

Leader's Guide

# **The Church and People with Disabilities: Awareness, Accessibility, and Advocacy**

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**Leader's Guide: The Church and People with Disabilities:  
Awareness, Accessibility, and Advocacy**

by Lynn Swedberg, with Leslie Bledsoe as consultant and author of opening prayers

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# Introduction for Study Leaders

## Preparation

Thank you for agreeing to lead this important course that expands our awareness of the full breadth of radical welcome to persons who may be on the margins of society. May you grow spiritually and find your life enriched by your preparation for and participation in the course. Since prayer undergirds all we do and connects us with our Maker and Source of life, begin each preparation session with prayer. Pray that your heart and mind will be open to new insights and that you will pay attention to the nudges that God sends your way.

You will find suggested books in Appendix B and web resources on the United Methodist Women disability study web page: [unitedmethodistwomen.org/disabilities](http://unitedmethodistwomen.org/disabilities). Try to read a selection of books, including first-person narratives written by people with disabilities. You will also want to read practical books, books by siblings or parents, books for children, and books on **disability theology**. Use the Internet and selected DVDs as additional sources.

Linger with each of the four suggested Bible passages. Learn more about the setting in which the text was written and about how people with disabilities were treated in first-century Palestine. Your goal is to understand how Jesus' reaching out to and including people on the margins of society was a radical act that challenged the very fabric of his culture. As you read books on the theology of disability, look for passages that address the selected texts. Take notes to help you guide the group discussions. Use the Glossary in the text to help you understand unfamiliar words. The first time a word from the Glossary is used in these pages it appears in bold print.

Spend time with friends who have disabilities. If you have a **disability**, meet with people who live with other disabilities that may be less familiar to you. Ask your contacts to share what it is like to live with their disability, and listen carefully to their stories. If you need to meet additional people, local centers for independent living or other self-help groups will welcome your questions and introduce you to people to interview.

As you immerse yourself into the world of disability, track your questions and follow up on them. Discuss your findings with those around you, staying open to the possibility that there are multiple valid answers and approaches. Continue to bring what you learn back in conversation with Bishop Johnson's text and with the session outlines.

## Resources to Have Available

- The Bible in NRSV and other versions. If possible, have a **Braille** version of the selected texts for each session (many cities have services that transcribe text to Braille at no cost). Provide a large-print version of each key text, in at least 18 point Arial font.
- *The United Methodist Hymnal*, 1989
- *The Faith We Sing*, 2000
- *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, 2012
- *The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church*, 2012
- Copies of disability-related books, magazines, and articles
- Print copies of selected web-based disability information
- Study DVD: *A Place for All: Faith and Community for Persons with Disabilities*, 2009, Diva Communications

## Supplies and Equipment to Have Available

- Computer, digital projector, and screen
- WiFi access. Note—if classroom Internet access is limited, prepare copies of the documents mentioned in the study.
- If possible, some source of accompaniment for the hymns and songs
- Whiteboard, easel with flip chart, or newsprint for recording the main points of discussion, brainstorming covenant items, and so on
- One piece of posterboard for the group covenant
- Self-stick paper pads
- Construction paper, scissors, transparent tape, and markers—both dry erase and standard
- One 6-foot length of butcher paper, with an outline of a person representing the body of Christ drawn on it
- Colored-paper body parts that fit together like a jigsaw puzzle to form the body of Christ, enough parts for one for each participant, to be used in Session Four
- Approved means of attaching materials to bulletin boards and walls, e.g. putty, painter's tape; push pins or staples for bulletin board use
- Objects for use in worship, for example a cross to pass around, reproduction of a painting based on or objects used in one of the texts, banner, or a sculpture of praying hands
- Eight copies of the Disability **Etiquette** skit (see Appendix A) for use in Session One
- Skit props for sessions one (see Appendix A) and three (see Putting It All Together section of Session Three).
- Copies of the United Methodist Annual **Accessibility Audit** and the **Accessibility** Tour (see disability study web page) for each class member, plus several 12-foot or longer tape measures
- Class assignments printed on newsprint, the chalkboard or whiteboard, or in PowerPoint slides
- Pitchers of water and glasses, unless there is a water fountain very close to the classroom

## Room Setup

Survey your assigned room as early as possible to determine how to best take advantage of the shape, size, furnishings, and display options. You may need to request alternative seating options if, for instance, all chairs have armrests and only 18-inch wide seats.

Arrange the room for optimal interaction, lines of vision, and mobility. A semicircle may work best, or a U-shape if you have long tables. You want members to be able to see one another's faces during discussions so everyone can determine who is speaking and read lips if needed. Make sure there is no backlighting, such as a large window, behind the area where you will be standing or sitting while you speak.

Provide 36-inch-wide access aisles within the arrangement so people with mobility devices can easily get to all areas of the room. Leave a few spaces open with room (48" x 60") for participants who use wheelchairs. If you have class members who use wheelchairs, ask where they prefer to sit and whether they would rather transfer to a chair during class and arrange the room accordingly. If no one is using a wheelchair, explain why you set up the room to be ready should the wheelchair space have been needed.

Set up a display table with books, resources, and sample assistive equipment. You may want to gather "fidgets" such as stress balls filled with sand, Koosh balls, prayer beads, and so on, for people who pay better attention when they are doing something with their hands. Ask a local church with an inclusive **disability ministry** to share brochures, photos, or program examples.

Locate pictures, posters, and other items to set the tone. Make bulletin board displays around topics in the study that might be of interest to the attendees in your conference or church. You may find an article about the work of a pastor in your conference who has a disability, or about a local church ministry. You might obtain materials from local agencies that service people who are blind or have other disabilities. This could include Braille samples or photos of people who are blind using devices to complete everyday activities. Post anything with small print no higher than forty-eight inches, so that the words can be read from a seated or a standing position.

## **DVD and Technology Use**

Using the DVD, *A Place for All: Faith and Community for Persons with Disabilities*, enhances your sessions by offering the voices of persons with disabilities. You need to be familiar ahead of time with operating the equipment provided for viewing the DVD, which may be a laptop computer and a digital projector, or a DVD player and a large-screen television set.

The closed captions have to be turned on manually each time you load the video.

Insert the DVD into the CD/DVD drive on the computer. To activate captioning you need to do the following each time you start the DVD:

- Click on the arrow next to the word DVD on the control bar on the bottom of the screen. This will take you to DVD Menu Options
- Go to “Special Features”
- Go to “Captions”
- Click on “Closed Captions”

On some computers you need to change settings before you can turn on the captions. If the above steps don't work on the computer, go to the instructions found at <http://www.washington.edu/accessit/articles?1251> for preliminary steps to take.

If you are using a television and DVD player, you need to either locate a CC button on the remote control or activate the on-screen menu to turn on closed captioning depending on the brand of the equipment. Please practice cueing the DVD to the correct segment using the time given (for instance the segment for Session One begins at 1:12), pausing the DVD at that point, and turning on the captions. You may need to consult with facility technical assistance staff persons.

