

# **Worship and Christian Education Suggestions for Disability Awareness Sunday 2005**

*How Do We See Each  
Other?*



*As Separate Pieces or the  
Whole Body of Christ?*

In I Corinthians 12:12, we read:

*For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. (NRSV)*

Yet for many people with disabilities and challenging conditions in our churches, we don't move beyond being welcoming – if they can even make it into our church buildings. We don't take that next step of nurturing them and transforming their lives through the example of Jesus.

Sue Sterling Montgomery, pastor of the Nickleville Presbyterian Church in Emlenton, PA uses a wheelchair due to bilateral osteoarthritis. Montgomery says churches that welcome wheelchair users give themselves hearty slaps on the back, "but being welcomed still leaves me as a guest. There has to be more. We have to break the mold of what is understood as Christian community and rebuild it with disability being part of it from the ground up. We can't build the community and then say, 'Welcome, now you're an invited guest.'" She adds, "Hear us, hear our experiences, hear our life stories, and hear how God is working through us."

In essence, Montgomery is saying see us – all of us with whatever gifts and abilities we bring – not as separate guests to be welcomed for a Sunday morning but as a part of the whole Body of Christ to be loved and cared for every day. Use our talents, learn from our experiences, show by example how Christ transformed all those with whom he had contact.

*How do we see each other?*

## What is Disability Awareness Sunday?

The 1996 General Conference of The United Methodist Church voted to create **DISABILITY AWARENESS SUNDAY**. The **2000 Discipline** states in ¶ 265.4:

*Disability Awareness Sunday shall be observed annually on a date to be determined by the annual conference. Disability Awareness Sunday calls the Church to celebrate the gifts and graces of persons with disabilities and calls the Church and society to full inclusion of persons with disabilities in the community. If the annual conference so directs, an offering may be received and the funds used by the annual conference to promote the work of creating architectural and attitudinal accessibility in local churches.*

In the Virginia Conference, Disability Awareness Sunday is the **first Sunday in February** – without a special offering.

## How Should We Celebrate Disability Awareness Sunday?

This special Sunday gives every congregation the opportunity to challenge our hospitality and our inclusion of all persons into the full life of the church. This can be a time when persons with disabilities can offer their gifts and graces to the congregation and to God as participants, liturgists and leaders in this celebration. As you celebrate this special Sunday, let it be an opportunity for the congregation to launch or extend its hospitality to persons with disabilities. The trustees and other groups should involve members of the congregation along with their sisters and brothers with disabilities in identifying and offering solutions to physical, architectural, communication and attitudinal barriers.

Develop specific plans and strategies to eliminate those barriers so that your congregation might be fully hospitable to all of God's people.

## How to Use These Materials...

The worship material included in this packet is designed so that you can incorporate pieces into your Order of Worship or fellowship times. Some of the materials have been prepared by the Southeastern United Methodist Agency for Rehabilitation, Inc. (SEMAR) for their 2004 Disability Awareness Sunday packet. Others have been developed by members of our Conference or disability advocacy groups. All references are noted for sources outside our Conference. The awareness materials which are included can be used for Sunday School or small group activities at any time during the year.

Help us as a part of your disability awareness activities to educate Virginia United Methodists on the opportunity to be in relationship with adults with developmental disabilities in our churches and communities. *February is the time set aside for special conference offerings for Heart Havens, the conference-related agency which provides group homes for adults with mental retardation.* While we encourage you to put Heart Havens before your church during this month, there are many opportunities to be in mission and ministry with Heart Havens throughout the year.

For more information about these materials, programs of the Commission on Disabilities, or specific church needs, contact:

Martha Stokes  
Office of Disabilities and  
Lay Life and Ministries  
Virginia Conference of  
The United Methodist Church  
PO Box 1719, Glen Allen, VA 23060  
(800) 768-6040 or (804) 521-1100 ext. 154  
E-mail: [MarthaStokes@vaumc.org](mailto:MarthaStokes@vaumc.org)  
[www.vaumc.org](http://www.vaumc.org)

## Worship Service Ideas

### Call to Worship

*(The congregation will divide left & right)*

Left: We gather together as people with abilities and disabilities,

**Right: With hopes, dreams, and visions,**

Left: Glimpsing a time when there will no longer be insiders and outsiders,

**Right: When all are held together in the love of God.**

**All: Let us worship as a foretaste of this vision!**

*(2004 Disability Awareness Sunday materials,  
Southeastern United Methodist Agency for  
Rehabilitation, Inc.)*

