

**CONCERNING DISABILITY JUSTICE AND INCLUSION IN ALL MINISTRIES WITHIN
THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST) IN THE UNITED STATES AND
CANADA**

(Sense-of-the-Assembly)

WHEREAS, “We are Disciples of Christ, a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world,” called to welcome others as we have been welcomed by God¹ and to practice hospitality to one another², as well as to strangers³ which includes the unique social, political, and theological concepts of individuals with disabilities who add meaning to the entire church; and

WHEREAS, ableism⁴, or the unjust privileging of abled bodies, is a persistent problem within faith communities which fragments our communities at programmatic, theological, and systemic levels; yet, faith remains an important aspect for disabled individuals and family systems impacted by disability alike;⁵ and

WHEREAS, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada, is called to “[Transcend] all barriers within the human family,” in pursuing worship, fellowship, service, mission, witness, mutual accountability, and for the nurture and renewal of its members⁶ while at the same time Disciples historically affirm baptism as the primary call to ministry and offer baptism to all who profess their faith in Jesus Christ as Savior; and

¹ Mark 12:31 [Statement of Identity of the CC (DOC), Disciples.org]

² 1 Timothy 5:10; 1 Peter 4:9

³ 3 Romans 12:13; Hebrews 13:2

⁴ Ableism, the belief that a specific form of able-bodiedness is superior to other forms of human diversity, is rampant in our culture. Therefore, it is impacting our churches, as well. Theologies which ostracize and condemn disabilities, practices which exclude, and social norms which reject the goodness of disabled people are all tied together in a net we call ‘ableism,’ which operates to the detriment of seeing God’s goodness at work in the world. We believe that in attending to disabilities faithfully, not only will more folks access your church but your faith expression will be deeper, richer, and more in tune with our loving God. <https://disciplesaccess.wordpress.com/>

⁵ McMahon-Panther, G., & Bornman, J. (2024). “Persons with Disabilities in the Christian Church: A Scoping Review on the Impact of Expressions of Compassion and Justice on their Inclusion and Participation.” *Journal of Disability & Religion*, 29(1), 81–108. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23312521.2024.2331461>. See also, Boehm, Thomas L. and Erik W. Carter (2019). “Facets of Faith: Spirituality, Religiosity, and Parents of Individuals with Intellectual Disability.” *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities* 57 (6): 512-26.

⁶ The Design for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), section 1 paragraph 12.

WHEREAS, scripture affirms that all people are created in the image of God and share with all others in the worth that comes from being unique individuals⁷; and as Christians, we are many members, but are one body in Christ each with different gifts, called by Jesus to love our neighbors as ourselves, and called to the ministry of reconciliation and wholeness within the world and within the church; and Scripture repeatedly challenges us to eliminate barriers that limit or deny access to God's presence;⁸ and

WHEREAS, Disciples historically profess that the nature of Christian discipleship is profoundly informed by the Lord's table, which is central to the act of worship, calling attention to the radical hospitality extended by Jesus, who welcomes all to the table of Grace, and the Disciples' movement came to be in reaction to limitations being placed on this welcome, recognizing that excluding anyone from the Lord's table, fragments the body of Christ; and

WHEREAS, the Disciples' movement has consistently affirmed the practice of the priesthood of all believers, where all are invited to share the gifts that God has bestowed upon each one of us; and

WHEREAS, disability is the interaction of individual body conditions and personal and/or environmental factors, including negative theological beliefs and attitudes, inaccessible transportation, inaccessible architecture, limited social support, and social perceptions. The relationship between individuals, communities, and environments greatly impacts the extent of disability experiences. Structural, interpersonal, programmatic, and social environments can create barriers which limit or impede the full participation of disabled individuals.⁹

WHEREAS, ableism is interwoven with other forms of identity and injustice, and the response of the Christian Church to such injustices has been clear consistent without being explicit in the need for disability justice itself;¹⁰ and

⁷ Genesis 1:26-7

⁸ Leviticus 19:14; Proverbs 31:8; Isaiah 40:3-5; John 5:2-9; Hebrews 12:13.

⁹ World Health Organization. (2001). *International classification of functioning, disability and health : ICF*. World Health Organization. Note: labeling practices, such as 'disabled person' or 'person with a disability,' are both politically charged and hold personal meaning for individuals. No single term fits all people. See, ADA National Network, "Guidelines for Writing About People With Disabilities," 2018. <https://adata.org/factsheet/ADANN-writing>

¹⁰ See resolutions 8524 (Concerning the Rights of Handicapped Infants); 8546 (Concerning Priorities for the Christian Church [Disciples of Christ]); 8547 (Concerning a Coordinated Church-Wide Response to the Needs of Older Persons); 8551 (Concerning Liberation Theology); 8558 (Resolution of Concern for Persons with Conditions of Impairment); 8715 (Concerning Shalom); 8720 (Managing the Affairs of Incapacitated Persons); 8730 (Concerning the Priority for the Christian Church [Disciples of Christ]); 8750 (Concerning Racist Groups); 8956 (On Affirmative Action and Civil Rights); 9126 (Concerning Ministry to Children with Special Needs and Their Families); 9127 (In Support of Ministering to Persons with a

