

ACCESSIBILITY CHECKLIST

The following is a guide to making your church or meeting location accessible to everyone.

Grab a tape measure, chalk, pencil, line level (to measure slopes), fish scale (to determine door pressure), and of course this checklist and head to your church or meeting location. This will help you determine how accessible the building is and what improvements are needed and where. **Remember, nothing says “Welcome” better to someone with a disability than an accessible facility.**

When buildings are structurally inaccessible, those with mobility impairments cannot get in.

When the Word is only spoken, those with hearing problems are denied some or all of the messages.

When announcements are in print form only, those with poor sight miss opportunities.

When general invitations are issued and members with a mental illness or another chronic illness are not personally invited, they may assume they are excluded.

When leadership appointments are made and each person selected appears to be nondisabled, the person with a disability may doubt his or her own usefulness.

Basic Accessibility Awareness

The following questions may help you to address some of those basic accessibility barriers.

- Are printed materials (Bibles, hymnals, etc.) available in large print? (16 point font is considered large print.)
- Are printed materials also available in Braille?
- Is the meeting site free of background noise?
- Is the speaker well positioned? (Windows as backgrounds may be troublesome for those with AD/HD. Also, speakers in wheelchairs may feel more comfortable at a table with 27" clearance rather than at a small podium.)
- For public meetings, is a “Sign language interpreter available upon request” notice in advertisements?
- When the meeting is in an accessible location, is this noted in the ad, or is a disability symbol placed near it?
- Are written and tactile directions to building locations available at entrance?
- Are ushers/greeters trained in etiquette of meeting special needs?
- Is disability awareness training available?
- Does the library include resources about various disabling conditions?
- Are the needs of those on special diets (e.g., diabetic) considered when food is offered?
- Is the indoor/outdoor play equipment accessible to children with physical and sensory impairments?
- Are assistive eating devices available (e.g., rocker knife, non-slip placemat, built up utensils, plate with rim, non-spill mug)?

Basic Facility Awareness

Some adaptations will be expensive. It should not be an argument, however, to delay making your meeting place accessible because of how few members of the church congregation have a disability. By consulting church members, their relatives, and those who are disabled in every phase of evaluation and planning, one should have a good idea of what is needed for physical changes. This can result in productive, instead of wasteful, changes.

The following questions may help you to address some of those basic facility barriers.

- Are there pew cuts or wheelchair accessible seating available in the main body of the congregation?
- Is the stage and/or choir area accessible to those in wheelchairs?
- Are bookstands or lapboards available for those unable to hold prayerbooks, hymnals, or Bibles?
- Is the carpet no more than 1/2" thick?
- Is there visual and auditory fire alarm control 48" from the floor?
- Is there a basic plan of evacuation for persons in wheelchairs, those who are blind, or those with any mental disability who would need assistance in an emergency?
- Is special seating available with the seat 19" from the floor, armrests, a foot stool, and extra wide leg room?
- Is there a fragrance free section?
- Are walks of a continuing common surface not interrupted by steps?

Sermons/Messages

Communication is the interchange of thoughts, ideas, feelings, and facts. There is a barrier in communication when the content of the message is not understood. Various devices and sensitive actions can help compensate for visual, auditory, and/or developmental disabilities so that every person can absorb the message of God's love.

Use these questions to review communication and accessibility possibilities within the congregation.

- Are services and messages presented verbally and visually?
- Are sermons or entire services on tape?
- Is an amplified sound system, audio loop, and/or other assistive listening devices (ALDS) featured?
- Are printed sermons available?
- Is real-time or closed captioning offered?
- Are Sign Language interpreters available?
 - Is there proper lighting on the interpreter/speaker so as not to cast any shadows on him/her?
- Is the Sunday School class curriculum made for inclusion and/or special education children?
 - Are Sunday School classes for children made accessible?
 - Is a system offered where one-on-one assistance is provided?
- Do the messages/sermons in the youth group services have an inclusive philosophy and/or have special curriculum available for participants who are disabled?
 - Are youth group services made accessible?
- Do the messages/sermons in the support/small groups have an inclusive philosophy and/or have special curriculum available for disabled participants?
 - Are support/small groups made accessible?

Parking/Parking Lot

In many cases, encountering a parking structure or lot is the first impression that people receive upon entering a facility. If there is an accessible parking structure for persons who are disabled, this means an open door to the rest of the building and possibly a more enjoyable or “normal” experience when compared to persons without disabilities.