## **Adult Education Guidelines**

The adults in your class come with a rich variety of backgrounds and experiences related to the topic, which they often want to share. Adults learn best when we can peg new material onto ideas and concepts that we already know. We don't like to be told information that we already know. Some dislike having a text we have already read being explained to us, while others find repetition of the most important points to be valuable. To meet the learning needs of both groups, members who recall concepts easily from their reading may be willing to recap the main points for others who prefer to learn auditorily.

The concepts behind *Universal Design for Learning*<sup>1</sup> can help in teaching diverse students. This strategy is based on findings that we process information in three different regions of the brain and need to plan our teaching to engage all three.

- The content or the “what” of learning is processed by recognition networks, which gather facts based on our senses. We need to present information in a variety of formats that tap into all our ways of sensing and perceiving the world.
- The teacher ascertains the level of understanding by the learner’s response. Students need a variety of options for how they act on and express what they have learned. This is the “how” of learning, which utilizes the strategic brain networks.
- Before we are willing to undertake new learning, we need to have a reason to do so. The “why” of learning, processed by the affective networks, is addressed by finding various ways to elicit the students’ interest and providing a variety of choices that pertain to their own goals and life journeys.

## Guiding Discussions

Your role is to serve as facilitator rather than teacher. There is no lecture portion in this Leader’s Guide, though content is interwoven within discussion questions. Your job is to set the tone and to ensure that all participants have an equal chance to be heard. You need to be comfortable with people-first terminology<sup>2</sup> and model this language at every opportunity. At the same time, class members need to feel safe in speaking without having to screen every word before it comes out. Find gentle ways to remind people in a non-direct or one-on-one basis if they persist in using terminology that doesn’t show respect for persons with disabilities. Make sure the speakers feel that they have been heard and are equally respected. Plan to introduce the issue of language during the Covenant portion of Session One.

Every group will have some members who want to contribute verbally each time a question is asked and others who are reticent about saying anything in a large-group setting. Introduce the expectation that we want to hear everyone’s voice, and find ways to draw people out who aren’t comfortable speaking. Some people prefer to share in writing, so have pads of self-stick paper available for comments. Sometimes all it takes to increase participation is to turn to a quieter section of the room and ask directly for input. Try having each speaker invite another person to contribute, allowing for the option of declining. Ideally each member will have a chance to say something before anyone speaks a second time.

Find ways to involve as many participants as possible in the worship and learning activities. For instance, invite a person who is blind or Deaf to be a reader. Have a person with a cognitive disability read or if necessary repeat each line as read by a mentor or coach.

Make sure that all members can follow class discussions in order to contribute. Those of us with hearing and visual loss appreciate it when members identify themselves before they speak so we can focus on the speaker. This also helps everyone learn one another’s names! If a member has a soft voice, someone may need to repeat what he or she has said. If a member uses a personal assisted-listening system, the group will need to pass the microphone during discussion. The leader should monitor to make sure that a sign language interpreter or captioner is keeping up with the conversation.

Acknowledge all contributions and thank people for sharing. Rather than getting caught up in opinions, validate that our views come from our individual experiences. Remind class members that we all constantly revise our views in response to new information. Mention that our stereotypes come from lack of knowledge or exposure, not from ill will toward people with disabilities. We want to hear diverse voices but also want to focus on our common goals as the inclusive body of Christ rather than to argue about correctness of viewpoints.

Be open to all questions, but don't let them get the group off track. Invite members to write down (or have someone write down for them) questions that they want answered by the end of the session, using self-stick paper. Keep these on a clipboard, the whiteboard, or the flip chart. As the session draws to a close, review the questions to make sure each was answered, or schedule a way to get back to the person, possibly during a meal.

## **Time Management and Session Planning**

You may find that most group members have not read the assignment prior to a given session. If this is the case you may want to ask small groups to review the individual chapters and report the key points back to the group as a whole in place of doing some of the activities in this Leader's Guide if your class needs this level of structure.

There are more teaching activities suggested for each session than most groups will be able to get through in two hours. Please review the objectives and pick priority activities and discussion questions for your group based on its level of awareness. Some groups will need to focus on basic understanding, whereas groups that are aware of issues around disability will want to go deeper. As a leader with a disability, or if your group has several members with disabilities, your sessions may be most effective if you spend time sharing personal experiences of living with disability. You may choose to spend less time on the devotional segments if your class is held as part of an event with a rich worship component in the general sessions.

Five minutes are provided for break time, though few groups stay within the allotted time and a five-minute break typically lasts ten minutes. Determine what is realistic for your group and plan accordingly. As a way to bring members together after the break, begin playing the DVD for the session at the designated regrouping time.

## Session 1

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# Awareness

### Objectives:

- To verbalize comfort with disability etiquette and people-first language
- To understand the biblical and historical background for negative perceptions of persons with disabilities
- To differentiate between healing and curing
- To identify collective and individual attitudes about disability that divide the body of Christ and to consider attitudes that bind us together

### Welcome and Introductions (20 min.)

Have group members introduce themselves and, in one sentence, explain why they picked this class and what they hope to learn during our time together.

Have the class leaders introduce themselves and briefly explain why they chose to lead the course.

Tell about ways that the group will model fully inclusive and accessible practices, for example layouts that allow for mobility, ensuring that everyone can follow what is being said, and describing anything that is presented visually. Encourage people to move around or stand if they are more comfortable doing so. Offer the use of “fidgets” for members who need to keep their hands busy in order to pay attention. Define **inclusion** as eliminating all sense of “us” and “them,” honoring the fact that we are all part of the body of Christ. Depending on your group, it may make sense to work in pairs rather than individually for projects, pairing people who can help each other compensate for challenges. For instance, someone who is Deaf and using an interpreter could partner with someone with limited hand and arm use. Mention ways that to ensure that all voices are heard.

### Group Covenant (10 min.)

Have everyone take a moment to prayerfully come up with at least one ground rule that will be important to our work together, for example to listen respectfully, to keep what is said in the room confidential, or to be open to the Spirit’s leading. Ask members to share, and have someone record each idea on newsprint or the whiteboard. After the first round, ask if there is anything important missing. Use consensus to select the items that will guide the group’s interactions. Write the agreed-upon items on posterboard and keep them posted during all sessions. Have group members sign the poster.

### Opening Worship (5 min.)

*Text:* John 9:1-11

*Reading:* Author Peggy Johnson shares her experience with us: “However, it is also true that even with great faith sometimes people are not healed. I attended a healing service when I was a young adult and asked to receive sight in my left eye. I was not healed that night and the people who prayed for me insisted that I was not healed because of my lack of faith. They encouraged me to read the Bible more because, according to the apostle Paul,

“faith cometh from hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17 KJV). That seemed to be more of a chastisement than an encouragement for me on that night. The interplay of faith and the works of faith in the act of healing leave us with curious dilemmas. How much faith is enough in order to be healed? In my case I believe the faith was there but God’s plan was such that healing was not the better gift for my life.”<sup>1</sup>

**Prayer:** Creator, forgive us for our lack of awareness in our perception of disability. It is our society’s view on beauty and perfection that sometimes distorts our view of one another. Please help us to remember that you created each of us and are at work in our lives in ways we may not understand. Open our insight to the divine beauty, gifts, and talents in each of us. Amen.

## Opening Discussion (20 min.)

Divide into small groups that will remain consistent during all four sessions. You may want to have participants number off to ensure diversity in the groups. Aim for no more than four or five members in each group.