### The Confession of Sin

Almighty and creating God; we come before you today as people who are separated from one another by fears, prejudices, and an inability to reach beyond ourselves to discover the joy of community. By our language, actions, and facilities we declare insiders and outsiders in our lives and in our church. Forgive us and create in us the vision of opening our hearts, minds, and doors as wide as the love of God, so that no one is left outside. Give us the vision to see that all people have gifts and abilities to share as part of our community of faith. We pray in the name of the one who always saw the best in people, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

*(2004 Disability Awareness Sunday materials,  
Southeastern United Methodist Agency for  
Rehabilitation, Inc.)*

## Prayer of Petition/Response

**ALL:** Recognizing our dependence on the Lord to care for all God's people, we bring these petitions before God:

*(After each request, all respond:*

***"Lord hear our prayer."***)

1. That our churches may be welcoming inclusive communities to all people, especially those who may be overlooked by the rest of society....
2. That we and our brothers and sisters with challenging conditions may realize our dignity as sons and daughters of God through faith in Christ....
3. That the people of God will openly receive the gifts brought by people who have disabilities....
4. That we recognize the beauty of God's creating hand in each person regardless of any human limitations we may have....
5. That the God of Reconciliation will unite all of us in praise for making each of us the special person we are....

**ALL: God, we praise you for the gifts you give each person. Help us accept ourselves and one another as brothers and sisters regardless of abilities and challenges. Let us love with Your love which excludes no person. We ask this in Jesus' name, our Lord and Savior. Amen.**

*(Mennonite Mutual Aid Worship Resources:  
Celebrating Our Oneness in the Body of Christ)*

## Affirmation

As God's creations, we are fashioned uniquely,

Each endowed with individuality of body, mind, and spirit

To worship freely the One who has given us life.

Each of us has abilities; each seeks fulfillment and wholeness.

Each of us has disabilities; each knows  
isolation and incompleteness.  
Seeking shelter from the vulnerability we all  
share,  
Claiming our promised place in God's  
Household of Faith,  
We are transformed by invitation, affirmation,  
and love.

In grateful response, we...  
Worship and serve God, the source of hope  
and joy;  
Celebrate and serve one another, rejoicing in  
our diversity;  
Transform and serve the world, until we  
become a community which reflects God's  
Oneness and Peace.

Let the House of God be open to all who  
would enter and worship.

*(That All May Worship: An Interfaith Welcome to  
Persons with Disabilities, National Organization on  
Disability, Washington, DC, 1997)*

## Children's Story

**Preparation:** Put a small jigsaw puzzle  
together. Apply masking tape to the back to  
hold the pieces together so that the entire  
picture shows. Remove an important piece or  
two, leaving holes in the picture.

**Story:** Explain how the puzzle was put  
together, whether it was hard or difficult, how  
many people it took. Once it was done, you  
realized there were important pieces missing,  
pieces that helped to make the picture whole.  
Explain that as you worked to put the puzzle  
together, it struck you as to how the church is  
like a jigsaw puzzle. We have to put the  
church together – piece by piece. It's hard. It  
takes time. It takes many pieces working  
together. If a piece is left out, the picture is  
not clear. And there are times when we don't  
know if all the pieces are going to fit together.  
With each piece, the picture becomes clearer.

Ask, "Have you ever put together a puzzle,  
only to find there were pieces missing?"

Explain that at times people who are different  
from ourselves for many reasons – disability,  
color of their skin, the clothes they wear, how  
much money they have, or where they live –  
are the missing piece of life's puzzle. They  
are often not seen as a piece of the whole  
picture, and that makes the picture not be  
complete.

Only when we accept everyone for the gifts  
and graces they bring, can the picture of the  
church be made clear. We need to welcome  
and support the ability of all people be a  
contributing part of God's family.

## Responsive Reading

*This reading is paraphrased from I Corinthians 12:12-  
27 and adapted from The Banner Newspaper, May 27,  
1985.*

**Reader 1:** For just as the body is one and has  
many kinds of members and all the members  
of the body, though many, are one body, so it  
is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were  
baptized into one Body – healthy, wise,  
challenged – and all were made to drink of  
one Spirit.

**Reader 2:** For the church does not consist of  
one kind of member, but of many. The person  
who is physically challenged may say,  
"Because I am not able to move as freely as  
others, I cannot do all tasks by myself. Yet I  
am no less a part of this body." And the  
person with mental retardation may say,  
"Because I learn new things differently than  
you do, I need extra help and time. Yet I am  
no less a part of this body." The person who  
is hearing impaired may say, "Because I do  
not hear well, I cannot sing on key. Yet I am  
no less a part of this body."

**Reader 3:** If the whole church were teachers,  
where would the learners be? If the whole

church were well off, where would the needy be? As it is, God arranged the kinds of people in a church, each one of them, as God chose. If all were a single kind with the same mind, where would the church be?