Use these questions to determine whether your parking facility is accessible.

- Is there adequate handicapped parking nearby building entrances?
- Are the accessible parking spaces clearly marked?
- Are 1 in 25 spaces handicap accessible?
 - Are the spaces at least 8' wide with a 5' access aisle?
 - Is at least one in every eight accessible spaces (if less than eight, then at least one) available for lift-equipped vans 8' wide with an 8' access aisle and 98" of vertical clearance?
- Is it easy to reach the meeting space from public transportation?
 - Is the unloading area sheltered with 114" vertical clearance?
- Is it possible to get from a parked car to any area in the building without going up or down a step or steps?
- Are the slopes of walks less than or equal to a 1' rise in 12' and a width of no less than 48"?
- Do walks have a level platform — the top should be 5' x 5' if the door swings out onto the platform or toward the walk?
- Does the platform extend at least 1' beyond each side of the doorway?

Ramps/Curb Cuts

Ramps and curb cuts are one of the easiest and cheapest improvements to make on a building structure in order to provide greater accessibility. Installing a simple ramp can mean the difference between someone having to get help up a few stairs or a curb, to being totally independent and going up the same way everyone else is.

Please use the below questions to help determine whether or not your facility is in need of ramps and/or curb cuts.

- Do curb cuts have a slope less than or equal to a 1' rise in 12' and a width of no less than 36"?
- Do ramps have a slope less than or equal to a 1' rise in 12' and a width of no less than 36"?
- Do ramps have handrails on both sides?
 - Are handrails 32" above the surface of the ramp?
- b) Do handrails extend 1' beyond the top and bottom of the ramp?
- Are floors on each story at a common level or connected by a ramp?

Doors, Doorways, Entrances, and Exits

Nothing seems to be more frustrating than not being able to fit through a door or some form of passage way. By making doorways, hallways, etc., large enough for a wheelchair to pass through, an entire facility will appear more accessible and welcoming.

By answering the questions below, you may be able to determine whether or not your meeting entrance is as accessible as it should be.

- Does the facility have automatic doors?
- Can manual doors either be opened electrically by the push of a button or do they have lever handles or push bars which require a single effort?
 - Can doors be opened by exerting 5 lbs. of pressure or less?
- Do doors have a clear opening of 36" or more?
- Is there a 5' diameter or T-shape of clear space to make turns?
- Are doors operable by a single effort? (Note: Double doors are not satisfactory unless they operate by a single effort and one of the two doors meets the 36" width requirement.)
- Is at least one primary entrance to each building usable by individuals in wheelchairs? (It is preferable that all or most entrances and exits be accessible to, and usable by, individuals in wheelchairs or persons who are otherwise disabled.)
- Are corridors at least 42" wide with passing spaces of 60"?
- Are objects that protrude more than 4" off a wall no higher than 27" from the ground?
- Is there no more than a 1/4" rise at the threshold of the door — if beveled edge, no more than 3/4"?

Meeting Locale

People with disabilities are much less likely to attend religious services at least once per month when compared to people without disabilities (47% vs. 65% respectively). More than 8 out of 10 people with and without disabilities consider their faith to be important to them; approximately 65% say their faith is very important to them. Therefore, something else — likely a barrier of architecture or attitude — is holding people with disabilities back from attending services at a church/parish, synagogue/temple, etc.

Use these questions to find out if more specific accessibility barriers are affecting your attendance.

- When counseling sessions or meetings are held, is the parsonage/church office accessible?
- Is the path of travel between furniture, etc., at least 36" wide? (42" is preferred)
- When sitting at a table is required, is there at least 27" clearance on the underside?
- Are at least two in 25 spaces provided for wheelchairs? (Each space should be 33" wide.)
- Do at least two in 25 spaces have extra leg room for disabled persons with crutches, walkers, braces, or casts?

Restrooms

Accessible restrooms are as important as the rest of the facility. Doorways a little wider, dispensers a little lower, and a large enough space to turn a wheelchair around in, are all things to keep in mind when making restrooms accessible.

As a guide, use the below checklist to review the accessibility of your restrooms.