Discuss the following:

- Why do some people equate disability with sinfulness and insist that a person can be healed if she or he just has enough faith? What other negative attitudes about disability are based on traditional religious interpretations of the Bible?
- Describe ways through which experiencing an illness or disability may bring glory to God.
- How does one deal with the healing narratives from a disability perspective? If you are blind and have not received your sight after prayers for healing, how do you experience this passage?
- Discuss the difference between “curing” and “healing” as explained in the story from Rev. Jonathan Campbell in the text.<sup>2</sup> What are ways in which God brings healing as *shalom* or wholeness? How can the church contribute to our experiencing God’s healing in our lives?
- What are other sources of negative attitudes about disability? Discuss how much exposure to children and adults with disabilities you had when growing up. How much does the amount of contact between persons with and without disabilities vary with the decade in which members were in school? What attitudes about disability did you learn at home? If you have had a disability from childhood, were you in a mainstream classroom alongside typical students, or were you in a partly or completely segregated setting? If you are comfortable doing so, share a little about your school experience.
- What role do popular media play in perpetuating stereotypes and influencing our attitudes?

## Break (5 min.)

## DVD (10 min.)

View or listen to *A Place for All*, 1:12 to 5:54. Can you identify examples of communication, architectural and **attitudinal barriers** to full inclusion? What do the Scriptures say about welcoming people with disabilities?

## Time with the Text (20 min.)

Statistically, we find that approximately 20 percent of us within the United States live with some form of disability.<sup>3</sup> As we age more and more of us will acquire disabilities. Yet fewer people (50 percent versus 57 percent) with disabilities attend worship at least once a month (when compared to people without disabilities),<sup>4</sup> and fewer yet attend classes or fellowship events. What might be some reasons for this discrepancy?

The story about the young man who had a visiting evangelist pray that the “demon of [Down syndrome] . . . be removed from him” is powerful.<sup>5</sup> Many people with disabilities can relate similar stories. When is it, if ever, acceptable to offer prayers for healing of someone with a disability? How can we avoid abusive prayer?

Bishop Johnson lists examples of gifts that persons who have disabilities bring to their congregations.<sup>6</sup> We are called to look for and receive the gifts and graces of all of God’s children. Briefly mention the gifts of persons within your congregation whose presence makes a difference and who happen to have a disability.

Why don’t we want to be seen first as our diagnosis or disability or, for that matter, as having any label? Why is language choice important, even if the terms that are considered the best this year will undoubtedly change in the future?

Our liturgies and hymns often correlate blindness with lack of spiritual awareness. For instance in “Amazing Grace” the author wrote, “I once was blind, but now I see.” We know that our beloved historic hymns were written in a different era and that no offense was intended. However, even contemporary sermons, hymns and liturgies may include phrases such as “No wonder many Christians today turn a deaf ear to the invitation to share their faith with friends and neighbors” and “We are called to be hope for the hopeless so all hatred and blindness will be no more.” Why are some people of faith comfortable using a person’s condition (usually deafness or blindness) as a metaphor for sin if that condition happens to be a disability? Do we do that with other characteristics such as skin color? How can we increase our awareness and sensitivity to the impact of these metaphors on people with disabilities?

## References:

<http://www.jacksonchrist.org/sharing-your-faith>

“We Are Called,” #2172, *The Faith We Sing*, words and music by David Haas (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000)

Can you think of famous people with disabilities who society deems super heroes because they accomplish something that people don’t expect from a person who has a disability? How do you feel when someone puts you on a pedestal? What is a better way of honoring people who are in leadership roles, perform or compete well, or otherwise share their gifts with the community while living with a disability?

## Putting It All Together: Awareness (10–15 min.)

Recruit a narrator, six characters, and a props person for the skit on disability etiquette. While the actors gather in the hall to grasp the concept of the skit, have the rest of the group discuss what they understand as the concept of disability etiquette. Direct the listeners to consider these questions during the skit: (a) Did you see yourself in any of the characters or statements? and (b) Did you think of alternatives to these etiquette blunders? (See Appendix A for the skit and instructions.)

## Wrapping It Up (10 min.)

Did the skit seem realistic? The stories all came from experiences of people with disabilities. Did you see yourself in any of the characters or statements? Did you learn anything new? Why are some people offended when those of us with disabilities want to do things independently and turn down unsolicited help?

This class is about the church living out its call to be welcoming of people from a diversity of backgrounds and experiences. What does it say about a conference or church's hospitality if people plan events in places that aren't accessible, show media that not everyone can follow, or say that some families can't attend worship and some children can't come to camp? What message does this kind of rejection send to people who aren't in our churches?

### **Time to Contemplate: Circles of Awareness** (5–10 min.)

Using a sheet of paper, or in your mind, create circles of awareness. (Keep these for future sessions.)

- In one circle list persons with disabilities in your family. Don't get hung up on the definition of *disability*, but rather think of people with visible or **hidden disabilities** who may need **accommodations** in order to participate or who have difficulty managing daily activities in typical ways and need technology or assistance for some tasks. Subsequent circles may overlap each other.
- In the second circle list persons with disabilities among your friends and acquaintances.
- In another, list persons with disabilities in your workplace or other community organizations that you participate in.
- In still another, list persons with disabilities in your congregation.
- Which circle has the most people? Do they overlap at all?
- Identify who is not at the table in your congregation. Who is missing, and who is present but not fully involved in the life of the church?

### **Call to Action** (5 min.)

Begin work on the Annual Accessibility Audit. Complete the "Attitudes" section individually or in pairs if several are from the same church or need a reader. Base your responses on your home congregation. Answer to the best of your knowledge, realizing that you need to solicit input from more voices when you return home.

### **Closing Devotions** (5 min.)

*Litany* (adapted from Paragraph 140, *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 2012*; have one group read the light print and one group read the bold print.)

Group One: We recognize that God made all creation and saw that it was good.

**Group Two: As a diverse people of God who bring special gifts and evidences of God's grace to the unity of the Church and to society,**

Group One: we are called to be faithful to the example of Jesus' ministry to all persons.

**Group Two: Inclusiveness means openness, acceptance, and support**

Group One: that enables all persons to participate in the life of the Church, the community, and the world.

**Group Two: Thus inclusiveness denies every semblance of discrimination.**

Group One: The services of worship [fellowship, and educational offerings] of every local church of The United Methodist Church.

**Group Two: shall be open to all persons.**

Group One: The mark of an inclusive society is one in which all persons are open, welcoming, fully accepting, and supporting of all other persons,

**Group Two: enabling them to participate fully in the life of the church, the community, and the world.**

Group One: A further mark of inclusiveness is the setting of church activities in facilities accessible to persons with disabilities.

**ALL: In The United Methodist Church inclusiveness means the freedom for the total involvement of all persons. . . . Amen.**

**Song:** Sing, or have someone read out loud: “Help Us Accept Each Other” (*The United Methodist Hymnal*, #560). (See copyright notice on page 2 that must be included when copying words and/or music for this song.)