**Reader 4:** As it is, many kinds of people are needed, yet there is one church. People who are able to read litanies cannot say to the non-readers, “We really don’t need you.” Nor can folks who are emotionally stable say that they don’t need those who are emotionally challenged. On the contrary, the people of the church who seem weaker are indispensable. But God has so composed the church that there may be no discord in the membership and that members may have the same care for one another – a covenant of care for one another.

**All Readers:** If one member suffers, all suffer together. If one member is left out, all are hurt. If one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now we are the Body of Christ, and each one of us is a part of it!

**Suggestions for Scripture Focus and  
Message for Disability Awareness  
Sunday 2005**

*These gleanings are written by Rev. Dr. Thomas W. Binford III, Pastor of the First United Methodist Church in Pulaski, Tennessee. Dr. Binford is the Chair of the Board of Directors of The Southeastern United Methodist Agency for Rehabilitation, Inc. (SEMAR).*

**Suggested Scripture: Exodus 3: 1-17**

**Answering a Call:** In the call of Moses, he has all kinds of excuses for not responding to God. But for every reason, God has a response. Finally, Moses says send someone else. God gets angry with Moses. So is the call of those who are called by God to set people free. People with disabilities continue to be on the edge of society and many with

little or no power to change their lives. When more than 1 in 10 or 1 in 7 (depending on your source) has a disability, this gigantic proportion of our population needs people like you and me to respond to the call of God to open the hearts, minds, and doors of our churches and society to people with disabilities.

The American with Disabilities Act has some holes in it. It still takes people making practical moral decisions to open the doors of society. The response of many churches has to do with the cost of making their facilities accessible. But when all of America’s society has to be accessible, what kind of statement is it when churches are not? Keep Out! Not wanted! Remain Outside!

What stand is God calling you and your church to take?

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**Suggested Scripture: Acts 3: 1-10**

**Left Outside:** In this text we find a man with a disability who every morning is laid at the entrance to the gate called beautiful. Because he is different, because he is not able to perform like everyone else, he is an outsider. He is not able to participate in worship, in the community, or in a fulfilling life. He has been pressed down to being a beggar.

The action of Peter and John changes this man. By introducing him to Jesus he is made whole. He can walk by his two feet, or with crutches, braces, or artificial legs. He is made whole because he has become an insider able to participate in worship, share with others in community, and discover who God intended him to be as a child of God.

Are we willing to reach out in faith to those who are different from us and invite them to join us in the living of life?

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***Suggested Scripture: Luke 5:17-26***

***Standing in the Way:*** There are many barriers which prevent people from coming to Jesus. Some are physical barriers like steps, ramps that are too steep, narrow doors or restrooms that are too small. Other barriers become people like you and me who literally are blocking the way by our attitudes, insensitivity to the needs of others, or inability to dream.

The friends in this text are creative and remove the roof to lower the man who is paralyzed down to Jesus. Have we been creative lately? People with disabilities are like every one else with a need for housing, transportation, employment and some need more personal care than others. In a changing society, we need to be creative to enable people with disabilities of all ages to live out their calling of God to the best of their abilities.

The story sets up a controversy with the Pharisees over who can forgive sins. The true sin is not that a person was paralyzed, but that he was left outside. We must all come before our forgiving God for those we have prevented from coming inside to Christ.

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**Other Message Gleanings...**

...A message using the United Methodist Igniting Ministry message theme: *Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors*. As we seek to have open hearts - open minds - open doors, we must move beyond opening the door to welcome only those who can climb the steps to enter. We must move beyond opening our hearts to love only those who look like us. We must move beyond opening our minds to accept only those who think like us.

...A message on the full inclusion of persons with disabilities in our churches. Suggested

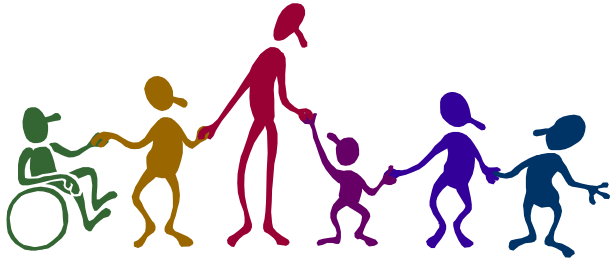
Scriptures include: Psalm 15:1-5 (1989 UMH #747); Genesis 1:26-31; Matthew 28:16-20; I Corinthians 12: 14-27. As the Body of Christ, we are called to care for all the parts of the Body. If we truly want to live as the Body of Christ, we cannot let part of the body suffer from neglect. There is the challenge facing the church of Jesus Christ: Will we be a whole church that includes all people, or will we be a broken incomplete church?

