Changing Culture
Helping Churches Welcome and Embrace People Affected by Disability

**What is Culture?** Culture is the invisible force that guides the growth and development of groups of people. Culture is the sum of the beliefs and values that shape **what** we do, **how** we do it, and **why** it's being done!

While businesses have the luxury of creating their own mission statements, churches have already been given a mission! In Mark 16:15, Jesus tells his disciples to “go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone.” By cultivating a culture of belonging, our churches can expand their reach to **everyone**. A church culture that excludes people with disabilities (even accidentally) is a church that is unable to go into **all** the world, because it has shut the door on people with disabilities! At best, a church like that can go into **most** of the world and preach the Good News to **many** people.

Creating a healthy church culture is like cultivating a healthy plant. Both take time, effort, and intentionality. But when we invest time in tilling hard soil, removing rocks and weeds, fertilizing, and ensuring access to sunlight and water, the crops we cultivate will begin producing fruit. We can’t force any given plant to produce fruit, but we can create an environment that gives it every opportunity to thrive.

Changing the culture of our churches is similar! We can’t force individual people to love and embrace people with disabilities, but we can prepare the soil to give people a chance to root deeply and grow in our community. So how do we prepare our churches to bear fruit? How do we form culture?

**How is Culture Formed?** It is taught and caught; it is formed by **words** and **deeds**. When we align what we say with what we do, we model the culture of our churches.

**Words** are important because they help form patterns of thought. Proverbs 12:18 tells us that “the words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.” Words don’t need to be spoken with malice to cut deeply. Reckless words can harm, but words chosen with wisdom can restore hearts and heal hurts. The way disability is spoken about by church leaders will shape the thoughts and beliefs of the congregation. Silence from pastors and ministry leaders will allow other voices to shape the congregation’s beliefs. Clear teaching on disability is needed for a true cultural change.

**Deeds** are where the rubber meets the road. Deeds are an embodiment of beliefs and values. They are words given form. As James 2:17 says, “Faith by itself isn’t enough. Unless is produces good deeds, it is dead and useless.” It doesn’t matter what we believe if that belief doesn’t motivate us to action! A church that believes, “Everyone needs to hear the Good News of Christ,” but doesn’t take strides towards removing barriers that keep people with disabilities from fully belonging has stopped short of living, useful faith. Right belief is necessary, but right belief should always lead to action!