

'I WASHED AND RECEIVED MY SIGHT' AWARENESS OF THOSE WITH DISABILITIES

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT, YEAR A

Lectionary Texts: 1 Samuel 16:1-13 Psalm 23 John 9:1-41 Ephesians 5:8-14

Focus Text: John 9:1-41

¹ As [Jesus] walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" ³ Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. ⁴ We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." ⁶ When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, ⁷ saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. ⁸ The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" ⁹ Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." ¹⁰ But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" ¹¹ He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight." ¹² They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know." ¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴ Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵ Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see." ¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided. ¹⁷ So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet." ¹⁸ The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight ¹⁹ and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" ²⁰ His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; ²¹ but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." ²² His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. ²³ Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him." ²⁴ So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner." ²⁵ He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." ²⁶ They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" ²⁷ He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" ²⁸ Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹ We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." ³⁰ The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. ³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners, but [God] does listen to one who worships [God] and obeys [God's] will. ³² Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." ³⁴ They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out. ³⁵ Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" ³⁶ He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." ³⁷ Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." ³⁸ He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him. ³⁹ Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind." ⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" ⁴¹ Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains."

NRSV

ADDITIONAL TEXT

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.... All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

I Corinthians 12:4-7, 11

SCRIPTURE COMMENTARY

BY CHRIS LIU BEERS, PROGRAM ASSOCIATE
NC COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

John 9, like the rest of John's Gospel, is in one sense basically about *seeing*. The themes of sight, light and darkness run from the book's prologue to its conclusion. "In the beginning," John states, was the Word – "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have *seen* his glory... full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Later, in the 20th chapter, Jesus says to "doubting" Thomas: "Have you believed because you have *seen* me? Blessed are those who have not *seen* and yet have come to believe" (John 20:29). John makes masterful use of these themes to layer irony upon irony in order to show to his audience the truth of Jesus' claims. For example, in John 3, Nicodemus come to Jesus at night – in the dark – to question him about his identity. Standing face to face in the dark, Jesus responds by saying that "the light has come into the world" (3:19).

When we come to chapter 9, then, and encounter "a man blind from birth," we should not be surprised that this man comes to see Jesus (literally) as "the light of the world" (see 9:5) even as the Pharisees and other religious leaders remain in the dark. In this powerful encounter with Christ, a man stigmatized by society for his disability – who was rejected by religious leaders as a "sinner" (see 9:34) – comes to see the truth and, in so doing, becomes himself a light bearing witness to the One who made him whole. It is likely that the religious leaders never paid much attention to this man, disabled and poor, until his broken body became the site of God's salvific and revelatory action in the world. After this miraculous healing, the religious leaders basically put him on trial, disbelieving that "their" God would ever be concerned with someone so lowly (and sinful), especially on the Sabbath.

Jesus' concrete actions in response to the man's situation call into question not only the self-righteous judgment of the religious leaders, but also the comfortable distance maintained by the disciples. When they encounter this man in the city, they see it as an opportunity for theological reflection. "Who sinned," they want to know, "this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (9:2). While their question regarding the relationship between sin and suffering is a good one (especially in that historical context), Jesus changes the nature of the conversation altogether. The disciples want to speculate; Jesus decides to act – to welcome the man as a person and a child of God, to offer those unique gifts that he has been given to heal the man's suffering, that the glory of God might be revealed.

John's Gospel hinges on the reversal of sight and blindness, light and darkness, "ability" and "disability." It is precisely for this reason that Jesus says to the man, after he has seen Israel's Messiah with his own eyes, that "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind" (9:39).

PASTORAL REFLECTION

BY REV. DAVID SLOOP, PASTOR, GOOD
SHEPHERD LUTHERAN CHURCH, RALEIGH

In my final year in seminary, it was customary for you to go to a church looking for a pastor and offer there a "trial sermon." This was, of course, something you would spend a long time crafting, knowing your whole future might hang on how well your sermon was received.

A fellow classmate named Dwayne Steele went out to preach his trial sermon on John 9—the story of the man born blind. Dwayne Steele is blind. Now you can imagine that our whole campus was abuzz with this event. How could a congregation hear about sight from a blind man and not call him to serve as their pastor? Wouldn't they have listened a little more than ordinarily because of who was preaching on this story? Might a few eyes be opened, we wondered?

That congregation called Dwayne Steele to be their pastor. I'm confident the spirit of Christ was at work that day he preached on John 9. I have to believe that they couldn't believe what they saw that day!! A blind man proclaiming the gift of sight.

