

Disability Concerns

Accessibility Audit Guide for Churches

12/5/02

Barriers of attitude:

1. People with disabilities should be welcomed to worship. The church should indicate this by the accessibility logo in the parking lot or on the church door.
2. People with disabilities should be included on congregational committees or in leadership roles.
3. The church should have a Committee or coordinator for Disability Issues. (This assures continuing progress and provides a comfortable way for people with disabilities to offer suggestions for reducing barriers without being made to feel like complainers.)
4. The church could have an annual Disability Awareness Sunday or other awareness training for the congregation.
5. People with disabilities should be encouraged to participate in the life of the church (for example, to attend social events, participate in service projects, be involved in small groups).
6. Ushers should be instructed regarding appropriate ways to greet and meet the needs of people with disabilities.
7. Transportation should be offered for people with disabilities who can not drive.
8. The church library should include resources about various disabling conditions?

Barriers of Communication:

9. There should be assistive listening devices (Infrared, loop or FM) available for people with hearing disabilities?
10. Sign language interpretation should be provided by prior arrangement.
11. The overall lighting must be adequate for signing or for individuals with low vision.
12. Songbooks, Bibles, bulletins and handouts should be available in alternative format, (large print, and braille when requested in advance) and should be displayed where they are readily accessible.
13. Written copies of the current sermon and of all spoken parts of the service should be available for those with impaired hearing, and captioning should be used with visual projection.

Barriers of architecture:

14. Accessible Parking should be provided- includes room for wheelchair loading and unloading. The path to church should be barrier free -- no gravel, no curbs, should not be blocked by other parked cars.
15. The main entrance door should be automatic if possible. If not, watch for items that create barriers, which can halt a wheelchair, door bases, grates, and thick shaggy mats.
16. Door handles should be lever style on all inside doors, not standard round knobs.
17. If a ramp is needed, it should have a slope no greater than a 1-foot rise in 12 feet and be no less than 36 inches in width with a smooth handrail 32 inches above the ramp.
18. Doors to rooms, especially washrooms, should be a minimum 32" - 36" in width to avoid knuckle rubbing for wheelchair users. Newer wheelchair models require more width.
19. All public sinks should have lever style handles or automatic motion sensors.

20. Towel dispensers or other hand drying items should be reachable from a sitting position (no higher than 40" from the floor). Possibly two dispensers should be used with the lower one also useable by children.
21. Proper handrails should be installed in all toilet areas for assisting in transfer and standing. All rails should be at hospital fixture height. All sink area fixtures and cabinets should allow for knee access (29" inches from the floor).
22. \At least one large toilet stall should accommodate turning a wheelchair around, a 5-foot radius free area is recommended. The ideal solution is a completely separate, lockable, unisex bathroom.
23. Light switches, phones, phone books, etc., should all be at a level for wheelchair accessibility.
24. Coat racks should be useable for all people. If they have permanent non-removable hangers then include a few removable plastic hangers with a blue disability sticker on them, put a coat hook or two on a side wall for wheelchair users.
25. Elevators and lifts should be fully useable by the people who need them, big enough to accommodate two people. Control buttons should be push style and at an accessible level. Control and safety features may be necessary. Keep in mind that people with disabilities use these items.
26. A practical location in the sanctuary for wheelchairs should be considered. Removing a part of 2 pews is ideal; this will keep the wheelchair from sitting out in the isle. When the spot is not needed for a wheelchair, a comfortable armchair could be set there for use by a person with a need for such a chair. Always keep in mind visibility from the location you choose. Also, have available a few pew pillows for individuals who need them.
27. Access to the main pulpit area is difficult in most churches. If a ramp can be placed along a sidewall this is ideal, but a removable ramp can also be used as needed and stored away when not needed.
28. Mailboxes have become common in most churches - keep in mind those with limited reach and supply a lower box rather than using the standard alphabetical placements.
29. Direction giving signs should be bold and visible and placed slightly above eye-level.
30. Fixtures that protrude from the wall can be quite dangerous and should be moved or eliminated altogether.
31. Stairs should be plainly marked and bright tape or paint should be put along the edge of each step to aid in visual perception.
32. Refreshment areas should be set up with consideration to those with disabilities. Cups and food items should be placed at wheelchair levels with an attendant on duty. The list of ingredients should be set by the food item where it will be clearly visible for those with food allergies.
33. A section of the worship area should be "fragrance free" and Members should be urged to refrain from wearing perfume and after-shave lotions.
34. Unscented candles, soaps, detergents, cleaning supplies, air fresheners, and facial tissues should be used exclusively.
35. The air filters on the furnace/air conditioning units should be changed as directed.
36. A private consultation with particular attendees concerning their disabilities may help identify unique requirements not covered by normal solutions, be creative and improvise so that all individuals may worship in comfort. For example, if an individual has trouble holding items, (especially books) mount a swivel arm stylebook holder onto the end of a pew.