



## RELIGION & RACE

General Commission on Religion and Race

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

### 4 Ways to Increase Equity for All Physical and Mental Abilities

*Increasing equity for people with physical and mental disabilities in and around our worship spaces can be easier than you imagine! Check out these four ways your church or ministry can better welcome, accommodate, and worship alongside those with disabilities:*

1. **Church events** are a great way to be considerate of the physical and mental abilities of all people. The next time your church or ministry has an event, include a space on your registration form for accommodations. These accommodations may include wheelchair or other mobility / auxiliary access, noise cancelling headphones, or large print bulletins. These small, but important accommodations can widen your church's ability to reach more people in meaningful ways.
2. Much of how we navigate the world is shaped by the way we **interpret biblical texts**. Reimagining Scripture, especially texts that highlight the physical and mental abilities of others, helps us to preach in ways that do not problematize the differing ability. For example, texts like Acts 3:1-10 and Matthew 17:14-21 are often positioned with a person's infirmities as the problem to be solved. While Jesus' healing manifestation for both people is evident, preaching these texts often stigmatizes life experiences that are beyond our control. Reimagining Scripture in a way that does not elevate the affliction as a "problem" allows for liberative and inclusive preaching that does not stigmatize those with different physical and mental [abilities](#).
3. Many older or conventional churches do not have ramps for wheelchairs to enter the building or sanctuary. Many edifices have steps that lead up to the pulpit, worship space, or choir stand making it difficult for someone with a physical disability to take part in the worship experience. This limits the ability of people who may have a calling or interest in preaching or music. More contemporary churches can also miss the mark with their church designs by not considering the **accessibility needs** of those with physical disabilities. [The Americans with Disabilities Act](#) website offers a great checklist for existing facilities that want to make their building more ADA accessible.
4. For people with Sensory Processing Dysfunction (SPD), bright, flashing lights and loud sounds can make it difficult for individuals to engage in worship. People with SPD have highly sensitive sensory reactions to touch, light, and sound making many worship spaces difficult to manage, uncomfortable, or prohibitive. Using noise cancelling headphones or creating a worship space with dimmed lights and lowered audio are practical ways to help engage those with SPD. People with [forms of Epilepsy](#) can also benefit from these **equitable changes in the worship space**.

Many of these practical tips are easy to implement to ensure that we create welcoming spaces for all people, regardless of physical or mental ability. All of them are worth it. While we may first think of these ideas as ways to reach more diverse people, what we want to ensure is that we are offering radical hospitality as a form of worship. Radical hospitality is about curating spaces where mutual respect and regard for personhood is ingrained in the worship, theology, and practices of our churches. Accessibility opens up our physical, visual, auditory, and theological senses to be aware of the presence of God. Accessibility in practice and preaching is accessibility to God – a path that is free of obstruction and limitation – a path that is wide enough to accommodate us all.

See also: the [Annual Accessibility Audit](#) for UMC's and [Accessibility Mini-Audit](#) for Churches

*This resource is written by Rev. Alisha Gordon*