WORSHIP AS ONE
Disability in Community

Created in partnership with

Calvin Institute of Christian Worship
for the study and renewal of worship

CLC Network
Christian Learning Center

clcnetwork.org/WorshipAsOne
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DEFINITIONS AND A FRAMEWORK

As witnessed in Worship as One: Disability in Community, including persons with a variety of abilities in your congregation involves a combination of:

UNIVERSAL DESIGN:

Universal Design refers to a broad-spectrum of ideas meant to produce buildings, products, and environments that are inherently accessible to all people, including elderly persons, people with disabilities, and people without disabilities.

RESPONSIVE DESIGN:

This is a process that provides options for including specific persons with an identified disability into full participation in worship, the congregation, and its activities.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY DISABILITY?

“Disability” applies to approximately twenty percent of the population of the United States.* While some disabilities are clearly visible, many are also “hidden” or unseen. This could, within a church setting, encompass an infant born with Spina Bifida, a toddler born with Down syndrome, an elementary aged child has Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder or a Learning Disability, a youth group member with autism spectrum disorder, an adult diagnosed with bipolar disorder, or a member of the senior’s group with limited vision or hearing. It is a very large group of people. For many individuals, having good practices in place related to Universal Design will give the needed supports. For others, an individualized plan will be critical for inclusion into the community.

*U.S. Census Bureau, 2012
HOW TO USE THIS VIDEO

**Idea #1:** Leader Meeting: Watch the video with your pastoral or church staff and walk through the discussion questions together.

**Idea #2:** Worship Retreat: Watch the video with your worship team and brainstorm how you can make simple, but impacting changes.

**Idea #3:** Sermon: Show a clip from the film during a worship service focused on 1 Corinthians 12 or another passage that focuses on community and the body of Christ. Consider showing the whole film during Disability Awareness or Inclusion Awareness Sunday at your church.

**Idea #4:** Social Media: Share the video on your individual or church social media page and share what your church is doing to include persons with disabilities. Use this as an opportunity to also dream about changes your church could make to better welcome and support all individuals.

**Idea #5:** Adult Education: Watch and discuss the video with your adult education class or small group. With the “Role-based Tips” (on page 3) as your guide, consider how you can better include children, teens, and adults based on your role within your church.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

USE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS TO GUIDE YOUR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION ON WORSHIP AS ONE: DISABILITY IN COMMUNITY.

- Did you connect or relate with any of the stories in the video? Which story and why?
- How have you or someone you know experienced inclusion (or exclusion) at church? What did this look like?
- How has someone with a disability shaped your life?
- Are there individuals or families impacted by disability that are currently part of your congregation? What gifts do they bring to your church? What are some of their needs?
- Is your church similar to one of the stories featured in the video? How?
- Does the video challenge you or your community in any way? Explain.
- If you could re-write one of the stories from this video, how might you change it? Why?
- What is the goal of a faith community? How does this video speak to that goal, and how it is being reached (or not reached)?
ROLE-BASED TIPS

No matter what part you play in your congregation, you can help to widen the welcome in your congregation for persons at all levels of ability and disability. To get started, look up the role you play in creating a worship experience. Consider how the suggestions for each role might benefit everyone in your community—regardless of their ability, age, or life stage. This list is not intended to be exhaustive; we hope it helps you brainstorm additional ideas that are personalized to your congregation and setting.

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ROLE WITHIN COMMUNAL WORSHIP SETTING

ANNOUNCEMENTS / PRESENTERS
(both verbal and printed announcements)

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

1. Highlight available accessibility services, items, and options (e.g. accessible bathrooms, valet parking, elevator, gluten-free options, location of fidget tools, website location for visuals, etc.).
2. Consider making your church a “Fragrance Free Zone”. Be sure to give clear instructions to congregation members and janitorial staff on what this means.
3. Have announcements/bulletin available in various forms for easy accessibility (e.g. digital, print, on PowerPoint screen, picture option, etc.). Large print copies should be available for attendees who have visual impairments.
4. When using pictures in a PowerPoint, use images that include persons with disabilities.
5. Use a microphone connected to the a hearing loop system.

Practical Tools:

Utilize this reference sheet on person-first language:
cdc.gov/ncbdd/disabilityandhealth/pdf/DisabilityPoster_Photos.pdf
Commonly used accessibility icons (with descriptions) can be found here: nsnet.org/symbols.html
For all print and projected materials, strive for optimum readability for all participants:
network.crcna.org/disability-concerns/tips-optimum-readability

ASSISTANTS / BUDDIES
(paired with persons with disabilities)

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

1. Arrange for specific requests (e.g. sign language interpreter or transportation).
2. Collect supports in a timely fashion (e.g. get sermon notes or PowerPoint and distribute digitally ahead of time).
3. Connect with ministry heads to determine what support is needed and make it happen.
4. Modify curriculum in the children’s ministry when needed.
5. Provide necessary support for children or adults during church activities.

CHILDREN’S MESSAGE PROVIDER / TEACHER

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

1. Know the “big idea” in your message and use multisensory ways to emphasize it in your message (e.g. object in special container, music and songs, catchy saying, movement, pictures or video).
2. Provide multiple ways for all children to interact with the message (e.g. speech button, communication stick with pictures, thumbs up and thumbs down, Scripture reader, etc.).
3. Provide opportunities for movement as well as structured seating options (e.g. sitting or standing, fidget tools, small rocker, carpet squares, paired planned movement with the message, etc.)

4. Be familiar with the children of your church community and provide any support that is needed for all children to participate (e.g. wheelchair accessibility, sound blockers, large print Bible, etc.).

5. Invite a child who may be anxious or need extra practice the option to visit the space or sanctuary when it’s empty. This could involve arriving early or visiting the space the day before. Practice your children’s message with that child and their parent and allow the child to practice where to sit, how to participate, and when to ask questions. Give the child the option of “reserving a seat” with a name card.