What would we do if we saw a blind man no longer blind? Would we have a hard time believing what we see? Would we search for witnesses, for new evidence? The long and complicated story of John 9 begs the question, "Who is really is blind here? The man or the ones who are sighted?" The story ends with a tragically revealing question from the sighted, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" And throughout this story, those who live in darkness work hard to insure they are right. Twice they bring in the man formerly blind. In between they hear testimony from his parents. The answers are unacceptable... so they renounce the man as unworthy, sinful. And they do away with him, casting him out.

"You were born in utter sin and you would teach us?" (v. 34). His sightedness is a threat! So Jesus who first came to this man with mud on his fingers finds him after being cast out. "Do you believe in the son of man?" Jesus asked. "And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?" Jesus said to him, "You have seen him and it is he who speaks to you." The man said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshipped Jesus.

In that day, to be sorrowful for being wrong meant putting on sackcloth. As a result of this encounter, someone needs draping with sackcloth. But the ones who need to see their sin, the religious leaders, find it easier to notice others' sin, not their own.

They see with great certainty, but their eyes are not really open. The Messiah would follow their rules, but Jesus healed on the sabbath. Why couldn't they see something else? Why couldn't they be glad with the blind man? Throw a party? Give thanks for

the new life he now has? Celebrate? Help him get his driver's license? Put him on the road giving testimony? Let him give a trial sermon?

The blind beggar healed on the Sabbath was a threat to them! His healing, his liberation was an assault on their traditions, their values, their power, their very lives. They felt attacked. And when we are threatened, we are reactive! We do not want to let go, holding tenaciously to what we know to be true. One slip, one exception, and everything we know would crumble. Must one person's liberation be another person's threat? And when we are threatened, we do not see. We trust hearsay and innuendo. We call in other witnesses who are likely to agree with us. And when all else fails, we discredit the person we find so threatening. *Must Jesus be so threatening?*

I saw it as a youth in my home congregation, when during the 60's we began receiving African-American members. But the ruling powers objected—they didn't want their church to embrace these new brothers and sisters. Some would be sitting in their pews. Did they have to be blind? Could they not see the new thing God was doing? And how about us? What is the prevailing spirit of our congregations? Many congregations have long talked about our embracing diversity... wanting to be more inclusive of others who don't look like us. We want our churches to be salt, leaven – a beacon of light where young and old / abled and disabled / all races / all who profess Christ are welcome. Do we see it? The most diverse hours in the congregations I serve are 7-9pm on the last Friday night of the month when people come to the Coffee House. The Coffee House brings together persons with and without developmental delays. On those Fridays, people who will never earn enough to live on, people of all races and abilities fill our fellowship hall with life and love. Here's an example of what we have been hoping and praying for, but do we see it? Are we made blind by our schedules, by the pace of life, such that we have no energy to embrace the very thing we say we most value?

Whereas ours is not the blindness caused by the threat of others taking our pews, it may be a blindness nevertheless. Does it have to be that way? Often we are simply motivated because we like things the way they are. There is security in what's known, what's settled. We get comfortable and we like it. But the comfort can bring a subtle blindness. Our branch of the Lutheran tree has seen a dramatic shift in our communion practices. It used to be that communion was reserved till after confirmation. Then communion age was lowered to fifth grade. Now many of our churches are embracing infant communion. It's no longer comfortable for some of us. We begin to ask ourselves, "Aren't there any rules anymore?"

Will it be a threat to us to see a 4 year old receive Jesus? Will it make the gift of Holy Communion less holy? Take away its power and significance? Or is this the gift of life Jesus intended? That he reach us all with his life giving presence. Is Jesus *threatening*? It matters a great deal if we have a certain picture of Jesus that we can no longer be surprised or changed or silenced by His presence. It matters a great deal if we can never be glad for the blind man healed on the sabbath because we are busy looking up the laws in the book. Or if we have a child reach up for Jesus beside us at the altar. Or if we begin to find Jesus fulfilling our prayers for diversity. Jesus keeps saying to us, the sighted, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam." Believe that the one sent you there can open your eyes to see someone you have never really seen before. This is the great challenge of our faith! This is the great privilege of learning to see, anew.

