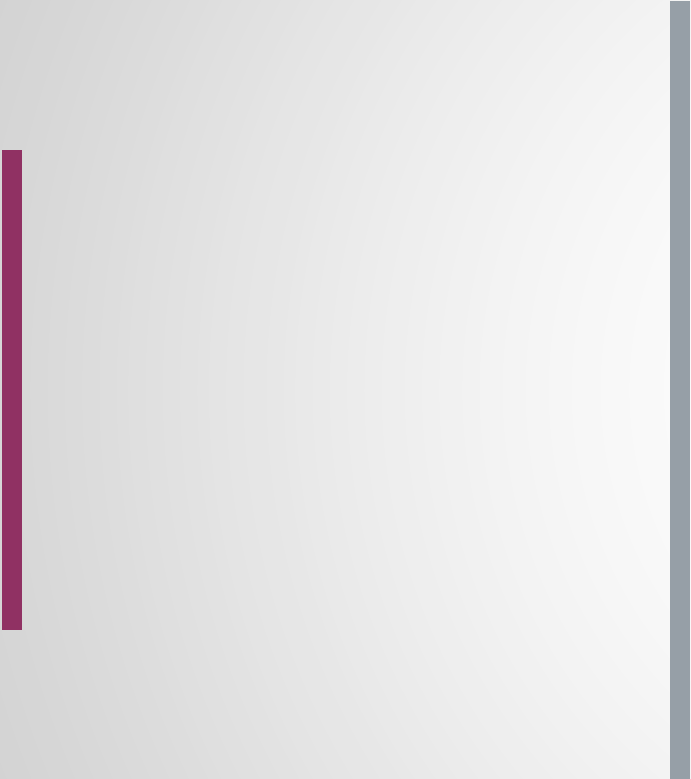
- In Jesus’ time it was often thought that a person with a chronic illness or disability had sinned and was being punished.
- In this healing encounter Jesus dispels that belief. He does not forgive the Bartimaeus’ sins but tells Bartimaeus that it is his faith that has made him well.

A MINISTRY AND MINDSET OF INCLUSION AND ACCESSIBILITY IN THE CHURCH

A ministry of inclusion and accessibility helps ensure those with disabilities in our congregations have a place and a voice in the life of their congregations.

Such a ministry ensures those with disabilities are sought out, celebrated, loved, embraced, and supported in answering God's call to be part of the ministry of all believers.

A ministry of inclusion and accessibility strengthens the entire congregation and its ministries by building better understanding of each other and relationships.



WHAT DOES ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSION ENCOMPASS

WHAT DOES ACCESSIBILITY LOOK LIKE

The answer to this question is broad and deep.

Listening

Making spaces accessible

Communicating

- How people are welcomed into a space

- Web sites

- Printed materials

- Spoken Communications

- Signage

Considering dietary needs

And more...

HOW IS CHRIST CHURCH ACCESSIBLE FOR AND INCLUSIVE OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AND CHRONIC ILLNESS?



HOW COULD
CHRIST CHURCH
BE MORE
ACCESSIBLE FOR
AND INCLUSIVE
OF PEOPLE WITH
DISABILITIES AND
CHRONIC
ILLNESS?



PHYSICAL SPACE: WELCOME AND INCLUSION

Clear signage

Handicapped parking

Accessible entry ways

Accessible bathrooms

Sound systems/microphones

Large print materials

Accessible seating: chairs with arms, spaces for wheelchair users

Elevators and chair lifts

Ramps

Quiet spaces for people who are overstimulated

And more...

BEYOND PHYSICAL SPACE: WELCOME AND INCLUSION

Consciously plan how people with disabilities are welcomed and included in services and ministries.

- Listen to what people tell you they need
- Ask about what they need to fully participate
- Well trained ushers and greeters
- Have large print bulletins available
- Offer gluten free wafers for those with gluten sensitivities
- Adapt ministries to allow inclusion
- Offer adaptive liturgies for autistic children such as Rhythms^{h14} of Grace

STEPS BEYOND PHYSICAL SPACE: COMMUNICATION

- Ensure that alt text is included in electronic communications where appropriate. Resource: [Microsoft Support page](#)
- Caption video content.
- Use fonts that are more easily readable
- Use sound systems where available to ensure those with hearing impairments and those participating online can hear.
(Note: Often people will say they speak loudly enough without a microphone. Speaking loudly does not make it easier for people with hearing impairments to hear.)

STEPS BEYOND PHYSICAL SPACE: ACCESSIBILITY STATEMENT

Accessibility Statement on your web site

What is it? A description of the ways in which your church is accessible. It should be easy to find on website. Example: Accessibility Statement St. Martin's Episcopal Church, Bridgewater, New Jersey in

<https://www.stmartinsnj.org/neurodiversity-and-inclusion/>

Why? It provides helpful information to people with disabilities who may come to your church

It lets people know that you are thinking about accessibility and inclusion even if you haven't addressed everything you might want to do. It can let people

STEPS BEYOND PHYSICAL SPACE: ACCESSIBILITY STATEMENT

Accessibility Statement on your web site can include

- Location of entrances and which entrances are accessible
- Type of seating and where there is space for wheel chairs
- Description of lighting
- Description of the service including
 - If there are any stairs to climb
 - Availability of gluten free wafers
 - How Communion is received (in both or either kind)
 - All are welcome to receive communion or a blessing
 - Sitting, standing, kneeling

STEPS BEYOND PHYSICAL SPACE: ACCESSIBILITY STATEMENT

Accessibility Statement on your web site can include

- Availability of a sound system
- Where there may be loud noise such as organ music
- Where people can go if they need to step out of the service
- Describe the bulletin
- Livestreaming availability
- Hospitality and whether food is store bought or homemade, if gluten free options are offered, allergens are identified
- Faith formation
- Parking and transportation

FINAL THOUGHTS

- The most important thing we can do to improve accessibility and inclusion is **to listen** to our parishioners, clergy, and community members.
- Accessibility and inclusion for people with disabilities is a very broad topic and it can be overwhelming if you begin to think of all the things that can be done to enhance accessibility and inclusion.
- I am always happy to discuss this topic with anyone who is interested in how their church could be more accessible and inclusive.



QUESTIONS?

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