

Disabilities

“For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: Love your neighbor as yourself.” Galatians 5:14 NLT

There are approximately 54 million people living in the United States with various kinds of disabilities that impact the way they lead their daily lives. Conditions causing disability include mental illness, blindness, military injuries, mental retardation, learning disabilities, and problems with hearing. A large portion of this population have physical disabilities or mobility problems because of a link to diseases like multiple sclerosis, cerebral palsy, polio, or various spinal injuries.

Historically we have handled this population poorly and rather than encourage them, have kept them isolated in their homes. How welcoming were the sweeping staircases in churches of the 1900's? Are we doing better today or are we still keeping people 'trapped' at home with caregivers that are just as isolated? Churches need to include the disabled into the active life of membership as well as support the families who care for them. Check in with the family of those with disabilities to see how you can be of help. Offer to sit with the husband disabled from a stroke so the wife can get her hair done. Take the mother/spouse of one dealing with mental illness out for lunch to offer her respite from her daily challenges. Sometimes it's the small things that help the most.

Those with disabilities want to be productive at home and at church so look for ways to be inclusive. Is your building handicap accessible? Can a person get into the sanctuary as easily as they can the bathroom? Are there classes, small groups, or ministries in which the disabled can participate? Evaluate the tools that are currently available in your church. Are there devices and magnifiers to help the hearing and visually impaired? Have classes been adapted to welcome those with Down's Syndrome or other mental disorders? Are there groups to support the families of those with disabilities? Christ welcomed everyone to his table; what about you? Ask your parish nurse for additional ways to welcome all to your family.

(Source: *Interfaith Disability Connection* www.interfaithdisability.org)

References / Resources:

www.disabilityinfo.gov/ - sponsored by the US Dept of Labor – has information on employment, education, housing, transportation, health, and more

www.accessiblesociety.org/casindex.shtml - The Center for an Accessible Society – originally funded by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research – links, articles, and resources for individuals/professionals

www.nod.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Page.viewPage&pageId=3 – National Organization on Disability – resources specific to faith communities