WORSHIP AID - 'I WASHED AND RECEIVED MY SIGHT'

RESPONSIVE READING

Gracious God,

In Your kingdom, all human notions of "giftedness" and "disability" become unimportant,

For there are a variety of gifts, but the same Spirit (I Corinthians 12:4).

In Your kingdom, faithfulness cannot be measured in terms of "productivity," but rather is characterized by loving service, gentle care, and incarnational presence with people across the barriers of race, class, gender, and "disability,"

For there are varieties of services, but the same Lord (I Corinthians 12:5).

In Your kingdom, spending time with those "in need" is more important than our many accomplishments. Often we discover that those we deem to be needy have already been given many gifts, and those of us who are not "disabled" find that we have been the ones in need all along,

For there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone (I Corinthians 12:6).

By Your grace, O God, we in the church need one another: healthy and sick. Weak and strong. The hopeful and the depressed. The friend, the enemy. The "abled" and the "disabled" - only together do we become the Body of Christ,

For to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good (I Corinthians 12:7).

In Your kingdom, everyone is welcomed and celebrated as a child of God regardless of "ability." When Christ dwelt among us, he came as one "despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity... as one from whom others hide their faces... and we held him of no account" (Isaiah 53:3).

Together, we affirm our commitment to welcome those of differing abilities from ourselves, that in acts of hospitality both great and small we would respond to God's calling upon us to be a people marked by love for one another.

Teach us, O Lord, to be mindful of the many hurdles that people with "disabilities" face daily. Show us how to create a physical and emotional environment that is truly welcoming, that in body, in mind and in heart we would be a gracious people.

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 (I Corinthians 12:12). **Amen.**

(by Chris Liu Beers)

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

O God, we know you tell us to welcome people with physical, mental or emotional disabilities so that we may share your goodness. However, out of fear, we often cling to the old ways and deny anyone we perceive as different their place at your table.

Forgive us, merciful Creator, for following human wisdom when we should be following yours.

O God, we know that those we consider to be weaker are indispensable to you and yet we treat them wrongly by forbidding them access to your sanctuary.

Forgive us, merciful Creator, for failing to care for one another.

O God, we know there are varieties of gifts, and it is you who activates all of them in everyone, but we often say in word and deed, "You do not belong to the body; I have no need for you" to those members of the body we perceive as less honorable.

Forgive us, merciful Creator, for our failure to remember that all the members of the body, though many, are one body with Christ.

O God, we know you chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise and what is weak in the world to shame the strong, and yet we make excuses for the divisions that exist within the body and our own desire for greater honor.

Forgive us, merciful Creator, for boasting of our own wisdom and our own discernment rather than recognizing the source of all life: Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from you. Help us to live in the one Spirit remembering we are all baptized into one body - broken or whole - and are all made to drink of the one Spirit that comes from you and you alone. Amen.

(adapted from the Association of Brethren Caregivers, "Worship Resources," www.brethren.org/abc/disabilities/worship.html)

SUGGESTED HYMNS

✠ <i>There is a Balm in Gilead</i>	AM 425/CH 501/NCH 553/MW 500/ TH 676/PH 394/BH 269/UMH 375/ GC 648
✠ <i>O Christ, the Healer</i>	UMH 265/PH 380/CH 503/NCH 175
✠ <i>We Have the Strength to Lift and Bear</i>	NCH 178
✠ <i>Healer of Our Every Ill</i>	GC 882
✠ <i>Have Thine Own Way</i>	BH 294/AM 345/CM 125/CH 588/ UMH 382

◆ Hymnal Legend ◆

† AM	— African Methodist Episcopal
† BH	— Baptist Hymnal
† CH	— Chalice Hymnal (Disciples of Christ)
† CM	— Christian Methodist Episcopal
† GC	— Gather Comprehensive (Rom Cath)
† LW	— Lutheran Worship
† MW	— Moravian Book of Worship
† NCH	— New Century Hymnal (UCC)
† PH	— Presbyterian Hymnal
† TH	— The Hymnal 1982 (Episcopal)
† UMH	— United Methodist Hymnal

ADDITIONAL PRAYERS

For All God's People

Let us pray for all God's people:

For people who are blind or cannot see well, and for people who can see but do not see those in need;

Lord, in your mercy make us see you and each other.

For people who are slow and cannot move well, and for people who are fast but will not slow their pace,

Lord, in your mercy help us move in step with you.

For people who are deaf or cannot hear well, and for people who can hear but block out cries of pain;

Lord, in your mercy make us hear you and each other.

