

OPEN HEARTS, OPEN MINDS, OPEN DOORS

Creating Access and Inclusion in Worship

AFFIRMATION

Some good ideas used by congregations to welcome persons with disabilities and their families in the area of affirmation:

- The faith community recognizes **talents and/or gifts** of individuals. Rarely are people described by their disabilities, instead they are recognized for their gifts. For example a woman who is blind proclaims the Scripture using Braille, and a man who is a guitar player and who uses a wheelchair performs with the music ministry.
- An **access survey** is used to determine the individual needs of the congregation and to help prioritize improvements such as accessible parking, large-print materials, improved sound system and lighting, wheelchair access, inclusive religious education classes, etc. (See access survey in this toolkit).
- Adults and children with disabilities are given **opportunities to serve others** within the worship service and in the outreach programs of the faith community.
- Worshippers with invisible disabilities are **active members** in the faith community (Invisible disabilities include learning disabilities, mental conditions, seizures, the many forms of cancer, arthritis, lupus, heart disease, stroke, etc.).
- Children of all abilities are **included in religious education classes** with appropriate supports.
- A religious or lay leader who has acquired a serious disability **continues to serve in worship services** and church leadership if he/she desires.
- A “**Care Committee**” has been created to connect the congregation to families affected by disability by means of weekly social visits, shopping assistance, caregiver break time, or babysitting. Committee members are **trained to communicate appropriately** and **to extend open-arms** to the new baby with difficulties or to the person with a new injury/condition so that all families can feel the warmth of God’s love. →

MINISTERING TO INDIVIDUALS WITH MENTAL ILLNESS

FACTS ABOUT MENTAL ILLNESS

- ✓ **Mental illnesses, such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, depressive disorders, anxiety disorders, personality disorders are physical brain disorders that profoundly disrupt a person's ability to think, feel, and relate to others and their environment.**
- ✓ **Mental illnesses are more common than cancer, diabetes, or heart disease.**
- ✓ **In any given year, more than five million Americans experience an acute episode of mental illness.**
- ✓ **One in every five families is affected in their lifetime by a severe mental illness, such as bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, major depression, and others.**
- ✓ **One in ten children and adolescents have mental illnesses severe enough to cause some level of impairment. Yet fewer than one in five of these young people receive needed treatment.**

WHAT CAN CONGREGATIONS DO TO REACH OUT TO THOSE WHO HAVE A MAJOR MENTAL ILLNESS?

Create a welcoming community for persons with mental illness.

Support persons with mental illness and their families.

Help stamp out stigma.

Work for justice in the mental health care system.

For additional information on creating a caring ministry with people with mental illness and their families, contact Pathways to Promise, Ministry and Mental Illness, 5400 Arsenal Street, St. Louis, MO 63139, phone: 314-644-8400, www.pathways2promise.org.