

## **TIPS TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN YOU PLAN ACCESSIBLE WORKSHOPS, GATHERINGS, CLASSES, MEETINGS etc.**

We bid you welcome, who enter this hall as a homecoming,  
Who have found here room for your spirit.  
Who find in this people a family.  
Whoever you are, whatever you are,  
Wherever you are in your journey.  
We bid you welcome.

– *Richard S. Gilbert (Singing the Living Tradition: Reading 442)*

Because ours is a faith community that welcomes all people, we have an obligation to plan congregational meetings and activities, workshops, and religious education classes, so that people of all abilities can participate fully. Here are some things for you to think about as you plan gatherings :

**Accessibility inside and outside** – Accessibility includes parking (consider offering volunteer “valet” parking service if there is insufficient accessible parking) as well as the path of travel into and through the facility. If overnight stays are included, accessible accommodations should be a consideration as well.

**Adequate lighting level** – Be intentional when you dim or extinguish the lights to create a particular mood. Darkness makes it harder for some people to see written materials, music lyrics and/or readings, and for people who are hard of hearing to have enough light to use lip reading to help them understand what people are saying.

**Alternative formats of written materials** – With electronic communication and photo-copiers it can be easy to provide alternative format materials. An inelegant method is to enlarge book pages and handouts on a copier to the biggest copy you can put on 11 x 17” paper – not the fanciest way, but it may work for someone – please ask the person beforehand. Audio-taping materials may also be a solution for some people.

**Assistive listening systems and amplification** – Use a microphone (if there is a floor microphone, make sure it is adjustable so people using wheelchairs can use it); sit in a “horseshoe” or circular seating configuration; use an assistive listening system (many churches have these systems in the sanctuary); make sure each person speaking faces the audience.

**Be truly welcoming** – Some congregations have made a covenant that all church-related events (e.g. restaurant dinners, picnics, etc.) must be held in accessible venues. Because accessibility can be a problem if an event is held in someone’s home, in the case of multiple small group meetings, at least one of the groups must be accessible.

**Disability etiquette** -- Unless you know someone with a disability, you may not think about the key points that make relationships with someone who has a disability easier and more relaxed. With the intent to create a welcoming and relaxed environment for everyone, you will find some basic rules of etiquette on our website:

[http://www.uua.org/programs/idbm/accessibilities/disabilityresources\\_etiquette.html](http://www.uua.org/programs/idbm/accessibilities/disabilityresources_etiquette.html)

**Emergency evacuation** – Make sure there is a pre-determined evacuation plan for people who have movement or sensory limitations. Do not assume that every person who has a disability will need help in an evacuation – always ask before providing assistance.

**Fragrance-free thoughtfulness** – For people who have chemical sensitivities: beeswax candles with lead-free wicks can be purchased online; attendees can be asked to refrain from wearing personal scents; burning incense and/or sage should be avoided; open flame/fire (e.g. for use in burning small pieces of paper) should be avoided.

**Meals and eating arrangements** – Buffet-style serving is difficult for people who use wheelchairs, walkers, crutches. Offer to be a “valet” – to carry a plate or tray. If you have a potluck meal, keep allergies in mind. Ask people to make index cards listing all ingredients of the dish they have brought and place these cards in front of their casserole, bowl, etc.

**Notices and publicity for the gathering** – For legibility, use simple uncluttered page design. Use a font like Arial 14 (if possible) and light colored, non-glossy paper. Registration materials should include a contact person who will be responsible for accommodations; the most important thing is to work individually to determine what accommodation(s) will help

**Scheduling, public transportation, carpooling** – Arrange carpooling if possible. Some people do not drive and some people do not drive at night or in bad weather. If there is public transportation available, try to schedule workshops, classes, and other events to coincide with bus/train schedules.

**Seating** – Arrange seating so that there is adequate integrated spaces for people who use wheelchairs. Make sure that aisles are wide enough for people to navigate comfortably inside the room without having to move seats. Provide seats with extra leg-room for people who use crutches, braces, or other walking supports. Have some chairs with arms, and some chairs that will be comfortable for people who are large.

**Sign language interpreters** – In registration material, ask people to contact the accessibility contact person at least two weeks in advance. If a person does make the request, it will not be difficult to locate a skilled sign language interpreter through your local Center for Independent Living or your local school district.

**Speaker platform, lectern, stage** – Have a wheelchair accessible podium/lectern available (a less-than-optimal alternative is to use a music-stand as an accessible lectern) and a ramped stage. Portable ramps may be available from your local durable medical equipment suppliers.

The Pacific Southwest District of the UUA has a comprehensive online accessible program planning guide: <http://www.pswd.uua.org/pswd-office/Checklists%20for%20Planners.htm>

There is also additional accessibility information on our accessibilities website: <http://www.uua.org/programs/idbm/accessibilities/>

We invite you to join the UU Access-L listserv to meet others who are interested in accessibility: <http://lists.uua.org/mailman/listinfo/access-L>