

EMBRACING OUR WORKERS

Hiring and Including Persons with Disabilities in Church Leadership and other Support Roles

As the Presbyterian Church, we are not necessarily exempt from the provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) concerning the employment of persons with disabilities. While national ADA-Title I requirements apply to churches employing 15 or more persons, **the State of Oregon extends those requirements to churches employing 6 or more people.** ADA also states that “those involved in the religious ministry, such as ministers, priests, or rabbis are not covered under Title I”. However, as a part of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) commitment to full participation of persons with disabilities, our denomination’s *Book of Order* was amended in 1993 to forbid discrimination against persons with disabilities in calling individuals to ministerial leadership.

The ADA prohibits discrimination in all employment practices, including job application procedures, hiring, firing, advancement, compensation, training, and other terms, conditions and privileges of employment. It also applies to recruitment, advertising, tenure, layoff, leave, fringe benefits, and all other employment-related activities.

In most cases, churches can comply with ADA employment provisions through job restructuring, low-cost or no-cost accommodations, and rewriting job descriptions to highlight the essential functions of the provision. As a simple first step, application forms should be reviewed and questions relating to disability be removed. Subsequent steps may include making “reasonable accommodations” for persons with disabilities to perform essential job functions. Examples include modifying work schedules, acquiring or modifying equipment, making the workplace readily accessible to and usable by people with disabilities, or reassigning a current employee to a vacant position for which the individual is qualified should the person become unable to do their original job because of a disability even with an accommodation.

Reasonable accommodation also includes adjustments to assure that a qualified individual with a disability has rights and privileges in employment equal to those employees without disabilities.

While statutory language of the ADA and its implementing regulations must be applied on a case-by-case basis, churches of all sizes are called by the higher mandate of God when it comes to employing persons with disabilities in *any* position, and that we as the church should be the model for the secular world to follow.

For more information concerning specific provisions or interpretation of the Americans with Disabilities Act contact the DBTAC Northwest ADA Information Center at 1-800-949-4232 or (TTY) 425-771-7438

[Back to Opening Doors page](#)