### **Assignment:**

Read Chapters 4-7, and catch up on the first part of the book if needed. Write down insights, stories that touch you, questions and concepts you would like to discuss. Read with your heart as well as your mind, and pay attention to nudges through which God may be calling you and your church to engage in new ministries. Look for possibilities, hope, and opportunities for transformation.

### **For Next Session:**

Tell attendees to be prepared for outdoor time during the next session, so to come with a sweater, umbrella, sunscreen, or whatever they need to be comfortable outdoors during the Accessibility Tour. Find out if anyone will need mobility assistance (such as use of a golf cart) for the Accessibility Tour and make arrangements to have a cart and driver available.

### **Optional Activities:**

Explore a website for more information on attitudes and language, for example *Disability Is Natural*: <http://www.disabilityisnatural.com/>, or the UM Committee on DisAbility Ministries’ article on “Communication and Etiquette with Persons with Disabilities,” <http://www.umdisabilityministries.org/2404.html>.

1. Read through several hymns to determine whether they are inclusive or could be hurtful to those of us living with disabilities. In addition to the use of *deaf* or *blind* as synonyms for sinful, look for verses that portray people with disabilities as weak and needing to be served, versus inclusive language that calls all of us to serve each other within the body of Christ. Commit to using disability-inclusive and empowering language in your own speaking and writing.
2. Look up other references to disability in the *Book of Discipline* or the *Book of Resolutions*. What guidelines do you find that are surprising? Is everything that is mandated consistently carried out? See the disability study web page ([unitedmethodistwomen.org/disabilities](http://unitedmethodistwomen.org/disabilities)) for a listing of disability references.
3. Research or poll people about attitudes regarding disability in your local church, community, or in a specific cultural group, and summarize your findings.

## Session 2

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# Accessibility

### Objectives:

- To recognize the role that environmental modifications, technology, and task adaptations play in enabling many persons with disabilities to live full, satisfying lives
- To carry out a functional accessibility audit with a focus on safety and access for persons with mobility and vision losses
- To describe the difference between communication needs and identity of persons who are part of the **Deaf culture**, persons who are hard of hearing, and persons who are **late-deafened**

### Opening Worship (10 min.)

*Text:* Luke 14:12-24

*Song:* Sing, or read aloud: “Who Is My Mother, Who Is My Brother” (*The Faith We Sing*, #2225). (**See copyright notice on page 2 that must be included when copying words and/or music for this song.**)

*Prayer:* (Have participants ask permission and touch the shoulder or elbow of the person on their right to experience connection.)

God of all persons, thank you that we can come together with others and worship in the church. Help us to overcome self and really encounter each other so that we may assist each other in our worship and work. Thank you for transforming us when we come together as a body to praise and worship in your name. Amen.

### Opening Discussion (10 min.)

How might we understand the parable? Who is the host? Who is the servant? Who are the guests who reject the invitation? Who are the poor and lame and blind? What does the banquet feast represent?

Luke is writing to a fellowship of mostly Gentile believers<sup>1</sup> who had forgotten that they were to associate and eat with all kinds of believers, not just the wealthy.<sup>2</sup> Jesus was turning the accepted conventions upside down when he suggested that people from the margins should be the guests at the great banquet.<sup>3</sup> What does this passage suggest for our churches in the twenty-first century?

When was the last time you compelled someone to attend worship? What would it mean to compel someone with love? What would it mean to compel someone who has a disability and might face barriers in your church? What might be barriers to worship in your setting? How can we help people outside the church be receptive to our invitation to God’s party?

### Checking In (5 min.)

Did any class member complete an optional assignment and want to briefly share findings or experiences? Does anyone have new insights about the materials and concepts presented in the first session?

## **DVD** (5 min.)

View or listen to *A Place for All*, 19:56 to 23:59, to learn more about Bishop Johnson and her work with people who are Deaf. Discuss this material along with the book discussion in the next section.

## **Time with the Text** (20 min.)

Is the information on Deaf culture new to you? What are the hallmarks of Deaf culture, and why is this concept important to Deaf persons who identify with the culture? Share stories and insights on effective use of interpreters and why Deaf persons may or may not be comfortable in your congregation. Discuss whether most information in your worship services is presented visually or auditorily and how easy or hard it would be for a Deaf person to follow.

People who develop a hearing loss significant enough to impact church participation seldom learn sign language and wouldn't benefit from learning because family and friends do not communicate in sign language.<sup>4</sup> Up to 90 percent of persons with hearing loss stop attending worship when they can no longer hear the message.<sup>5</sup> How does your church make it easy for you or others to participate despite a hearing loss? Have group members share efforts their congregations have made, which may include measures such as **assistive listening devices**, sermons available in print form, all videos **captioned**, acoustical measures such as sound baffles, consistent microphone use for speakers as well as the audience, or good lighting on the speaker's face.

How can members who have low vision or are blind participate fully in worship, service, and fellowship in your congregation? Have group members tell what their churches are doing, which could include providing large-print, Braille, and digital versions of the bulletin and newsletter. Other measures might be an accessible website, transportation, Braille or digital hymnals, ADA raised-letter and Braille signage, describing visual events like a children's pageant, and reading aloud anything projected in print only format. Volunteers may be available to guide, introduce, and read or take notes for a person who is blind.

Many of us who acquire sensory or mobility challenges take a while to accept these changes and to acknowledge that we need accommodations. How can the church be supportive and invite members to advocate for themselves?

## **Assignment for Next Session:**

Read Chapters 8-10. Write down insights, stories that touch you, questions and concepts you would like to discuss. Read with your heart as well as your mind, and pay attention to nudges through which God may be calling you and your church to engage in new ministries. Look for possibilities, hope, and opportunities for transformation.

(Note—this is intentionally placed before the break and tour, as you may be out of the room for the remainder of the session.)

## **Break** (5 min.)

## **Putting It All Together: Accessibility:**

(Note—if there are two or more “Disabilities and the Church” classes, coordinate schedules ahead of time so that only one group is completing each activity at a time.)

## **Accessibility Tour** (30 min.)

Leave the classroom for a walk-around accessibility audit of the building and campus where you are meeting. If possible, persons who use mobility devices and who are blind will help lead the tour. Take the Annual Accessibility Audit form (for reference only) and several tape measures along. Divide the class into teams of two and pass out the assignment sheets (see the disability study web page) so that each team knows what to look for. Present the activity as similar to a scavenger hunt, and ask teams to keep track of accessibility challenges and solutions that they find. Have the teams proceed so they are within voice distance of each other and can call the other teams to share problems or examples of accessible design that they discover.

## **Accessibility Fair** (30 min.)

Option A: This needs to be set up ahead of time with the assistance of persons and agencies within the conference and community. Find more information at the disability study web page. Gather in a central place or designated classroom to learn about accommodations, services, and technological devices that help those of us with disabilities and those who are Deaf to live our lives successfully. If there are two or more classes, stagger the times for each of these activities so that only one group at a time is doing the audit tour and visiting the accessibility fair.

Option B: If you are unable to stage a fair, use a speaker, video clips, or articles to accomplish the same thing. See the disability study web page ([unitedmethodistwomen.org/disabilities](http://unitedmethodistwomen.org/disabilities)) for suggestions.