Practical Tools:

The Inclusive Worship Kit includes a sample visual schedule you can use in a children’s ministry setting. Order online at clcnetwork.org/shop/

The Inclusion Awareness Kit contains a lesson plan and the needed supplies to allow children and adults to see each individual as an important and gifted piece of “God’s body puzzle”. The lesson plan lets you target any age group and offers an appealing final display. The plan also suggests ways in which you can allow group members to better understand the gifts and needs of an individual with a disability. Order online at clcnetwork.org/shop/

Helping Kids Include Kids with Disabilities by Barbara J. Newman supplies tools for teachers, peers, and parents of peers by giving basic information for educators concerning specific disabilities, lesson plans for teaching peers about those areas of disability, and sample letters that can be adapted to send home to parents of peers. Order online at clcnetwork.org/shop/

Every Child Welcome by Katie Wetherbee and Jolene Philo, walks through the steps of creating a welcoming children’s ministry for children with disabilities, and includes practical tools, resources, links and ideas. Order online at clcnetwork.org/shop/


CHOIR DIRECTOR AND MEMBERS, ORGANIST, PIANIST

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

1. Recognize people with varied abilities that have a heart for worship and welcome them in the choir, or to play.
2. Provide a variety of seating options (e.g. stools, fidget cushions, etc.).
3. Make sure your rehearsal and performance space is wheelchair accessible.
4. Provide streamers for choir and congregation members to express their worship through movement.
5. Offer a “preferential seating option” close to the director or musicians.
6. Ensure the song lyrics are available in multiple formats, including large print and digital.
7. Provide the songs on CD ahead of time so all individuals can learn and worship at home.
8. For choirs, make sure the clothing or robe choice will work for each participant.
9. There are times when the congregation needs an introduction to the behaviors or appearance of a person with a disability to best receive that individual’s gifts. Know the person, the gifts and needs, and share them accordingly (with permission from that person or that person’s parent or guardian).
10. Understand the volume level matters – many with sensitive ears may be present, so the organ, piano, and voices should not be overly loud.
Practical Tools:

The *Inclusion Awareness Kit* includes a lesson plan and the needed supplies to allow children and adults to see each individual as an important and gifted piece of “God’s body puzzle”. Order online at clcnetwork.org/shop/

*Helping Kids Include Kids with Disabilities* by Barbara J. Newman includes lesson plans and sample letters to help children understand their peers with disabilities.

**CLERICAL SUPPORT**

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

1. Provide printed or digital copies of the sermon and other materials if requested, including large print, digital, and Braille options.
2. Your church’s accessibility options should be described on the church voicemail and website.
3. Good universal design practices will make specific requests rare. However, when you do receive a request for a specialized need (e.g. equipment, sign language interpreter, etc.), respond within a day. Let the individual or caregiver know the length of time until the need will be met, what the process is, who else they will connect with, etc.
4. Connect individual’s gifts and needs with the appropriate resources or ministry. Use intake and attendance forms to learn of an individual’s areas of interest and needs, and pass those on to the appropriate personnel.
5. When appropriate, provide a preview of the church setting and activities with a *Church Welcome Story* for children and/or adults with specialized needs.

Practical Tools:

Use a personalized, informational story like the *Church Welcome Story* to provide a preview and information on your church and its programs. Order the customizable *Church Welcome Story* online at clcnetwork.org/shop/

Tips for visual accessibility of projected and printed material:

- Tips for Optimum Readability: network.crcna.org/disability-concerns/tips-optimum-readability

Worship For All is a website-based ministry transcription service that provides Large Print and Braille materials for churches: torchtrust.org/smartweb/foursight/accessibleworship.

**CONGREGATION MEMBER**

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

1. Work to make your church the most welcoming group of people in your community. Make a practice of welcoming others, especially people who make you feel uncomfortable and/or people who may not find a warm welcome elsewhere.
2. Learn disability etiquette and person-first language
3. Volunteer to befriend and support individuals with disabilities or unique needs in your church.
4. Become informed about various disabilities.
5. Encourage the gifts of all persons to be included in the church community.
Practical Tools:

Discover where you fall within Elim Christian Services’ Five Stages of Disability Attitudes; strive to reach stage five: the5stages.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/The5Stages_2014IMG.jpg.

Consider purchasing copies of the *Inclusion Handbook* for study groups and to make available in your church library: faithaliveresources.org

**DANCE TEAM**

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

1. Incorporate persons with disabilities into a dance by first asking the question, “How CAN this person participate? What movements CAN this person do?”

2. Use items like flags, streamers, shakers, or banners for every individual to express their worship.

3. Use music connected into a hearing loop system.

4. If words accompany the music, be sure they are presented visually (e.g. PowerPoint, sign language, etc.) for those who cannot hear them.

5. Think about those who may have difficulty viewing the dance (due to vision differences), and how to relate the message of the dance to that individual.

Practical Tools:

Enjoy this article on dance as embodied worship and disability: http://www.disabilityandfaith.org/dance-embodied-worship/

A sample wrist ribbon and instructions for making wrist ribbons are available in the *Inclusive Worship Kit* at clcnetwork.org/shop/

See this video of worship by dance including persons with disabilities: https://youtu.be/pWoBOHzIT1s.

**FACILITY / MAINTENANCE CREW**

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

1. Post clear signs that direct people to accessible entrances, services, and other options.

2. Conduct an Accessibility Audit, such as umdisabilityministries.org/access/audit.html.

3. Work toward your entire church campus being barrier free.

4. Assure that there is adequate lighting in all of the church’s common areas (for signing and individuals with low vision). Make sure sign language interpreters and individuals who are speaking or reading are not in the shadows.

5. Maintain all railings, steps, ramps, doors, seats, etc. so that all remain safe and sturdy.

6. Ask families and individuals what needs they have. Be sensitive and willing to accommodate.

Practical Tools:

Use cleaning products that are fragrance-free and least likely to cause reactions for people with chemical sensitivities.
You can order accessible signs at Compliance Signs: compliancesigns.com/Disability-Handicap.shtml


**FINANCIAL DECISION MAKERS**

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

1. Get to know the individuals with disabilities and their families. Ask about their gifts, along with the needs they need met in order to be part of the church family.

