

Imagining the Accessible Church Community - Think of the Possibilities

According to Google's dictionary, "accommodation" can be understood as "a convenient arrangement; a settlement or compromise."¹ And while accommodation is vital when we talk about physical and mobility ministries, settlements and compromises are the minimum that we hope to achieve with the Taskforce for Physical and Mobility Ministries. Instead, our aim is to develop community. Community is a much more encompassing focus defined as "a feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals."² In order for our churches to become places of community, we have to create churches that fully nurture all members, to provide opportunities not just to be served, but to serve, together.

How important is this focus on community? Well, the 2018 Global Church Member Survey found that about 15% of Adventists have a disability, with 2% reporting mobility challenges specifically³. We expect this number is probably much larger. We also expect this number to grow, as people continue to age and as the gospel is spread. Physical and mobility disabilities occur because of health conditions, birth circumstances, accidents, injuries, and less commonly understood, because of attitudes and physical barriers. For someone with a physical or mobility disability, a physically accessible church is one where everyone has the ability to get into a building unassisted and to use all areas of that building. If there is no or limited accessibility, then some people will have difficulty being involved in or leading out in ministry opportunities. We as a church could lose out on the blessings we may receive from the talents that God has given others simply because they could not enter.

Adventist Possibility Ministries (APM) believes that "all are gifted, needed, and treasured." And because of this, we believe that people with physical and mobility challenges have so much to contribute to the church, and to the community. So we care very much about physical accessibility. Having accessible churches and creating community within the church body are so important to helping all our church members thrive. Community is much more than simply being around others or having social gatherings. Community happens when people grow and learn more deeply, because they are together. Community is where the strength to witness, to lead out in ministry, and to serve, are reinforced.

When churches work to reduce both the physical barriers and attitudes that limit members' ability to be a part of all aspects of ministry, they are developing a sense of community. They are seeking to find opportunities to nurture all members, to provide opportunities for everyone to express their spiritual gifts, and to engage in service *with* each other. Paul's message in 1 Corinthians 12 addresses this opportunity. "All of you together are Christ's body, and each of

¹ See

https://www.google.com/search?rlz=1C1SQJL_enUS801US801&q=accommodation&spell=1&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewiX9s2_pM7uAhVNGs0KHUmOA6wQBSgAegQIFBAv&biw=1920&bih=947

² See <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/community>

³ See https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Resources/Global%20Church%20Membership%20Survey%20Meta-Analysis%20Report/GCMSMetaAnalysis%20Report_2019-08-19.pdf

you is a part of it” (1 Cor 12:27) (NLT). The church will only find its true identity as the body of Christ when it fully embraces those who are marginalized. This includes people with physical and mobility challenges, who have so many gifts, and leadership skills too.

The Taskforce for Physical and Mobility Disability Ministries has a burden for the world Church. Prayerfully we have asked, what can we focus on in the next year that will have the largest impact, around the globe? We know that one of the key needs, as you would imagine, is physical accessibility to church. We also know that social and spiritual accessibility must be addressed. As a result, we are looking for ways to collect and create resources for accessibility audits, so that churches can see how welcoming and accommodating they are, and to then be able to improve what access they have.

In addition, we want to create and collect content that is easily shared on social media to address some of the social and spiritual accessibility challenges often experienced by people with physical and mobility needs. We also would love to create short films to bring awareness to the needs for community and accessibility. We are most excited about the possibility of developing a virtual membership base (a community), perhaps an online network, where people can share ministry opportunities, support each other spiritually, and have live opportunities to fellowship.

If you would like to support this ministry, start by thinking about your own church home. Ask, can a person who uses a walker or a wheelchair get into the church? And once they are in, can they be active in the entire ministry? If not, we urge you to bring this up to your leadership and to work to identify ways to remove these physical barriers to community in Christ.

And finally, we ask, if you have a story to share, please contact us at PossibilityMinistries@gc.adventist.org. We want to know how you’ve been using your gifts and talents to minister *with* others...

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