

CALLED TO WHOLENESS IN CHRIST: BECOMING A CHURCH ACCESSIBLE TO ALL

WHEREAS the Biblical vision of the Great Messianic Banquet is of all gathered at the table with bounty for all; and WHEREAS any barrier that limits the wholeness of all, diminishes all; and

WHEREAS medical and scientific advances continue to reduce the death rate from infections, injuries, and other conditions, and more people survive to continue life with some disability and close to twenty percent of the US population identify themselves as having some level of disability, and over the age of eighty the percentage is much higher, so that all members of United Church of Christ congregations will be touched by a disability in some way at some time in their lives, and

WHEREAS the overwhelming majority of people with disabilities want to exercise choice in where and how they live, work, play, worship and serve; and

WHEREAS implementing the spirit of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 calls upon the church to take specific measures within each ministry of the church.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED by the Twenty-fifth General Synod of the United Church of Christ calls on Conferences, Associations, Congregations, seminaries and colleges, campus ministries, camps, covenanted ministries and all other UCC organizations to embody the philosophy of inclusion and interdependence, embark on study and reflection activities about disabilities, disabilities rights, and ways congregations are able to become accessible to all (A2A), remove or overcome barriers to welcoming and including all people in the work and witness of the United Church of Christ, and to support and implement provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

The Twenty-fifth General Synod acknowledges the uniqueness of every congregation and organization, and urges that these communities consider a progression of ministry and concern not only “to” or “for” people with disabilities but also ministry “with” and “by” people with disabilities.

The Twenty-fifth General Synod is aware that individuals who have lived with disability for some time say the real limitations to living, moving about, working and relating to others are not their particular impairments but the barriers they encounter in the social and physical environment.

Recognizing that discrimination against people with disabilities is complex, pervasive, and sometimes well-intentioned, and remembering that the United Church of Christ seeks to be multicultural, multiracial, open and affirming and accessible to all, this Twenty-Fifth Synod urges Conferences, Associations, congregations, seminaries and colleges, campus ministries, camps, covenanted ministries and all other organizations of the UCC to develop both short-range and long-term accessibility and inclusion plans, which may include some or all of the following activities:

- a) Establish Conference level Inclusion Task Forces charged with needs assessment, planning, and education;
- b) Join the National Organization on Disability’s Accessible Congregations Campaign;
- c) Continue to make improvements in United Church of Christ buildings and facilities to achieve full physical accessibility;
- d) Encourage local churches to establish Inclusion Committees and/or Inclusion Coaches to help conduct any accessibility or inclusion evaluation and modify existing curriculum and practices when needed.
- e) Seek out and befriend mentors in the disabilities community, keeping in mind the slogan, “Nothing about us without us”.
- f) Consider ways to invite/include people with disabilities to participate in and lead worship services and other programming. This may involve hiring professional support or acquiring specialized technology (i.e. sign language interpreters, TTY phone devices, etc.)
- g) Call clergy with disabilities and employ staff with disabilities.
- h) Become advocates for people with disabilities by becoming familiar with the Americans for Disabilities Act and other legislation that affects children and adults with disabilities, contact local advocacy groups for information and expertise.
- i) Utilize study/action process designed by the United Church of Christ Disabilities Ministries called “Any Body, Everybody, Christ’s Body” to become a congregation that is accessible to all (A2A).
- j) Support and utilize United Church of Christ Disabilities Ministries resources.

Funding for the implementation of this resolution will be made in accordance with the overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

Passed GS 25 June 2005