## **Closing Devotions** (5 min.)

If feasible, gather the class after the second activity and offer a prayer of thanks “for all the means by which campuses, church buildings, and programs can facilitate participation by all of us, and for the people who make these changes happen. Amen.”

## **Optional Activities:**

1. Continue to be alert for accessibility challenges for the rest of the time together.
2. Have someone gather all your accessibility findings to present to the meeting site administration. Download a form for this report from the disability study web page.
3. If several participants know some sign language, form a small sign choir and offer to share in one of the general worship sessions. Allow yourselves enough time to rehearse beforehand. Sources for signs to some songs can be found at the disability study web page.

## Session 3

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# Integration

### Objectives:

Participants will grow in their understanding that

- Disability ministry means an attitude of **integration** in which there is no place for “us” and “them,” and all persons are welcomed and assimilated as members of the body of Christ.
- Congregations can learn to identify, nurture, and use the gifts of persons with all kinds of disabilities in the service of God.
- Leaders strengthen worship and education through employing all the senses and engaging heart and body as well as mind and spirit.

### Opening Worship (10 min.)

*Text:* 1 Corinthians 12:12-26

Consider using this 3½ minute YouTube reading from *The Message*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MexBDXKdJbc>.<sup>1</sup> The video is captioned and read aloud, except for the section headings. Please be sure to have someone read the following three section heading statements:

The three things you can't say.

1. “The church doesn't need me.” (Read at the beginning of the video or at beginning of the group reading.)
2. “I wish I were somebody else.” (Read at 1:03 or before verse 14.)
3. “I don't need you.” (Read at 2:15 or before verse 21.)

(Alternative: have several members read aloud from *The Message* translation, pausing before verses 12, 14 and 21 for the narrator to read the questions.)

**Song:** Sing, or read aloud: “Many Gifts, One Spirit” (*The United Methodist Hymnal*, #114). (See copyright notice on page 2 that must be included when copying words and/or music for this song.)

**Prayer:** Creator of us all, remind us that you are in charge. Beautiful people, divinely created by you, have been sent into this world for your plans, regardless of the shape of the body. Many prayers would be answered if people were given a chance to show your glory. Amen.

### Opening Discussion (15 min.)

In your small groups, discuss the following concepts.

- What does it mean to you to be a part of the body of Christ? If Jesus showed up disguised as a stranger, what would he learn from your congregation about the makeup of the body of Christ?

- When the Scripture refers to the “members that seem to be weaker,”<sup>2</sup> we need to remember that this weakness is society’s preconception, not a statement of fact. What does it mean that all of us are indispensable to the whole? How do we find our strength in our weakness?
- In mainstream culture within the United States, independence is praised and dependence is feared. Is the concept of interdependence a more Christian approach? If so, what might interdependence look like in the life of your local church?
- How does your congregation discern and employ gifts of all members? Is there a process to make sure that members of all ages and abilities have a chance to give and receive?

### **Checking In** (5 min.)

Are there insights you have gleaned from our time together so far and from walking around the campus after our last session? Share one or two sentences if you’d like to do so.

### **Time with the Text** (25 min.)

Bringing about full integration of persons with intellectual and emotional disabilities requires a different approach than addressing needs of those of us who cannot access the building and program because of architectural, technical, and communications barriers. Review the wide variety of cognitive, intellectual, and developmental disabilities that are mentioned in Chapter 8. What are similarities and what are differences in the needs of those of us who have one or more of these disabilities?

In what ways does your congregation support people with cognitive and developmental disabilities? Are members with disabilities integrated, or is interaction with typical peers limited? Give examples of how persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities grow spiritually and contribute to the faith development of congregations.

Nearly every church has been or will be affected by the autism epidemic. Share experiences, with a focus on what families see as areas in which the church can be of support. What might be some needs of parents and siblings, as well as of the child or young adult with autism?

Similarly, the number of persons with Alzheimer’s and related dementias is on the rise. Would the couple in the Lansdowne church,<sup>3</sup> experience the same level of care from your congregation? How does your church support caregivers and persons with dementia?

Mental illness affects a significant part of the population, yet often stays hidden in the church family. Why does the **stigma** persist, even in the church? Describe ways that your congregation reaches out to individuals and families living with mental illness. In what ways do you support the mental health of your pastor and congregational members?

### **Group Project Sign Up:**

Before class members go on break, ask them to select a group to join for the second half of the session. List the topics on newsprint, a whiteboard, or a sign-up sheet so participants can decide what interests them most. The groups do not have to be equal in size, nor does every project have to be carried out. Please do have a group plan the Bible study skit to use in the devotions at the end of the session. Make sure a group studies the baptism documents.

## **Break** (5 min.)

## **DVD** (10 min.)

View or listen to the DVD segment found at 14:37 to 19:24. What did this nursery school do to promote integration of Max? Who benefited from having Max included in the school?

## **Putting It All Together: Integration** (25 min.)

Pick one of these projects to research or prepare in a group. Plan to report your findings briefly to the class. Allow time for two-minute reports when the groups are finished.

1. Plan a five-minute skit based on 1 Corinthians 12:12-26. Develop roles for several participants, and plan to act it out, not just read it. You may paraphrase the passage. Come up with props and involve as many senses as possible. The idea is to make the passage come alive for persons who may not grasp the concepts from the reading alone, and who will benefit from seeing the passage in action.
2. Review the document “By Water and the Spirit: A United Methodist Understanding of Baptism” at <http://archives.umc.org/interior.asp?ptid=4&mid=992> or in *The United Methodist Book of Resolutions, 2012*, Resolution 8031, pages 922-942. Pay particular attention to the sections: “Baptism as Incorporation into the Body of Christ” (page 931), “Baptism and Holy Living” (page 932), and “Baptism as God’s Gift to Persons of Any Age” (pages 932-933). Read also the congregational response in the Baptismal Covenant II (page 40, *The United Methodist Hymnal*). What are the implications for baptizing people who have profound disabilities and may not be able to express their faith? How are we as congregational members responsible for every child that is baptized in our church? Are there any exceptions or exclusions permitted? Discuss your findings with the group.
3. Those of us with mental health needs also have gifts to offer our churches. Research what it takes for a congregation to become a Caring Congregation that offers support to persons living with mental illness: <http://umc-gbcs.org/content/articles/creatingcaringcongbrochure.pdf>. Read more about caring communities and mental illness at <http://calms2012.umc.org/Text.aspx?mode=Petition&Number=152> or in the 2012 *United Methodist Book of Resolutions*, Resolution 3303, “Ministries in Mental Illness,” pages 408-416. Prepare a brief summary to share.
4. Learn how to examine the reading level of materials to make sure that you aren’t excluding people by writing in an inaccessible manner. Pick several sample passages and evaluate them using the readability index tools at [http://www.online-utility.org/english/readability\\_test\\_and\\_improve.jsp](http://www.online-utility.org/english/readability_test_and_improve.jsp) or similar sites. Explore Bible translations and find out which are easiest for someone with limited reading ability to use. Report on your findings, and make recommendations on how to make written materials more inclusive.
5. Research and brainstorm multisensory worship ideas that will benefit all of us, especially those of use with various disabilities. How can our worship engage all our senses? Here is a link to start with: <http://rwjms.umdnj.edu/boggscenter/projects/documents/MultisensoryWorshipIdeas.pdf> Write down at least five ideas that you would like to try, and share these with the class, either verbally or by demonstration.
6. Design a poster, banner, or other type of artwork that expresses the concept of full integration of persons of all abilities. Share your design with the class and explain what it means to you.