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58 **WHEREAS**, the church has historically throughout all of its iterations fallen short of
59 making accessible space for individuals with disabilities to be fully in community, as they
60 are, with the whole body, whether it be through inaccessible architecture,¹¹ who is
61 chosen to fill leadership positions,¹² not providing appropriate accommodations in both
62 large and small group setting,¹³ or regarding the needs of disabled individuals as an
63 afterthought in event planning, etc; and
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65 **WHEREAS**, the church in all of its iterations is in need of resources, guidance and
66 support from which to learn in order to grow in its professed and declared welcome of all
67 at the table, recognizing that disability as a concept and people with disabilities
68 themselves offer value and meaning to the church; and
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70 **WHEREAS**, General Assembly Resolution 1327, adopted in 2013, affirms the desire to
71 “recognize itself as striving to become a people of grace and welcome to all God’s
72 children though differing in...physical or mental ability”; and
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74 **THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the General Assembly meeting in Memphis,
75 TN, July 12-15, 2025, calls upon the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United
76 States and Canada to recognize itself as striving to become a people of grace and
77 welcome to all God’s children though differing in race, gender, age, sexual orientation,

Serious Mental Illness and their Families); 9334 (Concerning Civil Rights); 0113 (Report from the Anti-Racism/Pro-Reconciliation Initiative of the Christian Church [Disciples of Christ] and An Apology from the General Board of the Christian Church [Disciples of Christ] to the Americans of African Descent); 0319 (Assuring Civil Liberties and Equal Justice to Immigrant Communities in the United States); 1121 (Justice in Education Reform); 1123 (Support of Children and Youth by Opposing Bullying in Schools, the Church, and the Community); 1322 (Hearing Accessibility for Participants); 1323 (Incarceration, Justice, and Restoration in the United States); 1327 (Becoming a People of Grace and Welcome to All); 1518 (Black Lives Matter: A Movement for All); 1523 (Becoming a People of Welcome and Support to People with Mental Illness and/or Mental Health Issues); 1722 (Repudiation of the Christian Doctrine of Discovery: A Call to Education and Action and Support for Indigenous Voices in the Witness of the Christian Church [Disciples of Christ]); 1929 (An Invitation to Education for Welcoming and Receiving the Gifts of Transgender and Gender-Diverse People); 2352 (Invitation to Oppose Anti-Trans Legislation and Affirm The Dignity of Transgender and Gender-Diverse People)

¹¹ Stewart-Ginsburg, J. H., et al (2024). “A Preliminary National Survey of Accessible Features of Churches in the United States,” *Review of Religious Research* 66 (4), August 2024.

¹² See the Special Issue in Theology and Disability, Raffety, Erin (ed.), *Theology Today* 77 (2), July 2020.

¹³ See: “Pastors’ Views on Caring for People with Disabilities Survey of American Protestant Pastors,” *LifeWay Research*, September 2019. <https://research.lifeway.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Report-Pastors-Disabilities-Sept-2019.pdf>

and “Protestant Churchgoer Views on Attendees With a Disability Survey of American Protestant Churchgoers,” *LifeWay Research*, September 2019. <https://research.lifeway.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Churchgoers-Disabilities-Sept-2019.pdf>

and Taylor, C. E., Carter, E. W., Annandale, N. H., Boehm, T. L., & Logeman, A. K. (2014). *Welcoming people with developmental disabilities and their families: A practical guide for congregations*. Vanderbilt Kennedy Center.

gender identity, nationality, ethnicity, marital status, ability or disability status, political stance or theological perspective; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the General Assembly calls upon the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada to support the rights of disabled members to a self-directed faith, baptism, a place at the table, equitable participation, exploration and development of spiritual gifts, and leadership possibilities including employment and/or the pursuit of ordination.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the General Assembly calls upon the whole embodiment of the church to engage in training and learning opportunities to work through conscious and unconscious biases that seek to deny the Imago Dei from the members of the disability community; all forms of ministry are encouraged to pursue education, resources, consultations, and direct support to further efforts of faithfully including disabled individuals and communities.¹⁴

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the General Assembly calls upon the regions, general ministries, and institutions of higher education, of the church to make disability justice training available for congregations and ministries, through the sharing of existing opportunities for disability-focused professional development and/or continuing education.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the General Assembly calls upon the whole embodiment of the church to incorporate accessible registration practices for events, including open communication about existing and needed accommodation practices.¹⁵

FINALLY, BE IT RESOLVED that the General Assembly calls upon the church in all of its myriad contexts to discern pathways to develop and implement internal minimum standards for accessible events and presentations with accessibility for the whole body of Christ in mind.

¹⁴ Resources will necessarily be contextual to each ministry, but for general disability justice concepts see: Sins Invalid, "10 Principles of Disability Justice." <https://sinsinvalid.org/10-principles-of-disability-justice/> For a primer on congregational engagement, see Carter, Erik (2007), "Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities: A Guide for Service Providers, Families, and Congregations." Paul H. Brookes Publishing. For ecumenical resources, see United Church of Christ Disabilities Ministries at <https://uccdm.org/> and Disability Ministries of the United Methodist Church at <https://www.umcdmc.org/>. For Disciples-affiliated disability consultations, training, and networking, see Disciples Access at <https://disciplesaccess.wordpress.com/>.

¹⁵ For general principles and guidelines, see the Americans with Disabilities Act National Network, "A Planning Guide for Making Temporary Events Accessible to People with Disabilities." <https://adata.org/guide/planning-guide-making-temporary-events-accessible-people-disabilities>

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First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Anchorage, AK
North Hill Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Spokane, WA
Webster Groves Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), St. Louis, MO