

Disabilities Ministries Coordinator

A ministry description for local church leaders

Introduction

God's church is a community of people who share the Gospel with everybody. Christ healed the boy with deaf and dumb spirits (Mark 9). His healing of the paralytic (Luke 5:18-26) is clear evidence of a new, intentional disabilities ministry. It suggests that in every congregation there should be a band of compassionate workers responsible for sensitizing and reminding the entire church of its mission to disabled people.

Disabled people within the community and local church are often spiritually neglected. The signs on the front of our churches say "WELCOME," but many of these same churches present insurmountable barriers to the disabled. The steep stairs, narrow doorways and hallways, and restrooms located on another floor or in distant locations are generally unreachable by the disabled and elderly. Inaccessible pews prevent the disabled from sitting with family members. Strict adherence to worship schedules prevent the participation of people with certain disabilities because of the extra time needed in moving from seat to duty and back. In too many places these barriers discourage the disabled from attending and joining—even when they are looking for a church home. Governments within North America have taken steps to abolish the barriers that deny equal opportunity of employment, public services, transportation, public accommodations, and telecommunication services to disabled individuals. Church members are expected to enable the disabled in their communities and congregations by eliminating physical and attitudinal barriers, too. They should see the removal of restricting obstacles for the disabled not only as a present challenge, but a high priority if their church is seeking to fulfill the Christ's mission of reaching, nurturing, and enabling all people.

Church leaders are to demonstrate the acceptance of all members as equals in work and worship environments. Unless leadership clearly appreciates the diversity of those whom God loves, disabilities ministries will be in vain. Realizing this, the position of disabilities awareness coordinator has been established at the union conference, local conference, and local church levels to give special attention to members and others with disabilities.

Duties of the Disabilities Ministries Coordinator

Specifically, the job description of the disabilities ministries coordinator is to

1. Monitor physical access to the church facilities and functions, and make recommendations that will help to make the church fully accessible to people with disabilities.
2. Provide education for the church members concerning mental, emotional, and physical disabilities and the people they affect.
3. Assist in the process of assimilating people with disabilities into the active life of the church.
4. Conduct surveys to identify the needs of disabled people in the church and community.

5. Develop, coordinate, and maintain vital programs to meet the spiritual needs of disabled members.
6. Serve as a liaison with Christian Record Services (the church's ministry to the blind, www.christianrecord.org) and local organizations that provide services to people with disabilities.

Resource Materials

The following resources are recommended for your ministry. You can purchase these by calling AdventSource (800-328-0525), the Adventist Book Center (800-765-6955) or your local Christian bookstore.

Accessible Building Design: A Disabled User's Guide to an Accessible Building (1993, Diane Publishing).

Americans with Disabilities Act by Thomas D. Schneid (1993, Van Nos Reinhold).

Americans with Disabilities Act Handbook by Henry H. Perritt, Jr. (Employment Law Library, No. 1816) (1991, John Wiley).

Disabilities Manual for Local Church Leaders, prepared by the North American Division.

Expect Great Things: How to Be a Happy, Growing Christian, by Richard O'Ffill. A template for successful Christian living, with the goal of being like Jesus.

Follow Me: How to Walk With Jesus, by Miraslov Kis. With sensitive sketches of people whose lives were transformed when they met Jesus, the author gives us new eyes, and then explores the implications of following Jesus.

Make Us One: Celebrating Spiritual Unity in the Midst of Cultural Diversity by Delbert Baker.

Outlook Two Thousand (1991, Gordon Press).

Perspectives on Disability: Text & Readings on Disability (1993, Health Markets Research).

Working Together, by Thompson U. Kay. A complete guide to starting a deaf ministry in your church.

Visit AdventSource On-Line at www.adventsource.org for a complete list of the latest resources available for local church leaders. You can place an order or request a catalog by calling 1-800-328-0525.

For information about additional resources and answers to your questions call the Adventist Plusline at 1-800-732-7587 or visit them on-line at www.plusline.org.