2. Budget for universal design of the physical environment and communications. This might include budgeting for building changes, special foods, special equipment, transportation assistance, additional staff, etc.

3. When appropriate, raise funds for needs of a family or members of the congregation with a disability, or for special equipment or items for the church.

4. Provide an avenue for folks involved in various ministries to share what items are needed for full inclusion.

**Practical Tools:**

See “Additional Resources and Financial Consideration” on page 29.

**HOSPITALITY CREW**

(This includes individuals who serve refreshments, provide transportation or meals, and more.)

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

1. Invite persons with disabilities who have the gift of friendliness to be a greeter (or a similar position).

2. Train greeters and others to be welcoming and understanding of persons who may miss social cues or respond differently.

3. Offer to transport individuals with physical or mobility limitations to congregational functions (this may involve a little research into transportation options).

4. Present dietary need-based options with equal ease of access and proper identification. Alternatively, when putting out refreshments, communicate if it contains common allergens (such as sugar, wheat/gluten, corn, soy, dairy, or nuts).

5. Know the tools and services available to those with varying abilities as well as persons to connect them with.

**Practical Tools:**

Post gluten-free and sugar-free signs at refreshments.

See “Additional Resources and Financial Consideration” on page 29.

INFORMATION / WELCOME STAFF AND MINISTRY REGISTRATION STAFF

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

1. Permit service animals or guide dogs throughout the church campus and at church events.
2. Use intake forms, greeters, and other means to identify an individual’s needs.
3. Know where large print Bibles, sensory tools, and the sign language interpreter are located.
4. With the information you gathered on an intake form or conversation, direct the individual to the proper resources.
5. Use person-first language!
6. Receive training on disabilities and how to be welcoming to people with disabilities and their families.

Practical Tools:

Customize this sample intake form to discover the gifts and needs of children and youth in your ministries: clcnetwork.org/for-churches/intakeform/

Learn about the importance of using person-first language in this blogpost: clcnetwork.org/why-i-choose-person-first-language/


Consider purchasing copies of the Inclusion Handbook for study groups and to make available in your church library: faithaliveresources.org

LIBRARY / BOOKSTORE SUPPLIER

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

1. Stock books about disability theology, specific disabilities, and inclusion.
2. Have books in braille, digital and large print.
3. Provide opportunities for persons with disabilities to work in the library (based on their abilities). Make accommodations if necessary. A person with a disability can be a great resource to others in the church!
4. Communicate the resources on disability that are available in your library or bookstore.
5. Be prepared to suggest links to online book options for those unable to access print materials.

Practical Tools:

Consider carrying books, DVDs, and resources from CLC Network (call us at 616.245.8388 for special pricing): clcnetwork.org/shop

Consider purchasing copies of the Inclusion Handbook for study groups and to make available in your church library: faithaliveresources.org
LORD’S SUPPER SERVERS

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

1. Have a gluten-free option available and communicate its placement.
2. Make sure there is a non-alcoholic option.
3. Make sure the method you use for distributing the elements will connect with each person who wishes to partake. For example, a person with Cerebral Palsy may need someone to make the bread very soggy and place it in a specific spot in their mouth. You must know the individuals in your congregation and/or offer alternatives.
4. Make the Communion delivery method physically accessible to each participant. Are there stairs involved? Is Communion passed in the pew? Will someone present Communion to those unable to get up or reach for it?
5. Clearly communicate (through spoken and written words, and visuals) how your church distributes and takes the Lord’s Supper.

Practical Tools:

Customize the Communion Story to help individuals understand the significance of taking the Lord’s Supper. Find a sample here: clcnetwork.org/for-churches/communion-story/

There is a written version of the social story for “Celebrating Communion at Faith Church” in Barbara J. Newman’s book *Autism and Your Church* (see pg. 115), found at clcnetwork.org/shop.

MINISTRY LEADERS

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

1. Share the vision for welcoming all individuals into the church body and ministries of your church.
2. Provide training in accessibility awareness and etiquette to all leadership.
3. Include people with disabilities in committees and/or other leadership roles based on their gifts.
4. Have a Disability Advocate and/or Disability Team.
5. Adopt a policy on disability.
6. Hold an annual Disability Awareness Sunday, Inclusion Awareness Sunday, or other training for the congregation.
7. Encourage people of all ability levels to engage in the various ministries and activities in the congregation.

Practical Tools:

Watch Barbara J. Newman’s presentation “Universal Design for Worship” with your ministry staff: worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/universal-design-for-worship-symposium-2016-plenary-address/

The Christian Reformed Church of America and Reformed Church of America offer many resources on Disability Awareness Sunday:

- network.crcna.org/disability-concerns/ways-celebrate-disability-awareness-sunday
- network.crcna.org/sites/default/files/documents/Disability%20Awareness%20Sunday%20Resources%20from%20the%20UMC.pdf
- rca.org/resources/disability/disability-awareness-sunday-resources
PERSON WITH A DISABILITY

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

1. Be flexible, creative and patient with your congregation
2. Consider telling your story. Some individuals would benefit from hearing about your areas of gifting as well as the things that are difficult, especially in a church setting.
3. Consider coming up with three helpful things your church community could do or has done that would widen the welcome for an individual with varied abilities.

POWERPOINT / PRESENTATION CREATOR

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

1. Videos and other media should be clearly captioned.
2. Words on screens should not be crowded. Include no more than 12 words on a screen and make sure the text is large enough to easily read (we suggest a minimum font size of 36).
3. If you use a backgrounds on a slide with words, do not add effects or distracting images.
4. Use contrast to make words clearer. For example, a blue background with yellow text is easier to read than black text on white screen.
5. PowerPoints and similar presentations should be available ahead of time for individuals to download onto personal devices, especially if other visual accommodations are more difficult.

