

IMPROVING MINISTRY ACCESSIBILITY

for Persons with Disabilities



This reference is intended to be used in conjunction with the “Disability Ministry Assessment Tool” (DMAT) developed by The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Disability Ministry Task Force. The item numbering for each of the “possible solutions” refers directly to the same item number within the DMAT. Each of the items marked “no” in your assessment of your ministry may be addressed through the related suggested solutions.

For more information on the topics covered in the DMAT and this reference, please refer to the list of resources on the last page of this document.

Congregational Attitudes

- 1** Personally invite members and visitors with disabilities to worship services. Determine whether these people may partake of the Sacraments. Provide catechetical instruction as appropriate.
- 2** Personally invite members and visitors with disabilities to attend and participate in educational activities. Encourage members with disabilities to facilitate or help plan educational opportunities if they are interested in doing so.
- 3** Encourage congregation members to personally invite members with disabilities to attend and participate in fellowship activities. Encourage members with disabilities to facilitate or help plan fellowship opportunities if they are interested in doing so.
- 4** Personally invite members with disabilities to attend and participate in service or outreach activities. Encourage members with disabilities to facilitate or help plan service or outreach opportunities if they are interested in doing so.
- 5** Acknowledge that people with disabilities may serve in congregation leadership positions. Determine what accommodations might be needed so they may be able to carry out their responsibilities, and try to provide those accommodations.
- 6** Begin communicating directly with people with disabilities. Some possible methods include placing appropriate wording or symbols in newspaper and online advertisements and on the church sign, encouraging congregation members to advertise by word-of-mouth, or sending a press release to local media about the role of people with disabilities in your congregation.
- 7** Provide a transportation system for those members who are unable to transport themselves. Consider offering an accessible church van or a network of volunteer drivers in neighborhoods throughout the community. Provide local public transportation and taxi vendors with information if the congregation is unable to provide a transport service.
- 8** Designate volunteers and make sure they are easily identifiable to provide informational assistance during times of movement (such as before worship services, during fellowship hour) and physical assistance as needed.
- 9** Ensure that all members are aware of the proper leadership channels by which they may pass along suggestions for how to improve inclusion and accessibility within the congregation. Designate several people who can receive such feedback so that each member may choose to discuss feedback with someone with whom he or she is comfortable.

- 10** Schedule learning opportunities within all levels of the congregation to provide information about including people with disabilities. If members with disabilities are willing, consider having them co-facilitate the opportunities.
- 11** Provide regular training for congregation members who will use assistive technology or adaptive equipment. Collaborate with the members, their families and other professionals as needed.
- 12** Recognize that chronic mental illness is a medical illness that may require appropriate medicine, counseling and extra spiritual support. Encourage congregational leaders to receive training that will allow them to recognize symptoms of mental illness and to interact appropriately with members and families during times of distress or crisis. Contact the National Alliance on Mental Illness (www.nami.org, 800-950-NAMI) for possible training opportunities in your area.
- 13** Develop a listing of relevant community resources, including support groups, disability-specific organizations, hospitals, treatment centers, trustworthy

counselors, therapists, physicians, psychiatrists and psychologists. Ensure that the pastor and appropriate congregation members have copies of this list.

- 14** Whenever a planning board is formed, try to include one or more people with disabilities on the board.
- 15** Some people with disabilities may require extra assistance or extra time with daily hygiene and preparation before leaving the house. Speak with members to determine whether current worship times make it difficult for them to attend. If so, attempt to provide a worship service at a time when they are able to attend.
- 16** If a member or visitor has a support animal that needs to be with that person, talk to the person to find out how to best accommodate the animal. Educate members that the animal is “working” and may not be available to be affectionate or perform tricks.
- 17** In your effort to eliminate stigma, educate members about behavioral difficulties that some people with disabilities may experience. Talk to family members and caregivers to determine strategies to minimize negative behaviors when at church.



Educational Program Considerations

- 1** Schedule meetings in rooms or places that are accessible to all members.
- 2** Include a visual and auditory component to as many gatherings as possible. For example, when most information in a class or a meeting will be spoken, also have handouts available. When showing a movie, make sure that closed captioning is turned on.
- 3** Meet with individual members (and their families, as appropriate) who may benefit from individualized learning plans. Find out what method of presentation works best for them and what special accommodations may be needed. Advertise the church’s willingness to individualize learning experiences.
- 4** Avoid using flowers with strong scents. Try to use cleaning supplies that do not leave a lingering scent.
- 5** Let people know that you will provide tape recordings, DVDs or CDs of meetings, and provide them in a timely manner.