For people who learn slowly or cannot think well, and for people who learn quickly but who close their minds;

Lord, in your mercy help us search and learn from you.

For people who are sad and cannot cheer up, and for people who are happy and avoid all pain;

Lord, in your mercy make us know you and each other.

For people who are sick and cannot get better, and for people who are well but do not thank you for health;

Lord, in your mercy help us serve you while we can.

For people who are kind and serve the needy, and for people who are awkward in the face of need;

Lord, in your mercy make us know we need each other.

(continued on next page)

For people who feel trapped by their impairments, and for people who feel strong and add to that despair;
Lord, in your mercy help us set each other free.
For people who feel worthless and unlovely, and for people who feel proud and do not recognize your love;
Lord, in your mercy make us know your love together.
For all the people in your whole creation, that we may cherish each other and learn to live in peace;
Lord, in your mercy teach us love and give us peace. Amen.

(from "Reformed Worship," www.reformedworship.org/magazine/article.cfm?article_id=1690)

A Communal Affirmation

On this day we stand to open our hearts and minds to the unique gifts that people with disabilities and their families bring to our congregation.

To the church of Galatia, Paul paid this rare tribute, "Even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus Himself" (Galatians 4:14).

It is Christ's expectation that we embrace everyone within our church regardless of intellectual, emotional or spiritual abilities.

We ask God's guidance as we welcome those with disabilities or mental illness and their loved ones into the life of our congregation with a compassionate and sustained response.

(from the Association of Brethren Caregivers, "Worship Resources," www.brethren.org/abc/disabilities/worship.html)

Statement of Affirmation and Commitment

We will labor so that all persons may be enabled to gather before God in worship.
We will try to see all persons as sons and daughters of God.
We will seek to let God's love living in us cast out our fear of others who are different from us.
We will look for what we have in common with others who have disabilities.
We will labor whenever possible,
So that all persons with disabilities have the freedom to enjoy life's opportunities as we do.
We will seek out the gifts, abilities and strengths of each person with a disability.
We will give thanks for God's faithfulness in the midst of our common humanity,
Trusting in the Lord all the days of our lives. Amen.

(adapted from the Association of Brethren Caregivers, "Worship Resources," www.brethren.org/abc/disabilities/worship.html)

ADDITIONAL HELPS

▣ QUOTES ▣

Society's accumulated myths and fears about disability and disease are as handicapping as are the physical limitations that flow from actual impairment.

William J. Brennan, Jr.

I thank God for my handicaps, for through them I have found myself, my work, and my God.

Helen Keller

We must not, in trying to think about how we can make a big difference, ignore the small daily differences we can make.

Marian Wright Edelman

Many congregations haven't thought much about worship and disability. That's because, according to national studies, more than 80 percent of people with disabilities don't attend church. They worry they won't be accepted. And they face physical or social barriers to fully participating in church worship, study, service, and leadership.

Calvin Institute of Christian Worship

▪ **PERSONAL VIGNETTE** ▪

"THEY ARE MY FRIENDS"

BY ROSE REAVES, NORTH HAVEN CHURCH, RALEIGH

Being a part of a church family is important to me. Church is where I go to learn about God and to be around people who know God. I learn about ways to serve God and how to live my life in the way that God wants me to. Church is also where I have met many of my closest friends.

As a person with cerebral palsy, I have had both good and bad experiences at church. It's hard for me to do a lot of things that are easy for most people. I have trouble walking, and my balance is not good. My speech is hard for people to understand. I am also at risk for choking, so somebody has to be with me whenever I eat. People who want to relate to me have to take extra time and effort.

When I was a child, I mostly lived with my Grandma. She took me to her church every week, but I did not always feel welcome. People in the church did not know how to relate to me. Sometimes they acted like I wasn't there. They did not talk to me or take the time to try to understand me when I talked. I felt like I was trouble to them. I was not able to do a lot of the activities that the other children did, so I was not included. I just stayed around my Grandma and felt bad about how things were.

When I was a teenager, I lived at O'Berry Center in Goldsboro, in foster homes, and with my Grandma. When I was with her, she continued taking me to church. By this time, the people had learned more about me and were more comfortable around me. The other teenagers in the church started including me in some of their activities. They would hug me when they saw me and invite me to go out with them. I felt a lot more welcome and important.