## **Time to Contemplate: Circles of Awareness** (5 min.)

Refer back to the circle exercise from the first session. How well are members who have intellectual disabilities and mental illness integrated into the life of your faith community? Can you identify persons in your community who are affected by disability who would benefit from the support and love of your congregation? What might you be called to do in response to your answers to these questions?

## **Call to Action** (10 min.)

Work individually or in pairs on the remainder of the Yes/No questions in the Annual Accessibility Audit.

## **Closing Devotions** (10 min.)

**Skit:** Members of the skit group will act out the passage from 1 Corinthians 12:12-26.

**Song:** Sing, or read aloud: “Child of Blessing, Child of Promise” (*The United Methodist Hymnal*, #611). (**See copyright notice on page 2 that must be included when copying words and/or music for this song.**)

**Prayer:** Go around the circle, and give each person a chance to offer a sentence prayer in support of full integration of individuals they know who live with cognitive or emotional disabilities.

## **Assignment:**

Read Chapters 11–13. Review the sections on **Advocacy** in previous chapters (2, 8, and 9). Write down insights, stories that touch you, questions and concepts you would like to discuss. Read with your heart as well as your mind, and pay attention to nudges through which God may be calling you and your church to engage in new ministries. Look for possibilities, hope, and opportunities for transformation.

Complete the remainder of the Annual Accessibility Audit Yes/No questions that you didn't finish in class.

## **Optional Activities:**

1. Complete any research or project that was started in class but not finished.
2. View online information on respite ministries, for example at St. James United Methodist Church in Tampa: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cg4wyguPHzY>.
3. Read the article on developing a comprehensive congregational dementia ministry at <http://archive.constantcontact.com/fs110/1104745249463/archive/1112122873581.html>.
4. Research other faith-based resources for churches to address mental health needs at <http://www.mentalhealthministries.net/> and <http://www.pathways2promise.org/>.

## Session 4

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# Advocacy

### Objectives:

- To verbalize awareness of discrimination and disadvantage that people with disabilities, including veterans, experience and how faith communities can make a difference
- To be prepared to advocate in one's local church and community to improve accessibility and integration
- To envision the gifts that a pastor living with or affected by a disability would bring to one's congregation

### Opening Worship (10 min.)

*Text:* Mark 2:1-12

*Song:* Sing, or have persons read the stanzas: "Together We Serve" (*The Faith We Sing*, #2175). (**See copyright notice on page 2 that must be included when copying words and/or music for this song.**)

*Prayer:* To sit at the feet of Jesus listening to spiritual insights is a beautiful blessing. It is in these moments that we hear how to advocate for each other. In the name of your Son, give us wisdom and knowledge to bring about positive change. Amen.

### Opening Discussion (10 min.)

Gather in the small groups and discuss the following:

- Put yourself in the place of the man being carried. What are you thinking, feeling, doing, and saying? What do you want to have happen? Now put yourself in the place of the friends or relatives who were carrying the man. What are you thinking, feeling, doing, and saying? What do you want to have happen?
- Who was in the way, blocking access to Jesus? Was it just the crowds? Who else was there? Why did the friends choose the roof entrance? What does that mean for us in the church today? In what ways are we called to carry persons?
- Why did Jesus first forgive the man and then heal him? What does this passage tell us about the character of God?

### Checking In (5–10 min.)

Does anyone have final insights that you have gleaned from our time together? Did anyone do an optional assignment and want to briefly share?

### Time with the Text (20–25 min.)

(Select questions of interest to your group.)

The numbers of veterans returning from war zones with physical and emotional disabilities are staggering.<sup>1</sup> Bishop Johnson shares several approaches that churches and chaplains are taking to reach out and meet these

needs. Has your congregation started any form of ministry for returning veterans? What other ministries could we be doing?

Bishop Johnson mentions soul wounds.<sup>2</sup> Are secular counselors able to help heal soul wounds, and if not, what is the place of the church in addressing the needs? At the same time, how can we ensure access to needed professional counseling? What factors limit access to and willingness to accept treatment for mental illness and other emotional needs such as post-traumatic stress disorder and the aftereffects of trauma? How might stigma and fear play a role in a person's reluctance to seek out mental health services?

Employment opportunities are limited for persons with a disability, and organizations including the church may encourage persons to apply for disability benefits rather than continue to seek a job. How might we advocate for employment opportunities within and beyond the church? How can the church help pastors on clergy medical leave and parishioners on disability status stay engaged in the life of the church and community?

A higher percentage of persons with disabilities live in substandard housing and in unsafe neighborhoods with fewer opportunities than persons without disabilities.<sup>3</sup> How can the church get involved with increasing the amount of safe, affordable, accessible housing available? Share information about programs in your community.

Health care access is often limited for persons with disabilities.<sup>4</sup> What can churches do to decrease the discrepancies and provide improved access to holistic services to improve health in mind and body?

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was first implemented in 1990. Our churches are urged to carry out or exceed its provisions, as we have a moral imperative to make our facilities open to all of God's children. Why are new churches still being built that lack access to the chancel and choir areas? How many churches purchase a new parsonage with accessibility in mind? Why should a parsonage be accessible?

**Break** (5 min.)

**DVD** (15 min.)

View or listen to segments at 40:17 to 44:55 of the DVD. Why is it important for youth with disabilities to have role models of pastors with disabilities? Do people need to be in community for a full experience of worship? In the examples shown, how do you imagine the participants with disabilities became involved with the churches?

*Advocacy* means various things to different people. What are forms of advocacy that we might engage in as a response to what we have been studying? What organizations might we approach?

A church can do many things to become more accessible without spending money. However, some accessibility modifications are expensive, and grant funding is rare. How often is accessibility, especially the installation of an elevator, the top priority in a capital funds campaign? How might tensions around priorities get resolved?

Bishop Johnson provides some guidelines for developing a local church disability ministry. She highlights the importance of prayer in every stage of developing a process, planning, implementing, and assessing the congregation's efforts to become increasingly inclusive and accessible. Offer examples of prayer making a difference in ministry development.

## **Putting It All Together: Awareness, Accessibility, and Advocacy** (30 min.)

Divide into small groups and introduce the following activity: You are on the Staff-Parish Relations Committee and have just received word that your new pastor has a disability, or someone in his or her family has a disability. You are excited, because you have heard great things through the conference grapevine about how effective and engaging this pastor is. The pastor's skills and gifts appear to be just what your congregation needs to move forward. In your small group identify accommodations the church may need to make in order for this appointment to be successful and how you would find out the information you need to be prepared. Don't focus exclusively on the church building and parsonage—consider schedule flexibility, core tasks and tasks that could be shared with lay people, transportation, and support for the pastor and his or her family. Are there attitudes in the congregation that need to be addressed? How could the challenges that the pastor faces prove to be a gift to the congregation and increase the effectiveness of the pastor's ministry?