Website Content Considerations

- 1** Provide options for enlarging the text size of the Web page. Ensure that these options are easily found on the front page of the website.
- 2** Provide dark text on a light background or light text on a dark background when possible. Avoid having text and background of the same color (for example, light blue on dark blue). Black on off-white provides the best contrast.
- 3** When composing or revising the congregational website, have several people of various ages and abilities navigate the website to provide feedback about usability. Ensure that clear titles are used for links. Consult www.accessible.org for more information.
- 4** When composing text for the website, use simple sentences. If using foreign words or long words, consider including a glossary by which those words can be defined.

Physical Access

A - Parking Lot

- A1** Place accessible parking spaces so that they are as close as possible to the accessible entrance. If only street parking is available, reserve accessible spaces as close as possible to the accessible entrance.
- A2** Consider repainting parking spaces so that spaces of appropriate widths are available. If only street parking is available, ensure that accessible parking spaces are clearly marked.
- A3** Ensure that parking space lines are easily visible. Consider placing a sign vertically in front of each accessible parking space.
- A4** Ensure that a smooth, flat path is available from the parking lot to the accessible entrance. If gravel or uneven sidewalks are present, replace them with a smooth surface. Make sure to keep the path free from puddles, snow, ice, leaves and other debris.
- A5** Consider painting the edge of the curb with a color that contrasts with the sidewalk and the parking lot.
- A6** Install curb cuts in the existing curb. If the sidewalk is owned by the municipality, contact your local municipality or public works office to request curb cuts, preferably of a non-skid surface. Ensure that curb cuts are kept clean of snow, ice, leaves and other debris.

B - Entrance(s)

- B1** Provide clear signage to indicate where accessible entrances are located.
- B2** Consider installing a ramp or a wheelchair lift (please see item B3 for ramp safety considerations). If a wheelchair lift is installed, make sure that congregation members are taught how to use it. For a temporary solution, if the level change is less than 6 inches, consider purchasing a portable ramp that can be easily installed and removed as needed.
- B3** If installing or modifying a ramp, ensure that the following safety precautions are in place:
 - › The ramp should have a slope of at least a 12-inch run for every inch rise. For example, a staircase that is 20 inches tall requires a ramp that is at least 20 feet long.
 - › The ramp should be at least 36 inches wide.
 - › Railings, located 30 to 34 inches from the bottom surface, should be present on each side of the ramp.

- › Resting places should be located every 30 feet along the ramp with at least a 5-foot turning radius.
- › Wooden ramps should be weatherproofed. A non-skid surface should cover the length of the ramp.

- B4** Install a railing on each side of any outdoor steps. Ensure that visual markers, such as a contrasting tread or paint, are along the edge of each step.
- B5** Consider installing an automatic door opener. If a door opener is available, keep it in good repair. Adjust the controls on the door so that it stays open for at least 10 seconds. If a door opener is unable to be installed, consider having an usher or greeter present at the door during busy times to open the door, and consider installing a call button for less busy times.
- B6** Adjust the closing mechanism at the top of the door so that less pressure is required to open the door. Consider installing doors or lever-style handles that can be operated with minimal dexterity.
- B7** Allow for several feet of clearance in front and around a door. Consider moving furniture and decorative items that might impede access to the door.
- B8** Widen the doorway so that it is at least 32 inches wide.

C - Building-wide Accessibility

- C1** Consider installing a ramp, lift or elevator to ensure access to all levels and rooms of the building. If this is not immediately possible, try to avoid scheduling activities and programs in rooms or spaces that require steps to enter.
- C2** If renovating the building, be sure to include wide spaces in the design. Move unnecessary furniture out of the pathway. When placing new furniture or objects throughout the building, carefully consider whether that object will narrow the pathway.
- C3** If doorways are 30 to 32 inches wide, consider installing offset hinges to provide extra width. Doorways smaller than 30 inches should be widened.
- C4** If possible, smooth the threshold. Small ramps are available for thresholds up to 3 inches high. Thresholds higher than 3 inches should have a ramp that is at least as many feet long as it is inches high (for example, a 4-inch high threshold should have a 4-foot-long ramp).
- C5** Replace heavy carpeting or uneven tile floors with low-pile carpeting or tile flooring. If steep ramps are present, determine the feasibility of decreasing the slope of those ramps.

