

Disabilities and Inclusion - Accessibility Audit & Detailed Inventory

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The United Church of Canada has produced an Accessibility Audit, Presented at Disabilities Workshop Festival of Faith, General Council 43, UOIT, Oshawa, July 21, 2018, by Adele Halliday, General Council Office:

<https://www.united-church.ca/sites/default/files/resources/accessibility-audit.pdf>

Communities of Faith Explorations (detailed inventory)

NOTES FOR CONGREGATIONAL EXPLORATION AND DISCUSSION

What are we doing that encourages, fosters and promotes open and accessible opportunities for all?

What do we need to stop doing?

What do we need to start doing?

What changes do we want to make to encourage belonging and gifts in our mutual ministering and pastoral concerns for each other?

BARRIERS TO BE EXPLORED

- Physical access to spaces, created by stairs
- Zero step entry and transition from room to room
- Washroom access easier if main floor/same floor as entry/exit
- Does elevator/chair lift/access device require dependence on someone else to operate or can person use independently
- Washroom door access sufficient for a person using a wheelchair to open and safely maneuver
- Is toilet tissue dispenser accessible by all
- Are hallways and washroom maintained as barrier free or are stored items or furniture limiting access, mats creating obstacle to maneuver safely to and from washroom
- Lack of curb cut outs
- Width of doorways

- Ability to reach door handles and ease of door handles (i.e. Traditional handles vs. levered handles)
- Heights of counters, tables, cupboards, sinks, pulpits, microphone systems)
- Washroom safety (i.e. Bars, placement of toilets and sinks)
- Transportation to and from faith community events
- Accessible parking
- Offer valet parking, especially if inclement weather, slippery conditions, people must park beyond comfort and ease of access)
- Lighting and marking of ramps, stairs, etc. for high contrast
- Rugs that may be trip hazards or impede devices with wheels
- Grates that may be trip hazards or impede devices with wheels
- “Room transitions” (entryway from hall to room entry, or room to room, entrances) that may be trip hazards or impede devices with wheels
- Coat racks that are accessible for all people.
- Hand railings on both sides
- Choices of places to sit if needing extra space for mobility devices (wheelchairs, walkers, canes, strollers)
- All areas of sanctuary are accessible (pulpit, lectionary, choir)
- Church mailboxes are able to be reached by all people.
- Signage that is able to be clearly understood pictures, words, arrows
- Family friendly washroom
- Changing table access for parents with infants
- Garbage pail access outside for those with service animals and convenience of all coming and going from building
- If new buildings being created, ensure universal design (cheaper in new build than to retrofit and renovate at later dates)
- Treating physical access concerns with limits to where people can access limits people and does not practice open and accessible mindset, but guests invited only to certain places
- When holding events in people’s homes, consider if all can participate or if there is more suitable location that will assure welcoming for all (some people can’t accommodate a wheelchair, may be negative about a service animal visiting home)
- Identifiers for people to approach, especially at special events (shirts, hats, aprons, special name tags or arm bands, prior communication where possible to those for

whom visual identification of key people may not be helpful; arrangements to meet a person upon arrival)

- If using name tags make them universally in large clear print for greatest ease of reading
- For all meetings and events, invite everyone to introduce themselves around the table, all will know who is present (do not indicate being done for special purposes,
- Since Joe does not know anyone, we'll introduce ourselves or as Bob can't see our name tags)
- Effective microphone and speaker systems or suitable devices to support those with hearing difficulties; sign language interpreter where needed
- Spoken and visual prompts for order in worship; invitation to "all rise" and lift hand; have indicators in order of service on screen or in print handouts; awareness of language and connotations of "stand as you are able may be difficult for some; "stand in body and spirit" "stand or sit according to your comfort"
- Large print resources (Braille as needed; offer of assistance given to quietly whisper information where these resources are not available; respecting person's choice to accept or decline the offer)
- Closed captioning on videos; descriptive video service on videos
- Announcements of transitions, information that will be a change in routine or custom
- If surprises or sudden changes, loud noises are known to take place, speak to persons for whom this might create challenge and discomfort ahead of time, offering them a cue, permission to exit for that time or other mutually decided upon strategies that best meet the person's needs. (i.e. Loud noises for those with panic/anxiety/post-traumatic stress; those with hearing aids or conditions that will exaggerate sound effects; persons with Autism; persons who are blind and will not know what is happening; small children; those for whom there might not be an understanding of what is happening)
- Arrangements to help support families when a person's behaviour is difficult and may create negative feelings in some by providing positive support, reassurance, additional help, additional support to help person stay or be invited to step into another more comfortable room if the behaviour is angry or fearful and not self-expression
- Arrangements to post or review announcements supporting those who may not have processed the information first time
- Consider having a note taker where this might be helpful in worship or at an activity
- Space to play for very young (i.e. a small table or picnic table with quiet activities)
- Pillows, cushions, pew pads, lumbar cushions available to increase comfort