Make sure each group has a recorder and a reporter. Assign a different disability to each small group. You may want to print these out ahead of time:

- a pastor who is legally blind
- a pastor who has a hearing loss that cannot be fully corrected with hearing aids
- a pastor who has a loss of lower body function and uses a manual wheelchair proficiently
- a pastor who has bipolar disease under good control
- a pastor who has a neurological disease that causes fatigue, tremors, and some difficulty walking long distances or managing multiple flights of stairs
- a pastor with a child who has autism
- a pastor whose spouse uses a wheelchair and needs some care and support from the pastor

Have someone from each group report on the main points of their discussion in two minutes or less.

## **Call to Action** (15 min.)

Open to the last page of the Annual Accessibility Audit. Based on your findings so far, write at least three goals for your local church, and at least one action item (a first step to get things moving) per goal. Commit to helping with one of these goals.

(The leader will have outlined a life-size body on a piece of butcher paper and cut out enough parts of the body for each participant to have one. This symbolizes the body of Christ.) Pick a body part that you can relate to and write your goal and your name on the paper. Find a prayer and accountability partner, share goals with each other, and devise a method for staying in touch and holding each other accountable.

## **Closing Devotions** (5 min.)

**Action:** As the group reconvenes, invite each member to prayerfully attach his or her part of the body to the body outline, which is on a table in the center of the circle. This action reminds participants that they are the body of Christ and serves as a symbol of their intent to return home and take action.

**Prayer:** Form a circle and ask class members to contribute sentence prayers as they feel comfortable doing do. Have the person praying hold a cross (or praying hands carving or other object) while she or he speaks or prays silently and pass this to the next person around the circle to hold while praying. Members may want to

ask God for strength and guidance for implementing changes needed or to offer thanks for new learning and opportunities.

**Closing Song:** Sing, or read aloud together: “Sent Out in Jesus’ Name” (*The Faith We Sing*, #2184). (See copyright notice on page 2 that must be included when copying words and/or music for this song.)

### **Assignment:**

When you return home, gather a small group of people to carry out the actual Annual Accessibility Audit. Include someone from the Trustees, persons who have disabilities and can provide firsthand experiential knowledge, and people with professional experience such as occupational or physical therapists and architects.

Commit to praying that your congregation and conference will become increasingly welcoming and inclusive. Pray for your accountability partner.

### **Optional Follow-up Activities:**

1. Read the “Statement in Solidarity” for employment of people with disabilities: <http://www.aapd.com/what-we-do/interfaith/idac-statement-of-solidarity.html>. List paid positions in your church that could be filled by a person with a disability. How could your church take on an intern who needs to learn job skills to be employable? Can you reach out to employers who are members of your congregation and help them consider hiring persons with disabilities?
2. Read Resolution 3002: “United Methodist Implementation of the United Nations’ Standard Rules of the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities and the Americans with Disabilities Act,” *BOR*, pages 180-181 or online at <http://calms2012.umc.org/Text.aspx?mode=Petition&Number=213>. Ask persons living with disabilities how well the ADA standards are being followed in your congregation and conference at this time. Interview persons who have different disabilities, including people who have vision loss and are Deaf, people with mobility challenges, and parents of children of all ages with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Ask for input on priorities for changes needed. Communicate your findings to the respective administrative body.
3. Find out if your annual conference has a committee on disability concerns (which may have a different name) and what resources they offer. If you can’t locate such a committee, find out what committee carries out the duties outlined in the 2012 *Book of Discipline* ¶653 (pages 490-491) that reads: “There shall be in each annual conference a committee on disability concerns or other structure to provide for the functions of this ministry and maintain the connectional relationships” and lists the committee roles.

## Appendix A

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# Disability Etiquette Skit: Can You Believe It?

Five persons with disabilities have a hash-out gripe session about unbelievably poor etiquette and insults they often endure.

### **Characters:**

**NARRATOR:** Reads play's setting and leads ending applause

**JANE:** Blind, wears sunglasses and uses a white cane

**SAMUEL:** Uses a wheelchair and carries a notepad

**EMILIO:** Deaf, but able to speak clearly; wears hearing aids, if possible

**ROSE:** Sign language interpreter for Emilio, wears dark shirt to make signs visible

**PRISCILLA:** Fifty-year-old woman

**WAIT PERSON:** Person of any sex or age. Carries order pad and pencil

**PROP PERSON:** Gives characters their props that have been collected and placed offstage by the workshop leader  
(Characters are to read the script as naturally as possible, using humor to get the point across.)

### **Setting:**

A restaurant with a table and four chairs arranged with all facing the audience.

### **Props:**

Table and four chairs, menus, sunglasses, white cane, wheelchair, notepad, sign on the wall, "Café Benedict," order pad, pencil.

**NARRATOR:** Several friends, in town for a United Methodist jurisdictional committee meeting, get together at the Benedict Café after attending a city church that they hadn't been to before.

*(At opening, JANE and SAMUEL are seated at a table. JANE's white cane is visibly propped against her chair.)*

**JANE:** Can you believe it? I was just in the restroom and a woman came up to me and grabbed my hand and placed it under the water. Like I didn't know where the spigot was when I somehow managed to find the sink and turn it on. That happens all the time! I feel like I've been assaulted when someone grabs me without saying anything or asking if I need help.

**SAMUEL:** That sounds like what happened to me the other day. I was sitting outside, enjoying the sun, and thinking about the article I just started. All of a sudden a man came up from behind me and started pushing my wheelchair, without saying a word. It wasn't like I was in the way or anything.

**JANE:** I jumped and scolded the woman for grabbing my arm, and she got all huffy. “I was just trying to help you,” she said. Another time I had asked for someone to point me to the stall so that I didn’t bump into anyone in the restroom. I was sitting there doing my business and asked myself where the toilet paper might be. I heard a voice that was too close to be outside the stall telling me where the paper was. I told her to get out of that stall and close the door!

**SAMUEL:** Wow! She really invaded your personal space! I think it’s bad enough that people lean on my wheelchair, or put their feet up on the wheels. They don’t realize that the chair is a part of my space.

**JANE:** That’s like people who think they are being helpful by moving my cane out of the way. I need my cane right by me so I can get up when I need to. I fold it up out of the way, so nobody can trip on it. The other day I was searching all over the ground for my cane, and finally I heard a voice asking what I was looking for. The lady had picked the cane up and was holding it for me, trying to be helpful.

**SAMUEL:** You know, sometimes it is helpful when people jump to push my chair up a steep ramp. I just wish they would tell me that they were going to do it. If they offer help, I can then explain where I am going and the kind of help I need.

**JANE:** You’re lucky if they listen to you! If someone is helping me get someplace I’ll try to tell her to let me touch the back of her elbow and that I will follow closely behind her. You wouldn’t believe how often people argue with me and would rather drag me by my hand.

**SAMUEL:** That sounds like the guys who offer to hold the door open for me so I can get into the building, but then stand in the way so I would have to roll over their feet to get in. Sometimes it’s easier just to struggle with the door myself.

**JANE:** The hard part is that I know I need help at times. But I just wish people would let me try to figure things out myself and wait to make sure I need help. I’m trying to learn to read Braille, but every time I’m trying to make out what a sign says, someone comes along and reads it for me! How am I supposed to get more independent if people do things for me that I can do myself?