- C6** Consider removing loose throw rugs or carpeting. If this is not feasible, place non-skid backing under loose throw rugs or carpeting and tack down the edges of the carpeting. Contact a carpet store to professionally secure loose edges of carpeting. For a very temporary solution, use securely-fastened duct tape to secure loose carpet edges.
- C7** Regularly pick up clutter and debris in pathways.
- C8** Install railings on both sides of staircases whenever possible.
- C9** Place treads or non-skid strips that contrast with the color of the steps along the front of each step, or paint a stripe at the edge of each step using paint that is not slick. For a very temporary solution, place tape of a contrasting color along the front of each step, but make sure to remove the tape immediately if it appears to be coming loose.
- C10** Install non-skid treads or surfacing on steps.
- C11** Install additional lighting throughout the building. Replace burned-out light bulbs as soon as possible.
- C12** Ensure that directional and announcement signs have large lettering written in a clear, easy to read font.
- C13** Ensure that color contrast is available on all directional and announcement signs. White on black or black on white is best. Try to avoid patterned backgrounds directly behind words.
- C14** Place an alert mechanism (such as a table, chair, wastebasket, box) under an object that is hanging or protruding from the wall if the base of the object is higher than 27 inches. Additionally, a small alcove or small walls may be built to contain the object. Alert mechanisms along the floor that can be felt with a cane serve to warn of a space under stairs.
- C15** Incorporate Braille plaques into signage in elevators and at room entrances.
- C16** Adjust elevator doors so they stay open for at least 8 seconds. Install new elevator controls at sitting height. If these adjustments are not possible, have an usher or helper available during busy times to help hold open the elevator door and operate controls.
- C17** Install fire alarms that have both a visual and auditory component. Make sure that all congregation members are aware of emergency evacuation plans, and designate people to assist those with mobility and visual limitations in the event of an emergency.

- C18** Install drinking fountains that are reachable from a seated position with controls that can be operated using a closed fist. Alternately, have a pitcher of water and cups available on a table that can be reached from sitting position.
- C19** Place a phone and phone book in a location that can easily be reached from a sitting position.
- C20** Notify the appropriate maintenance contact immediately when an accessible feature is broken. Conduct repairs as soon as possible.
- C21** Consult user manuals for directions on how to activate closed-captioning features on audio-visual equipment. If purchasing new televisions or projectors, check for availability of a closed-captioning feature. If this is not possible, have a written transcript of the program available for those who are not able to hear the program.

D - Worship Space

(Including the altar, baptismal font, choir loft and nave)

- D1** Remove chairs or provide pew cuts at various locations throughout the worship space.
- D2** Move chairs and pews so that wide spaces are available. If this is not possible for all seating areas, provide space in at least some seating areas.
- D3** Ensure that kneelers may be easily moved. If any part of the kneeler protrudes when the kneeler is not in use, ensure that this part does not enter the pathway.
- D4** Provide large-print bulletins by typing in a larger font or enlarging the original bulletin using a copy machine. Use a clear font with minimal embellishments and with a strong color contrast (ideally black on off-white) on large-print bulletins, and let people know that these materials are available. Large print hymnals, Bibles, and other materials may be obtained from the following sources:
 - › Concordia Publishing House
www.cph.org
800-325-3040
 - › Lutheran Blind Mission
www.blindmission.org
888-215-2455
- D5** Ensure that lighting is focused toward all areas of the pews. When evaluating lighting, consider lighting levels for day and night as well as sunny days and cloudy days.
- D6** Offer printed copies of sermons.

- D7** Provide a ramp, lift or elevator so that all levels of the worship area may be easily reached. Ensure that railings are present at all steps.
- D8** Provide an amplified sound system, portable listening device or hearing loop, and let members and visitors know about the availability of these options.
- D9** Determine whether any members are willing and able to serve as sign language interpreters. If a member is interested in becoming an interpreter, contact the Church Interpreter Training Institute at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind., (citi@ctsfn.edu, 260-452-2197). If you would like to locate an interpreter in your community, contact a local organization that serves people who are deaf, a local school that has an American Sign Language program or the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (703-838-0030).
- D10** Remind speakers to face the congregation whenever possible. If speakers are unable to face the congregation, ensure that a printed copy of what they are saying is available. Install or adjust lighting so that speakers' faces are clearly illuminated.

