

# The Church Is for **EVERYONE**

*Including people of all abilities in your next event*



## Introduction

So you are planning an event at your congregation! Have you considered how you can more fully include people of all abilities in the fun? Jesus wants His church to have open doors, welcoming all people inside. Everyone has gifts and talents to share. Many times, people with disabilities don't participate because of the simple fact that they haven't been asked! Here are some simple ways that you can include everyone in your next event.

## Before the Event

Ask! Many times we ask about medical conditions and food allergies, but forget to ask, "How can we help you or your child participate more fully in our event?"



If crowds are troublesome, identify an alternate route to the event area, or if a later or earlier start time would be helpful.

Consider reserving parking spaces close to the entrance that is closest to the room being used.

Think about physical accessibility when choosing the event space — free of stairs, barriers and high traffic.

Some individuals are sensitive to light. Consider a room that has a dimmer to keep lights low or one with windows that have adjustable blinds to control light and shadow.

Some people are more comfortable if the same room is always used instead of rotating or switching locations.

## During the Event

Consider setting aside a "quiet room" where participants can go if they need a break. Some options for the room include rocking chairs, bean bag chairs, carpeting and exercise balls.



Try using the buddy system — sometimes having a friend to help navigate the schedule can make a big difference



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Some people may need a visual reminder of the schedule. Make it interactive, with Velcro or magnets that can be moved as activities are completed.

Use a PowerPoint or other slide presentation to help participants follow along. In addition to words, add icons that show an action; praying hands, a person singing, a picture of a Bible during a reading, etc.

Give opportunities for movement. Try letting participants draw on dry erase boards, pass out Bibles, collect the offering, or push the button to advance the slide. Sing songs that have body and hand movements.

If you are collecting an offering, consider asking for tangible items like canned food rather than money, which is abstract in its value.

Use repetitive, responsive and echo-style liturgy, prayers and hymns to help with recognition and memorization.

All of us like to be praised and given rewards. Be generous with them for everyone.

## After the Event

Be sure to follow up with a survey, asking what worked? What didn't work? What suggestions do you have for next time?



Make sure to invite everyone to continue to participate in the life of the church. Invite participants to Sunday school, youth group, or worship.

### Other Supports for Success:

- › Minimize distractions whenever possible
- › Use visuals in addition to spoken reminders
- › Give directions in written form as well as verbal
- › Include movement when possible — try to change activities every 5–10 minutes
- › Allow student to stand/walk in back of room away from other students
- › Give reminders before moving into transitions
- › Provide highly structured and predictable routines and procedures. Prepare for new routines and places ahead of time
- › Understand any “triggers” for upset
- › Have a transition Box with a variety of items that a student can choose from to take during transition time
- › Provide everyone pictures with names labeled that the student can take home to familiarize himself or herself with new people. Include teachers, pastors, and classmates.
- › Present information in small amounts
- › Use appropriate level reading materials or recorded Bible stories
- › Demonstrate what you are asking individual to do
- › Use hands-on materials when possible
- › Focus on the main idea of the Bible story or lesson

## Suggestions for Vision and Hearing Difficulties

### Hearing

- › Use facial expressions, gestures and body language when speaking
- › Use visual aides
- › Always face student when speaking
- › Use written communication



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- › Eliminate background noise and other excessive sounds
- › Avoid seating student in high traffic areas
- › Use of sign language/lip reading may be appropriate for individuals
- › Slow down your speech for lip readers
- › Instructors with a moustache should have it clipped to the edge of the lip so lip readers can see lips completely

### Visual

- › Seat student away from glare and bright lights
- › Use spoken cues
- › Make texts available in other mediums (Braille, audio files, etc.)
- › Use real objects and materials that students can feel
- › Increase contrast of text
- › Familiarize the student with the setting through verbal descriptions and tactile experiences

### Resources:

LCMS Health Ministry:  
[lcms.org/health](http://lcms.org/health)



LCMS Disability Task Force Resources:  
[lcms.org/socialissues/disability](http://lcms.org/socialissues/disability)

Lutheran Special Education Ministries:  
[luthsped.org](http://luthsped.org)

Dakota Boys and Girls Ranch:  
[info@dakotaranch.org](mailto:info@dakotaranch.org)

Bethesda Lutheran Communities:  
[bethesdalutherancommunities.org](http://bethesdalutherancommunities.org)

Chapel of the Cross Lutheran Church:  
[facebook.com/ChapelEService](https://facebook.com/ChapelEService)