

Creating a “Task Force on Disabilities” for Your Own Church

For your congregation to make a long-lasting, appropriate impact in welcoming people with disabilities into the life of your church, a planning structure will be needed. The most important first step is to enlist a group of committed people, including those with disabilities, and create a Task Force on Disability Issues.

Before approaching specific members of the congregation, first ask for the support and authorization from your Session. Following that, give the Task Force status by asking your pastor to sign a letter inviting members to serve.

Invite, as Task Force members, people who have:

- various types of disabilities
- a family member with a disabling condition
- responsibility to plan and lead worship
- influence in making church policy
- responsibility for managing the building
- skills in architecture, carpentry, or contracting
- responsibility for educational curricula, especially special education skills
- experience in fund raising
- responsibility for community outreach
- skills in writing and communicating

Each meeting and activity planned by the Task Force will broaden the understanding of the participants who influence others in the congregation. Task Force members will become bolder about taking action. And after a time, additional people with disabilities will become known to the Task Force.

Possible agenda items for the initial kick-off meeting of the Task Force include:

- Discuss experiences within the congregation that may be creating barriers for people with disabilities and for their families.
- Take time to examine the moral dilemma present when a congregation excludes or does not seek out those with disabilities. Reflect on such questions as “What is it to be human?” “What is God’s role in suffering?” “What binds people together in community?” “What are the theological underpinnings for including people with disabilities into the life of the church?”
- Make lists of access problems encountered by someone with physical, mental, emotional or developmental disabilities who is trying to enter and use the building for participation in worship, programs and other social activities. To help identify barriers review the Barrier Removal Checklist contained in the *OPENING DOORS* program kit.

Agenda items for subsequent meetings of your Task Force should include:

- Evaluate policies and practices concerning worship, social, educational and outreach activities which could be viewed as discouraging to someone with a disabling condition.
- Increase congregational awareness and commitment to welcoming people with disabilities by adopting the 15-step Action Plan contained in the *OPENING DOORS* program kit.
- Divide the list of barriers and problems by type and create a prioritized, phased strategy for removing them.
- Present your recommendations to Session for their authorization to proceed.
- To begin implementation of barrier removal projects start with those that will affect the greatest number of people and can be done for no or low cost.
- Strategize about fund raising for remaining projects. Ideas should range from urging the high school youth group to sponsor a needed program, to inviting families to contribute money for a ramp or enhanced sound system in honor or in memory of a family member or friend. In addition, refer to the fund raising ideas included in the *OPENING DOORS* program kit for other creative suggestions.
- Consider making an application to the *OPENING DOORS* financial assistance program for obtaining partial funding for one of your barrier removal projects.

The Task Force will need both short-term and long-term strategies. Making changes at one point in time does not necessarily answer the need forever. Devices get broken, well-intended adjustments may prove to be inadequate, and new requests are made that are valid.

The Task Force can be an informed and pro-active support group, known in the congregation for its ability to make changes on behalf of children and adults with disabilities. Its very presence will serve to assure members and visitors who seek an accepting atmosphere for worship, education, fellowship and service.

At any point, should you desire assistance in facilitating discussions, identifying barriers, or scoping out solutions to barrier removal please feel free to contact a member of the *OPENING DOORS* Task Force. Call the Central Region Office of the Presbytery of the Cascades at (800) 926-3223 to get the name of a Task Force member nearest you.

Portions of the material contained in this document were taken from the publication THAT ALL MAY ENTER, published by the National Organization on Disabilities and edited by Ginny Thornburg.

[Back to Opening Doors page](#)