At the age of 21, I moved to Raleigh into a new group home run by United Cerebral Palsy. People at my Grandma's church told me that I should visit North Haven Church when I got to Raleigh. I have been an active member there for the past 20 years. The people at my church include me in everything and treat me like I am as important as everybody else. They are my friends, and I know I can call them if I need help.

-They talk to me, and they take the time to try to understand what I am saying.

-The building is accessible, so I can get around where I want to go.

-I get to be a part of all the church's activities: Sunday School, worship services, and Wednesday night Bible study. If there is a church business meeting, I can go and help make decisions. If there is a retreat or a revival, I am part of that, too.

-People in the church support causes that are important to me. They give to fundraising activities for the agencies that provide support for me. And they have asked me to speak during Sunday services, to tell them about disabilities and my work as a self-advocate.

-People at my church give me a chance to serve alongside them. I give an offering every week, and I help with church activities whenever I can.

Since I joined North Haven, there have been a lot of changes in my life. I moved out of the group home and into a place of my own, with a roommate. I have some staff who help me during the day so that I can live as independently as possible. My Grandma and other relatives have died, and I have had to deal with other stressful events. Through all of these things, my pastor and the people in the church have prayed for me and supported me.

One family used to take me to church every Sunday. We would go out to eat, and then they brought me back home. They have moved to Florida, and now they invite me to visit them every year. Another family in the church used to give me a ride home from my job so that I didn't have to take the bus, which was very hard for me, or pay for a cab.

Many people in my church have helped me over the years. I am thankful to God for them, and I am grateful to be a part of this church family.

Rose Reaves lives and works in Raleigh. She is an active self-advocate and has served in many leadership roles to speak on behalf of people with disabilities.

▪ CONTACTS AND OTHER RESOURCES ▪

- ✦ www.nod.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Page.viewPage&pageId=9 – *The National Organization on Disability's "Religions and Disability Program"* is an interfaith effort which urges national faith groups, local congregations and seminaries to identify and remove barriers of architecture, communications, and attitudes. The program helps to sponsor "That All May Worship" conferences in many local communities. These conferences bring together people with disabilities and religious leadership to plan improved access – both physical and spiritual – in houses of worship. This website also offers a helpful guide to assess your church's accessibility (see "Journey of a Congregation" on the next page).
- ✦ www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncodh – *The North Carolina Office on Disability and Health* works to promote the health and wellness of persons with disabilities in North Carolina through an integrated program of policy, practice and evaluation. The goals of the NCODH are to increase awareness and understanding of the health related needs of individuals with disabilities, to improve access and inclusion, to develop health promotion programs and educational materials for consumers and professionals, to conduct and report on research and data collection, and to affect disability policy related to these areas.
- ✦ www.cccb.ca/site/content/view/2126/1226/lang.eng – *The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops* has composed an exceptionally helpful leaflet entitled "At Worship With the Disabled," which offers specific guidance on including persons with disabilities in worship and using their gifts in the liturgy. Also included are questions for ongoing reflection among both leaders and lay-participants in worship.
- ✦ www.ncdan.com – *The North Carolina Disability Action Network* is a statewide, cross-disability project working to involve people with disabilities in civic life. Its purpose is to bring members of the disability community in North Carolina together to claim their power as citizens and take action as a unified force on issues of local, state and national concern. The project seeks to mobilize people with disabilities across the state and to support and/or organize local constituencies around issues of common concern.
- ✦ www.cladisabilitylaw.org – *Carolina Legal Assistance* protects the rights of North Carolinians with disabilities. Its mission is to create and improve access to appropriate services and treatment for children and adults with disabilities through individual and systems advocacy. CLA is available for 1) representation of clients with disabilities, 2) public education and training on issues affecting people with disabilities, 3) technical assistance to lawyers and lay advocates, and 4) contracts with advocacy and service organizations for training, referrals, technical assistance, litigation and special projects.
- ✦ www.ada.gov – Dedicated to providing information and technical assistance on the *Americans with Disabilities Act*, this website is maintained by the federal government and contains links to numerous resources, including a guide to disability rights under the law. Also included are ADA standards for accessible design in buildings, including churches, in addition to a report on the enforcement of the ADA over the past five years.

