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# FAITH4ALL

## Inclusive Times

**Latest Edition:**

*We will discuss the intersection of disabilities, mental illness, and stigma in faithful communities.*

Issue No. 11

January 2023

## Reviewing Values & Goals When Emerging from the Pandemic

Like all of us, [Faith4All](#) is attempting to emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic and is now reaching out to congregations with a personal touch. In our last edition of the [Inclusive Times](#), we considered how the many different images of G-d affect our understanding of ourselves and our role in this world. In this issue of the [IT](#), we hope to address the issue of stigmas associated with disability and mental illness, which is partly at root of the failure of faithful congregations to welcome a representative number of people with disabilities (PWD) to their gatherings or including them in their membership.

### **Disabilities, Mental Illness and Stigma**

Many people with disabilities have experienced some degree of rejection or failure of fellow congregants to engage with them in their hopes to make a connection. This hesitancy of acceptance is not limited to faithful communities but is especially notable when this trepidation is coming from a person who identifies themselves as a child of God.

While many worshippers in faithful communities share both misunderstanding and lack of exposure to people with disabilities, they embrace the idea that the One being worshipped is responsible for all creation. (As was suggested in the Jan. '22 article,

[“Seeing Divinity in the Other”](#), it was noted that humans can have a difficult time seeing divinity in those living with disabilities. This notion may come from viewing G-d as a creator of disability, and this can cause confusion.

A conflict between one image of a loving G-d who create humans in “His” image and the fact of disfigurement, impairment, and disability of some children at birth is, I believe, the reason why “original sin” was first conceived. I believe that “original sin” was an understanding created to rationalize the fact of the seemingly undeserved struggle and pain of the children of an all loving, all-powerful G-d. Resolving this incongruity makes the appearance or involvement of people with disabilities in religious communities a particular problem: the mere existence of people with disabilities challenges most believers understanding of G-d, even if only subconsciously.

The reactions of people in congregations to the behaviors associated with people who live with mental illness are often even more challenging because without a physical cue, the mental illness is considered to be “less real” and more of a manifestation of a personality issue. This is particularly true for people with [bipolar](#)<sup>1</sup> and [borderline personality disorder](#)<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.webmd.com/bipolar-disorder/default.htm>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.webmd.com/mental-health/borderline-personality-disorder>

This misunderstanding is particularly challenging in faithful congregations because the expectation of proper etiquette is heightened in worshipful communities. Adhering to these unspoken rules or expectations can be especially challenging for people with disabilities, especially when ailments are viewed to be from some sort of mental illness.

In the journal article "[The Absence of Asterisks: The Inclusive Church and Children with Disabilities](#)<sup>3</sup>", Dr. Eric Carter explains the oft repeated reasons for excluding children with disabilities from churches and church schools which include, "We are just not equipped to serve your child," and, "We don't really do disability ministry here," and, "Perhaps you'd feel more comfortable at a church with a special program for them," and, "Their behaviors are a distraction to the other children."

The first step of the solution to the problem of the stigmatization of people with disabilities in worshipful congregations is awareness of the problem. Many people who I have encountered when attempting to promote inclusion might say, "We welcome everyone here!" I have found that in almost every single case, this statement merely represents the member's hopes or ideals, not reality. Simply put, widespread awareness of the exclusion of people with disabilities and those with a brain disorder is more of a challenge in faith communities than you might expect.

If a faithful congregation has done the work of assessment and education, and is marching the path toward full inclusion, this fact should be celebrated and clearly stated on a regular basis. Often such a church will include a statement in their weekly bulletin that could read:

"We are glad you are here: believers and agnostics, conventional Christians and questioning skeptics, people brimming with hope and those who wander in despair, people of all races, cultures, and abilities, of all gender identities and sexual orientations." While every faithful house of worship might not wish to state in the weekly bulletin every group listed above, a clear statement of inclusion which identifies specifically those supported groups helps attract people who have been left out, or asked to leave, previous worshipping communities. Such a statement also tells every member of this group of the corporate beliefs endorsed, a reminder of who they claim to be.

