



Welcoming People with Physical Disabilities to Church

1. First Contact

- Greet the person naturally and warmly.
- Avoid making assumptions about what they can or cannot do.
- Make eye contact and speak directly to them — not only to a companion or carer.
- If they use mobility aids (wheelchair, walker, crutches), position yourself at a comfortable eye level if possible.
- Ask: **“Is there anything that would make things easier for you today?”**
- If offering physical assistance, wait for consent before touching mobility equipment.

2. Offering Help

- Ask before helping — never assume.
- Offer options such as:
 - “Would you like support finding a suitable seat?”
 - “Is there a particular route that works best for you?”
 - “Would you prefer to stay with your mobility aid during the service?”
- Respect their independence — many people have well-practiced routines.
- If they decline help, accept this graciously.

3. Accessibility Tips

- Ensure entrances and pathways are clear of obstacles.
- Hold doors open if needed, but don’t pull or push someone’s wheelchair without permission.
- Be mindful of uneven floors, steps, or narrow spaces — offer guidance if appropriate.
- If giving directions, be specific and clear:
 - “Straight ahead, then a gentle slope to the right.”
- Allow extra time for movement or transitions.

4. Seating

- Ask where they would like to sit — preferences vary.
- Many people appreciate:
 - Space for a wheelchair or mobility aid
 - Aisle seating for easier access
 - Avoiding steep steps or tight rows
 - A clear view of the front without needing to stand
- If your church has accessible seating areas, ramps, or level access, point these out.
- Ensure companions or family members can sit nearby if desired.

5. During the Service

- Avoid asking people to stand unless it's optional — and say so clearly.
- If there are moments requiring movement (e.g., coming forward for communion), explain the options:
 - “You’re welcome to remain seated — we can bring communion to you.”
 - “There is level access via the side aisle if that’s easier.”
- Ensure readers, preachers, and leaders avoid blocking aisles or accessible spaces.
- If using screens, make sure text is readable from accessible seating areas.

6. Communion & Movement

- Explain the pattern of movement verbally and visually if needed.
- Offer choices:
 - Coming forward
 - Receiving communion in the pew
 - Having someone accompany them if they wish
- If guiding, walk at their pace and avoid rushing.
- Never move a wheelchair, walker, or stick without permission.

7. After the Service

- Crowded spaces can be difficult to navigate — offer to find a quieter area for conversation.
- Ask if they would like assistance reaching refreshments, the exit, or the toilet.
- If refreshments are served at high tables, offer to bring items to a comfortable height.
- Introduce others clearly and ensure conversations happen at an accessible level.

8. Emergency Situations

- Know the accessible evacuation routes in your building.
- If an alarm sounds, check that the person is aware and able to move safely.
- Offer assistance but follow their instructions — they know what works best.
- If using an evacuation chair or alternative route, ensure trained volunteers are available.
- Stay with the person until they are safe outside.

9. Please Avoid

- ✗ Leaning on or touching someone's wheelchair or mobility aid without permission
- ✗ Speaking only to a companion or carer
- ✗ Blocking accessible aisles or designated seating
- ✗ Rushing someone or showing impatience
- ✗ Assuming all disabilities are visible
- ✗ Saying “It's only a few steps” or “You'll be fine”

10. Remember

Ask ~ Respect ~ Include

People with physical disabilities are the experts in their own needs. Follow their lead, offer support without pressure, and ensure they feel fully part of the worshipping community.