...A message on accessibility and the church using Ecclesiastes 3:1-8. At different times in the life of almost every church, there is the great opportunity of building or construction. This is an opportunity for accessibility. The issue is whether we are committed to making the life of our church open to everyone.

...A message on the accessible God based on John 3:16-21. If God is accessible, then God's people ought to be accessible. "For God so loved the world" becomes an invitation to be open to all people with our love and care.

If you would like a speaker for your worship service, UMM, UMW, Sunday School or church event to focus on disability awareness or programs of the Commission on Disabilities, contact Martha Stokes in the Conference office.

If you would like a speaker on Heart Havens, contact Geoff Whittaker, President of Heart Havens, at 804-237-6097 or toll-free at 1-877-442-8368.



## Christian Education Ideas

### Discussion Starters and Questions for Sunday School, Bible Study, and Fellowship Groups:

Raise questions such as these and follow-up with a discussion of our United Methodist beliefs, Social Principles, doctrinal standards, and scriptural references relating to health and wholeness.

- How does your congregation celebrate the unique gifts of people who cope with disabilities and their families? How does your church family continue to nurture and support these individuals? Does our support and time wane over the years?
- Reflect on this quote: “Where you place your time you place your life, and where you place your life you place your love.” Have you taken the opportunity to interact with others who experience mental retardation and other disabilities or chronic illness?
- What are the obstacles that prevent your congregation from celebrating the diversity, gifts, and graces of ALL people within your congregation?
- What would you do if...?
  - An organization such as our Conference-related agency which

provides group homes for adults with mental retardation, Heart Havens, wants to buy the house next to yours.

- A new member of your congregation who has cerebral palsy and involuntary muscle spasms has asked to be a greeter or usher.
- The church is voting today whether to spend \$30,000 to make the church accessible for those who use wheelchairs for mobility and no one in a wheelchair attends.
- The parents of a man with mental retardation and non-verbal have asked that he participate in the confirmation class and become a member of your congregation.
- The new pastor appointed to your church is blind, or hearing impaired, or has another type of disability.

### Awareness Activities for All Ages:

- Use a video or book as a discussion starter for a Sunday school class or other program.
  - A Heart Havens video is available by contacting the Heart Havens office toll-free at 877-442-8368 or by e-mail at: [geoff.whittaker@hearthavens.org](mailto:geoff.whittaker@hearthavens.org)
  - Our Conference Media Center has numerous videos and DVDs available dealing with topics related to disabilities and health concerns. These include materials on American Sign Language, mental illness, and other topics.
  - Power Point presentations on health ministries, respite programs, Camp Rainbow Connection, and hospitality

are available through the Commission on Disabilities office.

- Visit a Heart Havens or other local group home or plan a special activity with group home residents at your church.
- For churches that have Sunday school openings, place the focus of one Sunday's program on Heart Havens, Camp Rainbow Connection, or disability awareness and designate one of these programs as the beneficiary of a separate offering to be taken during that time.
- Conduct a disability awareness simulation exercise for church groups. The following activities can be conducted within the church building. They can be adapted for church members of all ages and are most successful with existing groups where relationships of trust already exist (i.e. youth group, Trustees, missions committee, Church Council). Examples of simple, but effective activities include:
  - Borrow a wheelchair, crutches, and walker and use masking tape to keep knees and ankles together. Be careful to prevent injury by using tape that can be easily broken if balance is lost. Assign participants to visit selected areas of the church (i.e. restrooms, balcony, drinking fountains, chancel area, or enter the building from the parking lot). Follow-up by completing an accessibility audit of your church building.
  - Place slings on dominant arms, tight socks on writing hands, or tie rolled up newspapers around a limb so bending is impossible. Ask participants to eat snacks, tie shoes, put on a coat, complete a puzzle, or carry things to another room.

- Play "Simon Says" using ear plugs or silently mouthing directions to simulate hearing challenges or conduct a "Reverse Simon Says" to simulate learning challenges. In "Reverse Simon Says," tell participants that they are to reverse the directions that are given (i.e. When I say, "Stand on your left foot," you should stand on your right foot).
- Put cotton balls or earplugs in both ears. Assign participants to attend worship, Bible Study, or other activities and ask them to write down what the speaker is saying.
- Wrap several layers of plastic wrap or sandwich bags to old sunglasses or rub Vaseline over existing glasses. Ask participants to read from their Sunday school materials, hymnal, or Bible.

**Conclude all the sessions with opportunities for participants to vent their feelings concerning the activity and the church's accessibility to ALL persons.**

- Invite individuals representing various types of disabilities to help educate the church. Extend invitations to individuals with disabilities to teach a special Sunday school class, sing or play an instrument during the worship service, serve as worship leader, or provide a program for a church group.