E - Classroom Space

- E1** Rearrange classrooms so that wide pathways are available.
- E2** Ensure that procedures are in place to facilitate regular communication between the leader and the class to maximize each student's learning experience.
- E3** Encourage regular cleaning and organization of classrooms. Avoid overly-cluttered spaces and displays.

F - Offices and Equipment

- F1** Let people know that you are willing to obtain adaptive software. Familiarize staff and volunteers with accessibility features available on standard computer operating systems that allow for adaptations to keyboarding, mouse use and sound control.
- F2** Place telephones, fax machines, copiers, paper supplies, laminating machines, computers and other office equipment in places that can be easily reached from a sitting position.
- F3** Purchase and train staff and volunteers on the proper use of a TDD or TTY. Advertise the TDD or TTY phone number along with other contact information.

G - Restrooms

- G1** Place signs to mark accessible restrooms.
- G2** Install handles and latches that can be operated easily with a closed fist. Adjust or oil door hinges so they are easier to open.
- G3** Install grab bars at reachable heights on walls surrounding toilets. Make sure that grab bars are firmly secured to the studs in the walls.
- G4** Remove or relocate any furniture or obstacles that might be in the way of a turning radius. If bathroom fixtures are in the way, consider replacing them with fixtures that will allow for increased turning space. If stall walls are in the way, consider reducing the number of stalls if that is allowed by state building codes. If adequate space is not available, the bathroom may need to be expanded or another bathroom may need to be made accessible.
- G5** Ensure that counter/sink space is high enough to allow a wheelchair to be rolled underneath, but not so high that faucets are not reachable from a sitting position. Insulate any exposed pipes to prevent burn injuries. If a change of sink fixtures is not immediately possible, consider placing hand-sanitizing gel in a location that is easily reached from a sitting position and in a container that is easily to operate with one hand.
- G6** Consider installing a sink that is low enough to be reached from a sitting position. Consider lowering the soap and paper towel dispensers. If this is not possible, place a soap dispenser and a stack of paper towels on the counter or a small side table.
- G7** Install a faucet that can be operated with one hand. Examples include hands-free faucets or faucets with single or double lever-style handles.
- G8** Lower the mirror so that it can be seen from a sitting position. If this is not possible, consider installing a wall mirror on a wall in that bathroom that can be accessed from a sitting position.

H - Exercise Facilities/Playground

- H1** At the very least, primary pathways to and around the play area should be made of material that is easy to roll over, such as concrete or rubber matting.
- H2** Ensure that at least some, if not all, play features can be reached from a sitting position. If some play features are not able to be reached from a sitting position, try to include similar play features that can be reached from sitting position.

- H3** Ensure that play equipment may be reached without steps or a ladder. Include a ramp and play equipment at ground level.
- H4** Provide lockers or a lock-ready cabinet that can be reached from a seated position.

- H5** If a lip is present at the shower entrance, ensure that it is no more than ¼ inch high. Include a bath bench. Ensure that a non-skid mat or surface is present on the floor. Install a hand-held shower. Place grab bars at a height that is easily reached along common walls of the shower. Ensure that grab bars are fastened to wall studs.



Resources

- › The Access Board. (1998). *ADAAG Manual: a guide to the Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines*. (U.S. ATBCB). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- › Bethesda Lutheran Homes and Services. (2006). *Building A Developmental Disability Ministry: A Manual for Congregations*. Watertown, WI: Bethesda Lutheran Homes and Services.
- › LCMS Northwest District Disability Awareness Task Force (2003). *Communication & Architectural Access Survey of Worship Facilities*.
- › National Center on Accessibility. (n.d.). *Access to Play Areas*. Retrieved August 27, 2006, from www.indiana.edu/~nca/playgrounds/play-areas.shtml.
- › Patterson, E.A., & Vogel, N.A. (2003). *Accessible Faith: A Technical Guide for Accessibility in Houses of Worship*. Chicago: The Retirement Research Foundation.
- › Stark, S.; Hollingsworth, H.; Morgan, K.; & Gray, D. (in press). Development of a measure of community receptivity. *Disability and Rehabilitation*.
- › Thornburgh, G. (2005). *That All May Worship: An Interfaith Welcome to People with Disabilities*. Washington D.C.: National Organization on Disability.