KEY FACTS

- ❑ In the year 2000 (the last year that a full census was taken in North Carolina), more than 1.5 million North Carolinians had a disability out of a total of about 8 million. Almost 20 percent of North Carolinians live with a disability of some kind.¹
- ❑ Over 14 percent of working-age persons (age 21-64) in North Carolina have a disability, compared to 12.6 percent nationally. In 2005, the poverty rate of working-age North Carolinians with a disability is about 25 percent, while the poverty rate of those without a disability is just about 10 percent.²

- ❑ In 2005, the median household income of working-age people with disabilities was \$30,300 in North Carolina. The median household income of working-age people without disabilities was \$53,900; thus the difference in the median household income between working-age people with and without disabilities was \$23,600.³
- ❑ Among the many barriers that people with disabilities face is limited educational opportunity. In 2005, among working-age people with disabilities in North Carolina, 28 percent had less than a high school diploma – more than double that of the general population. Only 11 percent had a Bachelor’s degree or more, compared with 28 percent of people without disabilities.⁴
- ❑ An estimated 227,000 North Carolinians, or 3 percent of the population 5 and over, have difficulty performing self-care activities, also known as Activities of Daily Living, such as dressing, bathing, or getting around inside the home.⁵

Journey of a Congregation:⁶

A Self-Assessment and Learning Tool of the Accessible Congregations Campaign

AWARENESS: Recognition by some congregation members or the ordained religious leadership that certain barriers were preventing children or adults with physical, sensory, psychiatric or intellectual disabilities from accessing a full life of faith (including worship, study, service and leadership).

ADVOCACY (INTERNAL): Growing advocacy within the congregation to welcome people with disabilities as full participants and to remove barriers (architecture, communications and attitudes) to this participation.

DISCUSSIONS: Concerns raised regarding ability of the congregation to meet the challenges (e.g., Are there enough people with this need to justify the expense? Will people with disabilities feel comfortable in joining us once barriers have been removed?) and then solutions identified—ideally with input from people with disabilities and other experts.

PLANS: Invitation of people with disabilities to join the congregation as full members (including participation in rites of passage and initiation), action plans devised to achieve barrier-removing goals, and formal commitment made to welcome people with disabilities.

ACCOMMODATIONS: Accommodations made to improve the participa-

tion of people with disabilities (e.g., large print bulletins, trained ushers, accessible parking spaces, ramps and pew cuts, improved lighting and sound systems, appropriate religious education for children with disabilities).

WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT: Appreciation expressed for the changes being made and friendships extended to people with disabilities and their family members by increasing numbers within the congregation.

HURDLES: Identification of architectural (e.g., elevator, accessible restroom, ramp to the altar, chancel or bimah), communications (e.g., sign language interpreter or alternative formats for materials), transportation (e.g., wheelchair accessible van), financial, or other barriers and ways found to move forward in spite of them.

INCLUSION: Increased participation of people with disabilities in worship, study, service and leadership, as well as increased comfort levels of members with a more diverse congregation.

OUTREACH (LOCAL): Options explored and action plans formulated for partnership opportunities with local agencies and organizations serving people with disabilities.

LEADERSHIP: Recruitment of lay members with disabilities for leadership roles within the congregation and a willingness demonstrated to accept and accommodate an ordained leader with disability.

NEW CONSCIOUSNESS: Resistant barriers of attitude within the congregation toward people with disabilities addressed (e.g., through adult education forums, consciousness raising by the leadership of the congregation, and one-on-one friendships).

TRANSFORMATION: Ongoing transformation of the congregation (through enriched opportunities, responsibilities, and friendships) into a place where children and adults with disabilities are welcomed, fully included, and treated with respect.

ADVOCACY (EXTERNAL): An expanded advocacy role for congregation members regarding the needs and rights of persons with disabilities in the community-at-large.

OUTREACH: Successful strategies, insights, and effective practices compiled and shared with other congregations and communities.

SHARING THE STORY: The story of the transformation of the congregation publicized through articles, presentations, and/or media events.

1. U.S. Census Bureau, “State and County QuickFacts, North Carolina” <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/37000.html>.

2. Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Disability Demographics and Statistics, “2005 Disability Status Reports North Carolina,” www.ilr.cornell.edu/edi/disabilitystatistics/StatusReports/2005-pdf/2005-StatusReports_NC.pdf?CFID=19240191&CFTOKEN=99569444.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Center for Personal Assistance Services, “North Carolina Disability Data Table,” www.pascenter.org/state_based_stats/state_statistics_2004.php?state=northcarolina.

6. National Organization on Disability, “Journey of a Congregation,” www.nod.org/ACC/journey.html.