- Language sensitivity “persons first” vocabulary not naming a person by his or her disability
- Scent sensitivity – become scent free (allergies, emphysema, asthma, respiratory disorders and chemical sensitivities, including consideration for candles, floral arrangements, soaps and cleaning agents)
- Ask that all food brought have an ingredient list, more allergies than just nut concerns; consider adding a recipe in case others wish to make the dish
- Alternatives for consideration for Communion (gluten free)
- Alternative refreshments to “sweet” treats for those who may have dietary needs that limit sugar such as Diabetes

THE GOLDEN RULE - “Treat others the way you want to be treated”

- Speak to a person directly, not in the third person, or to someone with the person
- Shake or touch hand or shake with left hand as appropriate (prosthetic hand, a hand that is immobilized by injury or illness or may be holding something, use common sense)
- Ask and do not assume
- Provide choices to newcomers of where to sit
- Wheelchair spaces should not be separate spaces where possible or restricted to designated front or back position; consider shortening some pews or removing some chairs in various parts of the sanctuary as appropriate for wheelchairs, walkers, strollers, extra space for a service animal, extra space for a child to play
- Ask for instructions for best way to assist someone (i.e. someone using a wheelchair, someone with a walker, cane, someone with low vision, someone who is blind, someone who is hard of hearing or someone who is deaf, small children, carrying lots of things etc.)
- Respect a wheelchair, walker, cane, service animal creates an extension of personal space and care to not touch/interact with assistive devices, service animals without getting permission and any needed instruction is important
- Be sure to listen for best how to meet a person’s needs as often people are tempted to shout or speak in the ear of a person who has trouble hearing, when the most helpful approach is to look directly at the person and to speak clearly, awaiting for the person to offer any direction
- A person who is blind often finds people can assume a hearing loss exists when people meet the person and often speak in a louder than normal voice. It is helpful to introduce yourself. If possible use the person’s name so the person knows you are speaking to him or her, “Hi _____, it’s _____.” If the context is

unusual, additional identifiers such as where they know you from, their role or other identifying information may be helpful. If meeting a person for the first time, a verbal cue to help the person know you are speaking to can be helpful to orient the blind person to where you are and confirm you are speaking to the person. i.e. “Good morning, my name is _____. You have a beautiful guide dog” or “Good morning. We have not met before. My name is _____. I am a greeter at the church this morning. What is your name?”

- If an offer of acceptance is given when a person offers to direct a blind person with sighted assistance, the person guiding should offer his or her left elbow, remain relaxed and walk normally, asking questions if any clarifying directions are needed, such as do they have a preference of where to sit, do they need the washroom first, do they wish to sit near or speak with anyone?
- When leaving the conversation or departing from the space where a blind person is, announce that you are leaving or the blind person will assume you are still present and participating, will not know when you left the conversation and may resume conversation with “air.”
- Greeters should spend a few minutes with a new family, to let them know about any programs for different age groups, perhaps invite someone to give them a brief tour to orient to different spaces and offer to assist.
- When creating application/registration forms, invite space to respond and offer input regarding any needs, accommodations, gifts, skills that can be helpful; offer extra space not minimal space for identifying information for the applicant. Dietary needs is only one of many areas that might need consideration when planning events and activities.

SERVICE ANIMAL CONSIDERATIONS:

While the service animal has most often been considered as a guide dog partnered with a person who is blind, people can have service animals for many different reasons and purposes.

This is changing the understanding of people, the role and presence of the service animal and his other partner.

Historically the service animal has been a medium to large sized dog, often a German Shepherd, Labrador Retriever or Golden Retriever. With people having more allergy concerns other breeds such as poodles and even Boxers and Dobermans are considered more hypo allergenic. People who do not rely on dogs to provide “visual guidance” may be smaller dogs, such as the hearing ear dog or the seizure alert or diabetic alert dog.

Numerous dog training schools exist across North America and throughout the world. Different harness designs and different identifying characteristics might exist. Some dogs may wear little jackets or vests to signify the school they graduated from or the role they serve as a service animal. Dogs that are being puppy raised to become future service animals may have different identifying vests or sweaters as well. Dogs in training might also have different expectations and identifiers from a dog that has completed its training and graduated after being matched with a partner and trained with that individual.