- Are entrances and doors at least 36" wide?
- Is there at least one bathroom stall that...
 - is at least 36" wide? (42" is preferred)
 - has a 48" clear depth from the door to the front of the commode?
 - has a door that is at least 32" wide and swings out? (36" is preferred)
 - has grab bars on at least one side and one in the back which meet specifications?
 - has a commode with the seat 17" to 19" from the floor?
 - has a turning space of 5' x 5'?
- Is there at least one accessible bathroom stall provided on each floor?
- Does the sink have 29" of clearance from the floor to the bottom of the sink?
 - Are there lever-type faucet controls?
- Are the towel dispensers, soap dispensers, mirrors, and hand dryers no higher than 40" from the floor?
- Do the markings on the doors have access symbols, gender symbols, Braille, and letters?

Water Fountains

Most facilities, no matter how small, will have accessible water fountains of some kind. Some may be lowered, some may have cups on the wall, and others may have a more arched shoot of water coming out of the spout. Whatever the case may be, it still helps to have it as easily accessible as possible.

These questions below may help you in designing a disability-friendly water fountain.

- Are at least half of the water fountains accessible?
- Is the spout no more than 36" from the floor?
- Are they easily operated by users in wheelchairs?
- Are a supply of water cups mounted next to the water fountains?
- Is there at least one water fountain on each floor that is usable and accessible by persons who are physically disabled?

Telephones

In cases of emergencies, life-threatening or not, it is prudent to assume that persons with disabilities will need to use a phone as much as a person without disabilities. Every facility should have telephones accessible to those who cannot use a standard phone or payphone — not just for emergencies, but also as a courtesy.

Compare the checklist below to what is already available in your church.

- Is there easy access to a telephone for someone in a wheelchair?
- Is there at least one phone with the top of the controls no more than 48" high from the floor with a knee clearance of at least 27"?
- Is there at least one hearing aid compatible phone that has volume control/amplification?
- Is there a TTY phone available?
 - o Are volunteers/staff trained to use this?

Elevators, Lifts, and Stairs

One of the more expensive ways to make a facility more accessible is to add an elevator. While many churches and small organizations may not be able to afford this, there are some grants and financial aid available to help in this area. For more information on this, please see the documented organizations in the notes at the end of this checklist or visit the Financial Assistance Resource List on our website, <http://www.joniandfriends.org>, under *Programs and Resources, Resource Center*. Our Christian Fund for the Disabled (CFD) program may also be beneficial in this - please see our website *Programs and Resources, Area Ministries* for more information. As most facilities have at least one set of stairs in them, there is a portion of questions below regarding accessible stairs. Some may have lifts for which a section has been provided including that information as well.

Note: Lifts are not permitted in new construction except where no other alternative is possible.

The below questions were designed to help you make any necessary improvements in this area.

- Are there slightly raised abrasive strips on top steps to warn people with limited sight where stairs begin?
- Do stairs have handrails on both sides 32" above the step?
 - o Do the handrails extend 1' beyond the top and bottom of the stairs?
- Is an elevator or chair lift available to insure access to the sanctuary and all program areas?
 - o Are the controls placed 54" or less from the floor, reachable from a wheelchair?
 - o Is there Braille on the control panels?
 - o Is there a handrail on at least one side 32" from the floor?
 - o Is the cab large enough for someone in a wheelchair to enter, turn around, reach the controls, and exit?
 - o Is the door at least 36" wide?
 - o Is there an emergency intercom identified by Braille and usable without voice communication?

Disclaimer

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Joni and Friends has been authorized by the following organizations to include the information on this list. Joni and Friends can assume no liability in the recommendation of any product, service or organization, nor does this constitute an endorsement. We encourage you to evaluate these organizations for yourself. Please note that these are not necessarily Christian organizations.

For more information about **National Organization on Disability (N.O.D.)**, visit its website at: <http://www.nod.org> and click on "Religion".

For a complete accessibility checklist approved by the Americans with Disabilities Act (A.D.A. in association with the Department of Justice), go to: <http://www.access-board.gov/ufas/UFASchecklist.txt>.

The **Uniform Federal Accessibility Standards** (U.F.A.S. in association with the Department of Justice) offers a complete accessibility checklist and can be found at: <http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/checktxt.htm>.

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Additional information about international accessibility not used in this research can be found by accessing "Accessibility for the Disabled: A Design Manual for a Barrier Free Environment" distributed by the United Nations at: <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/designm/AD4-01.htm>.