**SAMUEL:** This is a nice restaurant. Thanks for not choosing a buffet. I’ve had enough buffet lines this week to last me all year. People kept coming up and pushing around me when I was slow because I couldn’t reach all the food. It takes my appetite away.

**JANE:** My husband saw someone he needed to talk with and took off when we got to the cafeteria yesterday. I just stood there waiting, getting hungrier and hungrier, with people walking by me going for their meals. Finally I called out for someone to please help me get some food. Wouldn’t you think somebody might have offered to help?

**SAMUEL:** How did it go after that? People seem to be put out when I ask them for help going through a buffet line, so I prefer to wait until after everyone else is through so I’m not rushed.

*(Enter EMILIO with ROSE from stage right.)*

(Action note for EMILIO AND ROSE: EMILIO must always look at Rose who is signing all that is said. She does not sign dialogue belonging to EMILIO.)

**EMILIO:** Hi, Guys. This is Rose.

**JANE and SAMUEL:** Hello. Hi.

**ROSE:** (*signs hello and hi for EMILIO.*) Hello.

(*They glance at the menu.*)

**SAMUEL:** Are we ready to order yet? Do you remember all the choices that I read to you, Jane?

**JANE:** I've decided. How about the two of you?

(*SAMUEL signals for the WAIT PERSON who comes to the table.*)

**WAIT PERSON:** (*Looking at Rose*) Are they ready to order yet? What do they want to eat?

**SAMUEL:** (*Sighs*) I can order for myself, thanks. I'd like the Chicken Caesar Salad and a diet cola.

**WAIT PERSON:** (*Pointing to Jane*) What about her?

**JANE:** Are you talking to me? You can say "Hey, lady with the white cane," and I'll answer you. I'd like a Rubeen sandwich and iced tea.

**WAIT PERSON:** (*Looking at Rose*) What about the two of you?

**EMILIO:** (*Points to the menu*) I'll have fish and chips and a vanilla milk shake.

**ROSE:** And I'll have a taco salad and iced tea.

**SAMUEL:** It's nice to be talking with people at eye level. I've got such a stiff neck from looking up at people all week when I'm talking with them. And have you ever noticed how some people will look over your head or at your feet when you are sitting in a wheelchair?

(*Some noise offstage makes SAMUEL notice PRISCILLA. He waves for her to join the group. She enters stage right.*)

**PRISCILLA:** (*Pulls another chair up to the table*) I'm so upset with that waitress. After she scolded me, I needed to see a friendly face. Thanks for inviting me to join you. I don't think we've met officially, but I recognize you from the meeting. My name is Priscilla.

(*SAMUEL, JANE, EMILIO, and ROSE shake hands and introduce themselves.*)

**JANE:** Why did she scold you?

**PRISCILLA:** She said I didn't look disabled and I had no business taking up a handicapped parking spot, even though I had my parking permit and everything.

**SAMUEL and ROSE:** But you don't look disabled!

**PRISCILLA:** That's what everyone says. But I just had my eighth knee surgery and I was afraid I would slip on the icy patches in the parking lot. I've been falling a lot lately. I can't use a cane or walker because my hand doesn't work right since my stroke.

*(The others exchange humorous glances.)*

**PRISCILLA:** I've had my parking permit since my stroke, but I don't use it unless I need it. It's come in handy after my back surgeries and when I was weak from my chemo two years ago, and I had . . .

**EMILIO:** *(Interrupting)* So . . . how did everyone enjoy the church service today?

**JANE:** Can you believe the way the usher treated me? I asked him if they had a Braille hymnal, and he said in a very loud voice, like he was talking to a two-year-old, "Stand over here out of the way and I'll get somebody to help you." So I stood there for a while and finally gave up and found my way to a pew.

**SAMUEL:** I didn't think I could see any cut-out areas in the pews, but I asked just in case. I really wanted to see the bishop preaching, so I sat next to the front pew. The ushers acted like I was in the way, but I just ignored them. They don't realize that if I stay in the back I can't see a thing when everyone else is standing.

**EMILIO:** I asked where to sit so I could see the interpreter. They told me where to sit, but when I watched the interpreter I couldn't see anything else that was going on. She was sitting down on the main floor, clear off to the side. There wasn't much light there so it was hard to see her.

**ROSE:** We met with the interpreter afterward and asked her why she sat there to interpret. She said that the worship and design team had decided that was the best place because it wouldn't distract the congregation during the service. Can you believe it?

**PRISCILLA:** The loud music really bothered me. I asked an usher if there was a better place to sit, where it wasn't so loud. He suggested that I go outside. I finally took his advice, because I was also getting a headache from the strong aftershave the kid sitting next to me was wearing. I don't know why kids think they have to bathe in the stuff!

**JANE:** Then you must have missed Communion. I wanted to go to the front for Communion, but the usher insisted that I stay put and he would bring the elements to me. He said it was easier that way.

**SAMUEL:** Since I was already in the front, I went forward for Communion. The steward acted like he didn't know what to do. Since my hands were a little shaky maybe he thought I couldn't use them, because all of a sudden I found he was shoving a piece of bread in my mouth. Maybe he thought I would contaminate the grape juice if I dipped the bread myself.

**EMILIO:** So why are people so afraid of those of us who are Deaf or have disabilities? Do they think we will bite? Do they think what we have is contagious?

**JANE:** It's not with malice. I had a friend who didn't talk to me for a year after I went blind. She said she didn't know what to say. Anything would have been better than not talking to me. She's not mean, but that was hurtful.

**SAMUEL:** Well, I think it is mostly ignorance. Can you believe how hung up some people seem on using the correct language? They ask, "What would you rather be called: disabled, handicapped, physically challenged, or what?" I tell them, "Samuel would be just fine."

**PRISCILLA:** One thing, about it, Samuel. At least they are trying to understand.

*(NARRATOR leads applause.)*

## Appendix B

# Suggested Reading List

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# Endnotes

## Introduction

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## Session 1

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## Session 2

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4. Ginny Thornburgh and Ann Rose Davie, *That All May Worship: An Interfaith Welcome to People with Disabilities*, Ginny Thornburgh, ed., 6<sup>th</sup> printing (Washington DC: National Organization on Disability, 2000), 25.
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### **Session 3**

1. Used by permission of Mark Lehman.
2. First Corinthians 12:22. New English Translation, NET Bible® copyright ©1996-2006 by Biblical Studies Press, L.L.C. <http://netbible.com> All rights reserved.
3. Johnson, 46.

### **Session 4**

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## About the Author

**Lynn Swedberg** is a United Methodist laywoman who serves as disability consultant for GBGM/UMCOR Health. Her passion is facilitating accessibility and inclusion in faith communities and camps. She is a lay speaker and writer. Lynn provides occupational therapy services through Outreach Therapy Consultants, her private practice. She helps her clients, primarily older adults at a rural hospital and transitional care unit, return home and live as independently and safely as possible.

## About the Consultant

**Leslie Bledsoe** worked as a social worker and served in the United States Marine Corps. She was a local pastor and has been on numerous boards and committees in The United Methodist Church. She is a member of and volunteers for the National Federation for the Blind and other organizations that improve the lives of people who are blind.