Practical Tools:


Here are tips for visual accessibility of projected and printed material:

- Tips for Optimum Readability: [network.crcna.org/disability-concerns/tips-optimum-readability](network.crcna.org/disability-concerns/tips-optimum-readability)

PRAISE BAND MEMBER

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

1. Recognize people with varied abilities that have a heart for worship and welcome them into the praise band in some way.
2. Begin by asking the right question, “How CAN this individual participate?” It may be with movement or objects or shaking an item.
3. Allow space for all to participate in the worship area and within the congregation. For example, provide space for waving worship streamers as well as a location with quieter sound.
4. Be sure lighting is adequate in the congregation, worship area, and space leading up to the worship area.
5. Arrange instrument players in a way that honors those with sensitivity to loud sounds.
6. Avoid wearing text on clothing to limit distractions for those in the congregation.
Practical Tools:

*Accessible Gospel, Inclusive Worship* by Barbara J. Newman provides a framework and ideas to foster faith formation in everyone through creating an inclusive worship environment. Order online at clcnetwork.org/shop/

See the gifts of a singer with autism spectrum disorder, and who is blind: https://youtu.be/wPTMA7Hllyk

**PRAYER TEAM MEMBER**

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

1. Provide ways for all members to participate in prayer (e.g. pictures, signs or gestures, or communication device).
2. Some individuals may need instruction in prayer. For example, instead of just speaking the Lord’s Prayer, give a context for those words or write a small explanation.
3. Develop relationships with the congregation and provide multiple ways for members to communicate prayer needs (e.g. email, phone call, anonymously, written, etc.).
4. If you are praying one-on-one with an individual, make sure you ask permission before you touch that person.
5. If you are praying one-on-one with an individual, carry post it notes and a pen. Some individuals may benefit from you writing down key phrases or an illustration of your prayer to take with them.
6. If asked to pray for healing of a person with a disability, be very cautious and proceed ONLY by following the lead of the individual with a disability.

Practical Tools:

The Vertical Habits are eight relational words we utilize in worship and conversation with God. The Calvin Institute of Christian Worship website has many resources for implementing the Vertical Habits in your community: worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/practical-resources-for-vertical-habits/

*Accessible Gospel, Inclusive Worship* by Barbara J. Newman provides an explanation of the Vertical Habits and suggestions for implementing them in an inclusive worship community. Order online at clcnetwork.org/shop/

The *G.L.U.E. Training Manual* by Barbara J. Newman and Kimberly Luurtsema has many resources and suggestions. clcnetwork.org/shop/


**PREACHER**

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

1. Know your “big idea” and emphasize that big idea in multi-sensory ways (e.g. make up a catchy phrase, set the big idea to music, show a picture on a Power Point, have an object to show and/or interact with, include congregational movement, or make sermon notes with words and pictures).
2. Plant times within the sermon where there can be interaction between the congregation and pastor (e.g. respond to a question, give a thumbs up or thumbs down response, participate in a role play, talk about something with the person next to you, or act out an example or section of Scripture).
3. Not only think about the words you want to say but also how those words will be received. What would you understand if you were an individual with failing memory, a person who interprets language literally, a person with a lower
IQ, an English Language Learner, a person with limited hearing, a new believer, a person from a different country, background, or denomination? How could you change one thing in your sermon to make a better connection?

4. If your sermon is lengthy, consider offering options for movement (e.g. a rocking chair for an individual that needs to move, options to sit or stand, a smaller environment where movement is welcome, and providing hand fidgets or tools throughout the sanctuary).

5. Watch your wording. “Please rise in body or in spirit” allows all to participate whereas, “Please stand” will leave out those who are unable to do so.

6. Consider making a sermon manuscript or extensive outline available for people to pick up before the service for the sake of people with hearing impairments and people with attention deficits.

7. Take care when preaching on healing miracles not to assume that all people with disabilities want to be healed.

8. When announcing births of children with disabilities, announce the birth of a child, not a disability.

9. Remember people with non-visible disabilities in the congregational prayer sometimes, such as asking God for grace for people living with mental illnesses and their family members.

Practical Tools:

Look into the tools available in the Inclusion Tool Kit and Inclusive Worship Kit available at clnetwork.org/shop/

Friendship Ministries offers an inclusive adult Bible study known as Together. The study has great ideas and techniques which can apply in a corporate worship setting. togethersmallgroups.org

See the “Inclusive Language Suggestions” on page 19 of this document.

Utilize this reference sheet on person-first language:

cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/pdf/DisabilityPoster_Photos.pdf

PRODUCT PURCHASER

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

1. Choose products that are fragrance-free and hypoallergenic whenever possible.

2. Choose candles that are unscented and non-petroleum-based.

3. Find out if gluten-free, sugar-free, or allergen-free foods are necessary for certain individuals and keep them in stock. ALWAYS offer a gluten-free bread option for the Lord's Supper.

4. Keep a supply of items individuals with sensory or visual differences may need (e.g. sound blockers, ear plugs, fidgets, braille Bibles and books, large print Bibles and books, etc.).

5. See that seating options are safe and appropriate. They should be sized correctly and stable for the individuals utilizing them.

6. Provide seating options that offer movement (e.g. wiggle cushion or Hokki stool) or structure (e.g. chair with arms, rocking chair, or bean bag chair).

Practical Tools:

Allergy Buyers Club and Green Depot offer a variety of safe products: allergybuyersclub.com and greendepot.com

The Therapy Shoppe offers toys and tools for individuals with sensory differences: therapyshoppe.com
The Inclusive Tool Kit and Inclusive Worship Kit provide different sensory tools: [clcnetwork.org/shop](https://clcnetwork.org/shop)

You’ll find the Hokki stool and other seating options from Kaplanco or Amazon: [kaplanco.com/shop/furniture/hokki-stools](https://kaplanco.com/shop/furniture/hokki-stools) or [amazon.com](https://amazon.com)

See the “Additional Resources and Financial Considerations” list on page 28 of this document.

