

TORONTO UNITED CHURCH COUNCIL

Connecting Resources with Ministry

Church Development Discussion Papers

TITLE: How Accessible is Your Church?

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With an estimated 19% of the population having some type of disability (hearing, vision, physical, mental, developmental or environmental), and considering all the family members who are impacted by a relative's disability, it becomes obvious that church accessibility (both attitudinal and architectural) is an important factor in becoming a welcoming congregation.

It is an equally important factor in retaining members, for most of us may eventually have difficulty walking, seeing or hearing. Accommodations (such as ramps) for people with disabilities can also be a blessing for parents of small children.

What is crucial is a willingness to commit to accessibility. Use this checklist from the *Christian Council on Persons with Disabilities* to build awareness.

Attitudes

Are people with disabilities welcome to worship with us?

Is this welcome indicated with an accessibility logo on our front door, on our church sign, and in our church advertising?

Are directions to accessible entrances provided on doorways that are not accessible?

Are people with disabilities included on committees? In leadership roles?

Are the ushers instructed regarding appropriate ways to greet and meet the needs of people with disabilities? Do we have an annual Disability Awareness Sunday – or awareness training for the congregation?

Do we have a committee on disability issues? (This assures continuing progress and provides a comfortable way for people with disabilities to offer suggestions to reduce barriers.)

Does the church library or resource centre include materials about various disabling conditions?

Communication

Does our congregation provide large print hymnals, Bibles, and worship bulletins?
Are sermons printed or taped?

Is sound amplification adequate for people with hearing losses?

Are sign language interpreters available and do we have a way to encourage volunteers to learn this skill?

Is there adequate lighting in areas where people are expected to read printed pages?

Physical

Is transportation available for those who are disabled or elderly and cannot drive?

Are there marked accessible parking places near accessible entrances?

If a ramp is needed, does it have a slope no greater than 1 to 12 and a width of no less than 0.91 metres (36 inches). Does it have a smooth handrail 0.91 metres (36 inches) above the ramp surface?

Do doorways have a clear opening of 0.91 metres (36 inches) or more? Do doors have lever or push handles?

Is space (pew cuts at scattered sites) provided in the worship centre for people in wheelchairs? (This enables people in wheelchairs to sit with their families without blocking an aisle or being restricted to the back or the front of the seating area.)

Are there spaces with extra leg room for persons with crutches, canes, walkers, braces or casts?

Rest rooms

Is there one accessible bathroom on each floor? Are there grab bars on each side of an accessible toilet? Does the sink have a 0.75 metre (29 inches) clearance from the floor to the bottom of the sink? Are towel dispensers available to people in wheelchairs?

Does a wheelchair have adequate turning space in washrooms and near doorways?

Elevators

If your church is multi-story, does it have a chair lift or elevator or some other viable access to all levels that is protected in inclement weather?

Water fountains

Is there at least one water fountain on each floor easily usable from a wheelchair or is a supply of paper cups mounted next to the water fountain?

Environmental friendliness

Are members encouraged from wearing perfume and after-shave lotions?

Is care taken in the purchase of unscented candles, soaps, detergents, air freshener, and paper products?

Are air filters installed on the furnace and are they changed regularly?

In 1988, over 700 disability ministry workers gathered at Wheaton College, Illinois, for the National Congress on the Church and the Disabled. During this historic event, 30 key leaders in the Christian disability community met to organize the Christian Council on Persons with Disabilities (CCPD). CCPD has launched **Lift Leadership Network** [www.liftdisability.net] as a continuum of the vision to unite the disability community.

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