

Celebrating Disability Awareness Sunday in Your Local Church

The Book of Discipline (§265.4) states: “Disability Awareness Sunday shall be observed annually on a date to be determined by the annual conference. Baltimore-Washington Conference members voted to observe Disability Awareness Sunday on the first Sunday in February, or if that is not possible, any other Sunday that might be more convenient for church members.

Disability Awareness Sunday calls the Church to celebrate the gifts and graces of persons with disabilities and calls the Church and society to full inclusion of persons with disabilities in the community. The church is not complete unless all of us are present and included.

Because each church is different, it is recommended that every congregation start with a planning committee and target the needs of their local community. First steps could include:

- Complete an accessibility audit — involve the trustees and other groups, including persons with disabilities. Find ways to make your church as accessible as possible. For instance, rent a ramp to the chancel, hire an interpreter, hold the service outdoors or in an accessible part of the church, borrow assisted listening devices, print some of the bulletins in a larger and/or bolder font, and remind parishioners to avoid wearing fragrances.
- Reach out into the community to invite persons with disabilities and their families to participate in the worship service and educational offerings. Be creative in locating people through preschool programs, deaf service centers, rehabilitation centers, vocational rehabilitation offices, ADA compliance offices, etc. Place a notice in the newspaper. Offer transportation to people who no longer drive as well as people in nearby group homes or nursing homes.

During the service, typical activities will revolve around God’s love and acceptance of all of us. Children could be offered the opportunity meet people with disabilities, to use a wheelchair and crutches, and to learn sign language. Some churches take an offering for Golden Cross Sunday or for an accessibility project for their congregation or community. Most always finish with a potluck for fellowship. Encourage people to bring foods that everyone can enjoy, including healthy low-sugar, low-sodium, low-fat foods. Have members bring a copy of the recipe to share so others can copy favorite recipes and check for foods they may be allergic to.

Resources available for developing your Disability Awareness Sunday

- [Resources on Disability Awareness Sunday](#) from the United Methodist Task Force on Disability Ministries
- [UMCOR’s Worship resource](#) for Disability Awareness Sunday (includes an entire outline for worship)
- [That All May Worship: An Interfaith Welcome to People with Disabilities](#)
- [From Other Faith Traditions](#)
- [BWC Disability Awareness Sunday Church Kit](#)
- [Hymns for Disability Awareness Sunday](#)
- [Include UMC videos in American Sign Language](#)

- **Resource for Leaders:**

Social Principles of the United Methodist Church on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities <http://archives.umc.org/interior.asp?mid=1752> **DISC (Disability Concerns)** is a resource from the UM General Board of Global Ministries for persons with disabilities, their families, friends, caretakers, congregations and clergy

<http://new.gb-gm-umc.org/umcor/work/health/disc/> **Autism and Faith** is a resource (PDF download) for including individuals with autism in faith communities written so that others will not feel alone

<http://rwjms.umd-nj.edu/boggscenter/products/documents/AutismandFaith.pdf> **Developing Inclusive Ministries in Congregations** provides a list of resources (PDF download) to support congregations in welcoming people with special needs

Beginning and Strengthening Inclusive Ministries and Congregations Vanderbilt Kennedy Center provides downloadable tip sheets on supporting, teaching, and understanding people with specific disabilities while meeting their spiritual needs

<http://kc.vanderbilt.edu/site/services/disabilityservices/tipsheets.aspx> **Autism and Alleluias** by Kathleen Deyer Bolduc provides insight into the life of a family with a child with autism, and their struggles and blessings in being a part of a congregation.

Books for Children:

My Friend with Autism: A Coloring Book for Peers and Siblings by Beverly Bishop. Ages 4 through 8

Why Can't Charlie Talk? by Debbi Spencer Ages 4 through 8