**SCRIPTURE READER**

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

1. Use a microphone that’s connected to a hearing loop system.
2. Post the words on the screen. Include simple pictures if possible.
3. Post the reading ahead of time on your website (including YouVersion) for those who may use a digital device or need it in large print.
4. If gifted in this way, invite a person with a disability to be the Scripture reader or part of a team reading Scripture.
5. Consider using technology in your Scripture reading through providing audio options for those who struggle with reading. Provide speech buttons for those who could read Scripture by pressing a pre-recorded button or series of buttons.
6. Provide access to large print Bibles.

**Practical Tools:**

Use YouVersion app for audio options and to share Scripture online ahead of time. Visit [youversion.com](https://youversion.com) for more information.

Use speech buttons to include individuals with communication differences. Order [ablenetinc.com](https://ablenetinc.com)

For more information on hearing loops, see [hearingloop.org](https://hearingloop.org).

**SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETER**

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

1. Provide interpretations of sermons, small group discussions, and other church events to facilitate inclusion in the church.
2. Dress in un-patterned clothing so signing is easy to see.
3. Teach common signs to others in the congregation so they can interact with the person who is deaf.
4. Teach signs to songs during children’s worship.
5. Get to know the person you are interpreting for and help them use their gifts in the church body.

**Practical Tool:**

*Helping Kids Include Kids with Disabilities* by Barbara J. Newman includes several ideas and considerations for including children with hearing impairments. Order online at [clcnetwork.org/shop/](https://clcnetwork.org/shop/)
SOUND CREW

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

1. Microphones should be used at all times by anyone who is speaking.

2. Watch the volume! There are many who appreciate a more quiet area or at least a way to dampen the sound. If this isn’t possible, consider finding the best range and setting for persons with noise sensitivity.

3. Create a welcome video. Similar to how you might look up photos of a hotel for an upcoming trip, consider having a similar welcome video of your church available on your website to offer guests a preview of what they can expect when they visit your church for the first time. Provide the information in a printed book form as well.

4. See how you can connect your tech systems (e.g. hearing loop, projecting the PowerPoint on to personal devices, etc.).

5. Mentor someone. The tech arena is a great place to serve for an individual who may need movement or hands-on involvement to engage in church. Look for an individual who is eager to get connected in church and train that individual.

Practical Tool:

The Calvin Institute of Christian Worship provides resources and considerations for determining “how loud is too loud”: worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/how-loud-is-too-loud/

TEACHERS AND LEADERS

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

1. Material/lessons should be adapted as needed for inclusion of children and adults with accessibility needs.

2. Always use person-first language.

3. Receive training in areas of specific disabilities, behavior management, person-first language, etc.

4. Utilize the knowledge, experience, and resources of local experts: members of the congregation and community who know about the individuals with disabilities, areas of disability, assistive technology, etc.

5. Welcome aids, assistants, and other team members who make it possible for persons with disabilities to participate in the learning environment.

6. Get to know individuals as much as possible (names, areas of interest, families, etc.).

7. Communicate regularly and clearly with all persons involved in including an individual (peers, family, teachers, etc.)

8. See items under “Preacher” for additional ideas.

Practical Tools:

Use Friendship Ministry’s new inclusive adult curriculum, “Together” to include teens and adults with and without disabilities: togethersmallgroups.org

The CLC Network blog has many helpful articles for including persons with varied abilities, such as:

• Preparing Your Ministry to Receive Persons with Disabilities: clcnetwork.org/preparing-your-ministry-to-receive-individuals-with-disabilities/
• 7 Strategies to Equip Volunteers to Include Children and Teens with Disabilities: clcnetwork.org/equipping-church-volunteers/
• 10 Tips for Church School Classroom Management: clcnetwork.org/10-tips-for-church-school-classroom-management/
• Six Tips for an Inclusive Christmas Program: clcnetwork.org/6-tips-for-an-inclusive-christmas-program/
• Supporting Persons with Disabilities through the Holidays: clcnetwork.org/supporting-persons-with-disabilities-through-the-holidays-part-2/

There are many books and training DVDs on the CLC Network website that may be helpful for understanding and including persons with disabilities. Visit clcnetwork.org/shop for more information.

USHERS

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

1. Receive training on appropriate ways to greet and ask about the needs of people with disabilities.
2. Know what your church offers, including gluten-free options, seating options, large print items, hearing loop, assistants or buddies in children’s ministry, quiet area, sound blockers, and more.
3. Be welcoming and understanding of those who do not understand social cues or respond in typical ways.
4. Wear a nametag and/or other identifiers that signal you are someone guests can come to for information or help.
5. Ask that pew cutouts be created for people who use wheelchairs or walkers.

Practical Tools:

The United Methodist Church offers a wonderful guide for ushers and greeters on greeting persons with disabilities: umcdiscipleship.org/resources/on-greeting-persons-with-disabilities-a-suggestion-manual-for-ushers-and-gr

Autism and Your Church by Barbara J. Newman has information on understanding individuals who may not understand social cues in typical ways. Order online at clcnetwork.org/shop/


WEBSITE MANAGER / DESIGNER

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

1. Include pictures of persons with disabilities included in typical activities in your community.
2. Always use person-first language. For example, say “a man with Down syndrome” or “a child who uses a wheelchair” instead of “a Downs man” or “a crippled child”.
3. Clearly communicate accessibility options on your website. For example, share accessibility features such as barrier free facility or hearing loop. Let website visitors know that large/bold print bulletins, song books, and Bibles are available and large print words are projected on the PowerPoint. Let folks know that Braille bulletins or alternative media are available upon request. Indicate other accessibility options.
4. Include video/photo preview of the building, events, key people, etc.
5. Make it easy to contact the church for accessibility need requests (e.g. sign language interpreter, sermon notes ahead of time for digital device, large print requests, etc.).

