



WHO IS WELCOME?

A CHECKLIST FOR YOUTH FOR DETERMINING ACCESSIBILITY

*Access Sunday and Disability Awareness Week
Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 23*

Persons with disabilities and their advocates have been working together in the United Church of Christ since 1971 so our churches may be accessible and welcoming to all people. Thirty-four years later we know that a ‘one size fits all’ solution will not create accessible and welcoming churches. There are a huge range of disabilities that may prevent people from fully participating as committed Christians in their local congregation. As a matter of fact about 40 percent of the population lives with some form of disability. The good news is that there are many creative ways a church may adapt itself to meet the needs of all who wish to worship and serve in a local congregation. All people, including people with disabilities, bring gifts to local churches and to the Church universal. God sets a banquet and welcomes, and needs, all God’s people.

An Activity: Who May Come to the Banquet?

The UCC Disabilities Ministries has as part of its mission “to encourage local churches to be open, inclusive, affirming, and accessible in all aspects of their lives, including their buildings, worship, education, fellowship, and service. . . .” Often it is not until we have a personal experience of disability in our congregations that we begin to notice barriers—physical, social, and even theological—in our midst. Learning the basics of accessibility and becoming more observant is the first step toward becoming a congregation and denomination that is accessible to all.

This year the United Church of Christ Disabilities Ministry (UCCDM) suggests that young people of a congregation, a confirmation or youth group, take the lead. Prior to Access Sunday, youth and their sponsors are invited to observe worship in a variety of congregations and their own. After praying about and reflecting on the results in their own group, they might share their discoveries with the pastoral staff, trustees, deacons, and/or the worship committee. On Access Sunday, they or other worship leaders might identify some of the results, or, better yet, point to differences in the worship service or setting because of their discernment.

The following checklist is a fairly typical action/reflection worksheet designed for youth and mentors of a confirmation or youth group. It is to be used when they visit places of worship to contrast and compare with others—including their own.

A CHECKLIST

Worship: Does It Welcome All?

The United Church of Christ has made a commitment to work toward being accessible to all in the design of our church buildings as well as the way we worship, have fellowship, and communicate.

Over the next few weeks/months, you are invited to visit and observe the style and content of worship services in several congregations. First, observe your own. Then, with invitations from other congregations, participate in their worship. Respect the worshiping community wherever you visit. Don't fill out or even take the list into worship with you. Instead, by yourself or with a friend or mentor, complete it after worship. Especially become sensitive in what ways persons with disabilities might experience worship.

Congregation: _____ Date: _____

Youth/Confirmand _____ Mentor _____

1. What do you notice as you arrive at church? How is the architecture, style of building, inviting or not to you? How accessible is the parking and entry to the worship space? In what ways do you feel welcomed or not welcomed?
2. Is seating space available for people who use wheelchairs for mobility? Where are these spots located?
3. Are there ramps to all areas that you visit? What about the pulpit or other leadership space?
4. Are the restrooms accessible?
5. Does the choir sing in an area accessible for wheelchairs or walkers?

6. Do people need to be able to read to participate in worship?

7. Are there religious symbols that tell a visual story?

8. Did you notice if hearing devices and large print bulletins are available?

9. How many of your five senses were engaged during worship? How?

10. What are some other ways that this congregation is aware of ways to be inclusive of all people? (For example some worship spaces have 'scent-free seating' for people with allergies or asthma).

11. Reflecting on worship in other congregations, what is worship like for persons with disabilities in this congregation?

12. What might God be calling on you or the youth group to do or say because of this experience and reflection?

Thank you for taking time to observe and reflect on worship. It will be interesting to compare your experiences and share them with the whole congregation on Access Sunday.



This activity was designed by the Confirmation Committee at Union Congregational UCC in St. Louis Park, Minnesota, and submitted by Jo Clare Hartsig, pastor and inclusion coach at Union UCC. For more information about UCC Disabilities Ministries or ministries with those with disabilities, contact Peg Slater, minister for diversity and inclusion coordinator, Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team, by phone at 216.736.3838 or by e-mail at slaterm@ucc.org.

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