In unique situations, there may be different animals that provide a service, though the dog is the most widely recognized, even if they don't provide visual guiding to a person. Due to the popularity of media, dogs that guide blind people are often referred to as "Seeing Eye" dogs which is a misuse of the term unless the dog has graduated from the "Seeing Eye", the first dog guide school established in North America that trained guide dogs for persons who are blind. A graduate of the Seeing Eye will have the Seeing Eye stamped on its working harness and its leather leash, as well as often on a plate on the collar. A dog that graduates from another school that trains guide dogs for those with low vision or who are blind, do not have "Seeing Eye" dogs.

SERVICE ANIMALS AND THEIR POSSIBLE ROLE:

- Vision
- Hearing
- "Companion" special skills for people in wheelchairs
- Autism
- Diabetes
- Epilepsy – seizure alert
- Post-Traumatic Stress

Many dogs become working dogs, supporting a team as special canine units that might be trained to sniff out drugs, locate missing people, and detect special substances for which they have been specially trained. These sort of animals have specialized careers in the helping professions such as police and fire fighters.

Though not service animals, there are a growing number of trained "therapy" dogs that receive training as a pet, by their owner, and accompany their owner to do special visits to places such as hospitals and long term care facilities.

When approaching any dog, do not try to distract or get the attention of the dog. Speak to the dog's handler and ask permission before any interaction. Knowledge of what one handler allows or disallows does not have universal application. For example, some handlers adhere strictly to the expectation that when the dog is in harness it must never be petted, until permission is asked and the harness is removed. Some people may determine it is okay if the dog is on duty but not actively working, such as lying at the person's feet. Do not assume you know what is wanted or expected.

The age, personality, circumstances all may be factors in a person's response to an offer of help. In new surroundings, a person might want more direction and clarification and not in others. A partnership that is very new, (the team has recently graduated) will be different from a more seasoned team that has been together for a number of years. Dogs, like people, have unique personalities and may look different to an observer in their manner. If a working team is new, it is important to not judge and compare a new dog to a prior one. The team takes time to bond and learn together. Both will be working hard and statements made, especially in a stressful, moment is not encouraging or supportive to the person.

BEHAVIOURS: WORSHIP EXPRESSIONS

Some situations not traditionally associated with a time of worship cause people to sometimes react/respond or even feel like they should leave or are not welcomed or valued.

- Coughing
- Blowing nose
- Sneezing
- Crying
- Playing
- Using personal devices
- Needing to move or walk around
- Inability to stay in same place throughout worship service or meeting or activity
- Fidgeting, twitching, rumoring
- "tick" behaviours
- Sudden movements or gestures (controlled or uncontrolled)
- Humming
- Speaking out/commenting
- Loud voice

- Verbal sounds that are non-words
- Mouth sounds
- Clapping
- Laughing
- Slapping or thumping self
- Raising or swinging hands
- Standing up unexpectedly
- Singing when others are not
- Sitting when others are standing
- Kneeling/not kneeling
- Bowing/not bowing
- New style of music
- New songs that are unfamiliar
- Change in rituals
- Changes in traditional order of sequence
- Alternate scripture translation used
- Different readers
- People sitting where other people usually sit
- Interaction/dialogue with congregation; no dialogue
- Leaders/choir in robes/not in robes
- Pews/no pews
- Silence/no time of silence
- Use of Lord's Prayer/no use of Lord's Prayer
- Children in worship/children not in worship
- People speaking to you/not speaking to you when you are new
- Use of technology/no use of technology
- Long sermon/short sermon
- Service exceeds an hour/does not exceed hour
- Hymn verses are reduced
- Traditional music
- Contemporary music
- Use of drama/skits or no use of drama and skits
- Intergenerational participation (i.e. can't hear children well)
- People who arrive late or leave early

All these are behaviours that exist within the context of worship. Some behaviours will be welcomed, anticipated and expected. Others may not.

What do you consider distracting to your own worship experience?

What constitutes disruptions and what may be someone's self expression of who they are and how they are?

When does "different" require concern (harm to others or self)?

What is the feeling we want to create in our faith community?

Have we any habits that might create discomfort to new comers by our verbal comments, non-verbal responses (body language), in our interactions and relationships?

When do we create "them" and "us" reactions which demonstrate separation and possibly judgments?

When do we find ourselves treating others according to our sense of their "neediness" which can elevate us as serving and perhaps not recognizing or encouraging their gifts and skills (putting people down, treating as little children, "less than" others)?

Have we become stuck in our perception of our ministry and worship?

What can we do differently?

How do we create a culture or community of dignity and respect?

(This appendix was created by Rev. Sharon Ballantyne, PhD as part of a Colloquium presentation, **DISABILITY AND THE CHURCH: REIMAGINING BEING TOGETHER**

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