6. If you offer a livestream option, remember that there are many individuals who take advantage of watching church within their own home. Consider how you may connect with the gifts and needs of individuals who regularly tune into your worship service.

7. Make sure your website design is accessible so that it can be easily read and utilized on various devices.

Practical Tools:

Consider how this church webpage shows what their ministry is doing and how to connect with their ministry with persons with disabilities:
• Faith Church (Dyer, IN): wearefaith.org/connect/special-needs/

Consider these church websites that offer a “preview” through pictures and words of what visitors can expect:
• Memorial Baptist Church (Columbus, IN): memorialbaptistchurch.us/virtual-tour/
• Calvary Community Church (Westlake Village, CA): calvarycc.org/first-time-guests

This blog post shares other items to consider for your website:
clcnetwork.org/ways-to-make-your-church-inclusive-on-easter/

Website accessibility evaluator: fae20.cita.illinois.edu/

Here are tips for visual accessibility of projected and printed material:
• Tips for Optimum Readability: network.crcna.org/disability-concerns/tips-optimum-readability
• Using Computers for Inclusive Worship: network.crcna.org/church-web/using-computers-inclusive-worship


WORSHIP SERVICE PLANNER / LEADER

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

1. Consider the gifts of persons with varied abilities as you determine worship team participants and planners. For example, ask a strong reader who is in a wheelchair to read Scripture, ask a “techy” person with autism spectrum disorder to work with the sound system, ask a young artist to make a picture for the big idea of the day.

2. Have a variety of tools available during worship so everyone can engage in the conversation with God. For example, include worship streamers which can be waved during songs, sound blockers for those with sensitive ears, the PowerPoint available ahead of time (allows a person with limited vision to access the material on a personal device), and hand tools and fidgets for those needing movement options.

3. Provide options for individuals with limited vision and hearing. For example, have large-print hymnals and Bibles available, offer large-print handouts and bulletins, consider a hearing loop or Sign Language interpreter or Braille bulletin and make alternative media available upon request.

4. Plan deliberate times within your year to highlight and celebrate the gifts that persons with disabilities bring to your congregation.

5. Provide the order of worship in written and/or pictorial form to individuals who function best when they know the day’s plan and have an accompanying schedule. See #6 below.

6. Be careful with your wording in the publicly shared order of worship. Do not use specific times or list events that will not happen, as some individuals may be counting on your schedule to be completely precise and accurate. For example, someone may get agitated if the schedule says 10:00 AM worship, but the service does not start until 10:04 AM.
Practical Tools:

See the “Sample Order of Worship” on page 20 of this guide.

_The Easter Book_ by Barbara J. Newman has patterns for making alternate worship tools. Order online at clcnetwork.org/shop/

_Inclusive Worship Kit_ includes a sample visual schedule you can use in a worship setting. Order online at clcnetwork.org/shop/

INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE SUGGESTIONS

For some individuals, words can make the difference between partial participation and full inclusion in a worship service. Consider these alternative phrases for including persons with a variety of abilities in your congregational gatherings.

INSTEAD OF SAYING... SAY THIS...

“Please stand” “Please rise in body or spirit”

“Clap your hands” or “Raise your hands” “Praise with clapping or other movements”

“Sing” “Make a joyful noise” or “You may sing”

“Kneel” “Get into a position of humble prayer”

“Speak, repeat, say, or pray aloud” “Share with us (using voice, device, or other options)” or “You may speak, repeat, say, respond, or pray with us as you are able”

“Come to the Lord’s Supper table” “Join us in the Lord’s Supper” or “Let us serve you the Lord’s Supper”

“Dance” “Celebrate with movement”

“Shake hands, hug, or say hello” “Greet those around you”

“Please sit” “You may sit”

“Pass the offering plate/bucket/etc.” 1 “You may give your tithes and offerings, which allows others to give as well” or “Ushers welcome your tithes and offerings”

“Go forth to your workplaces and schools...” “Go from here into the world around you”

“Write or fill out” 2 “You may write, fill out, or respond as you are able”

“Watch or view” 3 “You may watch or view” or “Take in”

---

1 The traditions during a service in which congregants participate, such as the Lord’s Supper or offering, must be accessible for people with limited mobility and vision. Some individuals may need you to simply bring the Lord’s Support or offering basket directly to them. It is important to know the abilities of those in your congregation and the accommodations that would allow them to participate.

2 When requesting congregants to fill out a paper or write something down, offer the option for someone to fill it out for them by dictation. Alternatively, you can make the form available electronically.

3 Visuals should be accompanied with an audio narration or description whenever possible. Alternatively, you can have someone available to describe the visuals to individuals with visual impairments.
SAMPLE ORDER OF WORSHIP

Many churches provide attendees with a printed and/or electronic bulletin or order of worship prior to the service. Below you will find a sample order of worship along with images and universal design elements to consider, which you are welcome to adapt to your congregation.

ORDER OF WORSHIP

Preparation
Welcome! “Let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice” (Psalm 105:3).
Let us rejoice as we present ourselves before our loving Creator. Welcome to worship. Welcome to this house of God.

Prelude

Acolytes

Welcome and Announcements

Adoration

UNIVERSAL DESIGN ELEMENTS TO CONSIDER

Is the order of worship available electronically ahead of time?
Is there a preview on the church website so folks can observe the worship service or gather information prior to attending?
Are handouts available in large print or digital forms?
Have you made arrangements for physical accessibility to the worship space, as well as bathrooms and drinking fountains?
If you are serving food or the Lord’s Supper, are gluten-free options available?
Do you have a hearing loop available?
Is a sign language interpreter available upon request?
Are the announcements available in multiple formats?
Is your PowerPoint accessible and readable?
ORDER OF WORSHIP

Worship Music “Shine, Jesus Shine”

Call to Worship

Leader: God Has given us holy, spiritual hands:

People: Hands to caress a deep ache, a tight knot of stress and tension;

Leader: Hands to hold a hurt child, embrace a lovely friend, care for one who is ill;

People: Hands to create a loving meal or a work of art;

UNIVERSAL DESIGN ELEMENTS TO CONSIDER

Did you inform leaders to use the phrase, “Please rise in body or in spirit”?

Is the leader prepared to offer multiple ways for the congregation to respond? (Responses might include spoken or signed words, movement, a pre-recorded response, or some other expression.)
Leader: Hands to till the soil or to make a bed;

People: Hands to write to one in need or call another with good news;

Leader: God has given us holy hands;

People: hands to bring God’s touch to earth and to do God’s will.

Leader: Come and worship God.
ORDER OF WORSHIP

Singing “O Worship the King”

Confession

Leader: The people of our church confess their sins.

O God, whom Jesus called Father, we admit that we have done many wrong and wicked things and we have neglected doing many loving things. We are sorry that we have thought, said, and done such foolishness. Now we would turn away from our mistakes. We are at heart, Father, when we think of them. Forgive us for not knowing what we do. Grant that we may so love You and serve You all our days that others will come to know and praise You. (Continue in silent confession.)

Words of Assurance

Leader: The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting. I declare to you, in the name of Jesus Christ, we are forgiven and cleansed from all our sin.

UNIVERSAL DESIGN ELEMENTS TO CONSIDER

How loud is the music volume?
Are the microphones connected to a hearing loop system?
Did you inform leaders to use the phrase, “Please rise in body or in spirit”?

Are there multiple ways for folks to express their confession?
Could the set of words offered here be accompanied by an action?

Have you offered multi-sensory ways for the congregation to receive and express the spoken words?
ORDER OF WORSHIP

People: May the God of mercy, who forgives us all our sins, strengthen us in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, keep us in eternal life.

Amen.

Thanksgiving

Giving our Tithes & Offerings

Have you considered the wording you use for your Tithes and Offerings? Consider saying, “Ushers welcome your tithes and offerings”.

Are there multiple giving options (e.g. text or electronic giving)?

Special Music

Doxology

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Are there multiple ways for folks to offer thanks?

Could “thank you” be a word, movement, picture, or sign?

Could an item of thanks be prepared ahead of time that all participants can engage with?

Affirmation “The Apostles’ Creed”

Are persons with varied abilities present in your electronic materials?

Consider this inclusive video of The Apostle’s Creed from Faith Church (Dyer, IN):

Supplication

https://vimeo.com/152307850
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IMAGE FOR VISUAL SCHEDULE</th>
<th>ORDER OF WORSHIP</th>
<th>UNIVERSAL DESIGN ELEMENTS TO CONSIDER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Prayers &amp; the Lord’s Prayer</td>
<td>Do you have options for presenting prayer requests? Can individuals speak, write, draw, or submit them ahead of time?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Leader: Let those who wish, voice their joys or concerns in the form of a prayer ... Join me now in a time of silent prayer ... Hear these joys, concerns, thoughts and needs of our church as we pray together...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image3.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>People: “Our Father, who is in Heaven... “ Amen!</td>
<td>Do you have words and images to commonly spoken prayers and creeds displayed on PowerPoint and large print?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image4.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Sermon</td>
<td>Are sermon notes available ahead of time?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image5.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Singing “Majesty”</td>
<td>Have you come up with at least one multi-sensory way to emphasize your “big idea”?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Boardmaker™ is a trademark of Mayer-Johnson LLC.
Scripture Lesson: Acts 3:1–21

Leader: This is the Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God!

Sending

Universal Design Elements to Consider

Have you invited participants to read along through the YouVersion app?

Could you use people with varied abilities to participate in the service as leaders? Look to the gifts of those gathered.

Do you have individuals with the gift of memorization or speaking?

Could others use their gifts to set Scripture to song, use an assistive technology device, offer sign language, or an interpretive dance?

Have you provided multiple options for expressing, “Thanks be to God!”? This could be words, movement, gestures, or actions.
ORDER OF WORSHIP

Singing “I Love to Tell the Story”

Acolytes Extinguish Candles

Benediction / Pastoral Blessing

Postlude

Please sign the attendance sheet in the black book at the end of the pew row so that we may have a record of your attendance.

UNIVERSAL DESIGN ELEMENTS TO CONSIDER

Have you chosen fragrance-free candles?

Do you offer multiple ways for attendees to provide contact information?

Could this be collected via the pew book, an online form, or through spoken word at an information station?
THEOLOGY OF INCLUSION

As you consider receiving the gifts of persons with disabilities and implementing universal design concepts, we encourage you to reflect on CLC Network’s core values, which have strong biblical foundations. Below are just a few references for your own use in biblical study. At CLC Network, we believe…

EVERY PERSON REFLECTS GOD’S IMAGE.

As an image bearer of God, every person has intrinsic value that cannot be denied and must be celebrated.

Genesis 1: All human beings are created in God’s image and in His likeness.
Colossians 3:10: As Christians, we are being “renewed in knowledge after the image of the Creator”.

EVERY PERSON HAS BEEN PLACED IN THIS WORLD FOR A PURPOSE.

Every individual should have the opportunity to realize, understand, and accomplish his/her purpose.

II Corinthians 12:7-10: God’s household is a web of partnerships between people, all of whom are a mix of strength and weakness, gift and need.

EVERY PERSON DESERVES OUR BEST.

God calls us to give our best as our responsibility to others.

Luke 21:1-4, Matthew 25:21: God expects people to use faithfully the gifts that He the Creator, has given, regardless of how those gifts might be measured on some human scale.
I John 1 and Philippians 2: Equally broken, we also are equally called to be servants of each other.

EVERY PARTNERSHIP IS VALUABLE.

Interacting with others creates relationships vital to every person’s development.

II Corinthians 12:22-25: “But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.”
Romans 15:7: “Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.”

Bible verses abridged from Appendix A of the G.L.U.E. Training Manual, written by Dr. Thomas B. Hoeksema, Sr. and Dr. Andrew J. Bandstra.
For more information, see the G.L.U.E. Training Manual and DVD, Making Room: Creating Communities of Inclusion by Barbara J. Newman and Kimberly Luurtsema available at clcnetwork.org/shop.
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

As you make changes in your congregation to include persons with varied abilities, consider the following resources and costs for planning purposes.

BOOKS ON DISABILITY AND INCLUSION

• **Accessible Gospel, Inclusive Worship** by Barbara J. Newman, with contributions by Betty Grit
  
  This book provides many ideas for creating an environment where you can introduce the good news of Jesus Christ to a family member or church friend with an intellectual disability or autism spectrum disorder. The book also uses a concept known as “Vertical Habits” to give a framework for creating inclusive communities of worship where each one can use the gifts God has given to participate in a worship conversation with God. Transform the worship environment for ALL by welcoming each one.

  Available at [clcnetwork.org/shop/](http://clcnetwork.org/shop/)

• **Church Welcome Story** by Barbara J. Newman
  
  Sometimes a child in a church setting benefits from having information in advance about rooms, schedules, and people. By using this informational story, you can create a personalized story to send to the child prior to the beginning of Sunday School, afternoon church clubs, and other events. Purchasing one book opens the door to multiple uses through the CLC Network website. Don’t miss out on this easy-to-use tool which has made a huge difference for children on the autism spectrum, children with limited language abilities, and those needing more predictability.

  Available at [clcnetwork.org/shop/](http://clcnetwork.org/shop/)

  
  This manual and accompanying DVD provide your church with an individualized planning process to come alongside children and adults with disabilities in your church. *The G.L.U.E. (Giving, Loving, Understanding, Encouraging) Manual* walks your team through a process of discovering how persons with disabilities can use their gifts to be included in your congregation.

  Available at [clcnetwork.org/shop/](http://clcnetwork.org/shop/)

• **Inclusive Worship Kit**
  
  The Inclusive Worship Kit contains materials and instructions for making tools that help individuals with a variety of abilities participate in a church service, small group or church class. This kit includes materials to make a story apron or display board, hoop streamer, wrist ribbon, visual pocket schedule, as well as *A Scary Storm* storybook and pictures to accompany visual schedules and lessons.

  Available at [clcnetwork.org/shop/](http://clcnetwork.org/shop/)

ACCESSIBILITY AUDIT

• Assess your strengths and weaknesses in creating an accessible space for worship, learning, and fellowship with an Accessibility Audit. The United Methodist Church has an excellent study you can conduct at your church. Visit their website for more information: [umdisabilityministries.org/access/audit.html](http://umdisabilityministries.org/access/audit.html)
SPECIAL FOODS

• For your planning purposes, the mean unit price for gluten-free products is $1.71 compared with $0.61 for regular products. On average, gluten-free products are 242% more expensive than regular products.*

• Gluten-free foods and sweeteners can be purchased at Vitacost: vitacost.com

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT

• Frequently asked questions and pricing on hearing loops: healthyhearing.com/content/articles/Technology/T-coils/45927-Hearing-aids-in-loop

• Braille signs in English, Spanish, and Bilingual: compliancesigns.com

• The Therapy Shoppe carriers many items for sensory differences (such as wiggle cushions, theraband and fidget items): therapyshoppe.com

• AbleNet carries many adaptive technology solutions (including speech buttons and other devices): ablenetinc.com

BUILDING NEEDS

• See your local resources, architects and building codes, as they vary by location and specifications

TRANSPORTATION ASSISTANCE

• Community Transportation Assistance Program provides expertise, training, and support for coordinating public transportation: web1.ctaa.org/webmodules/webarticles/anmviewer.asp?a=3

ADDITIONAL STAFF

• Check your local costs and qualifying factors

OTHER

• In some cases, further costs may need to be considered (insurance due to equipment, other building maintenance or materials that may need to be in place, etc.)

FUNDING IDEAS:

- Since universal design for worship benefits your entire congregation, consider costs associated with accessibility and inclusivity an on-going budget item for your congregation. However, if you are looking to get some special equipment or make a one-time purchase, here are a few fundraising ideas:

  Take a special offering as you highlight the opportunities and needs.

  Depending on your denomination, some funds may be available through your governing structure.

  The Calvin Institute of Christian Worship offers Vital Worship Grants focused on projects that connect public worship to intergenerational faith formation and Christian discipleship. If your need fits within this theme, consider applying for a Vital Worship Grant at worship.calvin.edu.

- Events:

  Host an all-in-one-place garage sale where your church rents space to vendors. The vendors hold their garage sale at your church and keep their own profit. However, your church benefits from the vendor rental fee and can charge shoppers $1 to enter the huge sale. This type of sale is often a hit with kid and baby items. See hollandmom2momsale.blogspot.com/ for an example.

  Bake sale
  Auction
  Car wash
  Bottles & cans drive
  Scrap metal drive
  Host a camp for kids, with the registration fee going toward your costs
HOW CAN WE HELP?

At CLC Network, we combine our expertise in special education and our passion for inclusion to help persons at all levels of ability and disability worship God together.

This may include:

• Consulting about the gifts and needs of a specific individual and brainstorming ideas you could try;

• Conducting a comprehensive Site Study of your church’s strengths, needs, and vision related to including persons with disabilities and implementing universal design elements;

• Training your staff or volunteers on inclusion, specific disabilities, behavior management, or faith formation;

• Speaking with your congregation about the blessing of inclusive community.

We hope to talk to you soon to find out where you are in your journey, and to discuss how we might come alongside your congregation.

Learn more at clcnetwork.org or call us at (616) 245.8388
OUR MISSION:

CLC Network promotes the development of people with a variety of abilities and disabilities to live as active, integrated members of their communities.