I would like to take this opportunity to tell you of some recent good news: Pope Francis has made a strong statement of the inclusion of people with disabilities in the Roman Catholic Church's efforts. The headline of this announcement reads "[Pope to persons with disabilities: The Church needs each of you](#)"<sup>4</sup>! This announcement and statement from Pope Francis can be read in this online Roman Catholic Church publication which "offers a Christian vision of the world by providing general and religious content that is free from ideological influences."

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Note: Recently, the newsletter associated with the organization [www.RespectAbility.org](http://www.RespectAbility.org) lead me to quite a helpful article from the great paper, the [Star Tribune](#) of Minnesota, titled "[Disability etiquette: Stop embarrassing yourself and learn the right way to engage](#)". I found the article interesting and educational to read!

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<sup>3</sup> Carter, E. W. (2020). [The Absence of Asterisks: The Inclusive Church and Children with Disabilities](#). *Journal of Catholic Education*. ([digitalcommons.lmu.edu/ce/vol23/iss2/14/](http://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/ce/vol23/iss2/14/))

<sup>4</sup> <https://aleteia.org/2021/12/03/pope-to-persons-with-disabilities-the-church-needs-each-of-you/>

**We wish you a virus-free and productive 2023!**

**Future Inclusive Times Topics:**

- **Specific actions that promote belonging in a faith community**
- **Where are PWD if not in a faith community?**
- **Examples of inclusive faithful communities**



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# FAITH4ALL

## Inclusive Times

**Latest Edition:**  
This issue considers  
the nature of our  
inclusive efforts,  
comparing them to  
justice rolling down.

Issue No. 12

March 2023

### Can Justice Truly 'Roll Down'?

In honor of the contributions of the [Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.](#) to the entire world, today (1/25/23) my church devoted an entire service to hearing his message and words. The church choir in which I sing presented a rolling rendition of the song "[Roll Down Justice](#)" composed by [Mark A. Miller](#) which incorporated some of the song "[Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing](#)" by [Robert Robinson](#). This song, which I adore performing, is very powerful and quite a number of people listening to it reportedly teared up.

Here I will present the lyrics of the song (not including the lyrics to "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing"):

There's a voice, strong and clear  
Ringing out far and near  
"Let justice roll down, let justice roll down!"  
Like the rush of a stream  
Comes a powerful dream  
Let justice roll down  
Justice rolls down!

Let the earth be restored,  
Ev'ry soul be reformed;  
Let the healing renew Creation reborn.  
Here in this sacred space  
With the strength of God's grace  
Let justice roll down,  
Justice rolls down!

Roll down! Roll down, justice!  
Roll like an ever flowing stream.  
Roll down! Roll down, justice!  
Roll like an ever flowing stream,  
Flowing stream,  
Roll down!

Let your heart soar,  
Open the doors wide,  
Let your mind be transformed,  
Let it be, let it be.  
Let it be opened by love  
Opened by love.

On this glorious day,  
Give us courage we pray  
That justice rolls down,  
Let justice roll down!  
Let the vision take flight  
And God will delight  
As water roll down,  
Justice abounds!

Roll down, justice!  
Roll like an ever flowing stream.  
Roll down!  
Roll down, justice!  
Roll like an ever flowing stream,  
Flowing stream, Roll down!

Although this is one of the most powerful songs that I've ever sung, on reading the lyrics I have to quibble with the text: "Let justice roll down". My quibbling is based on my belief that justice doesn't roll down; justice is something that has to be worked for! This is not simply the observation of a former physics professor; it is the conclusion of both myself and the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

I believe that justice rolling down, or following the natural course of nature, goes against the first order selfishness embedded in the human animal. Because we are beings that primarily have control over our own actions, we inherently tend to be selfish creatures. Sharing our food or other resources, and letting justice abound, is not a primary driver for humans (or capitalistic economies). I believe, however, that an equitable distribution of the necessities of life is the desire of more advanced thinkers who can see our hidden interconnection and how such justice leads to a more prosperous and stable society. Though obvious to many, the importance of justice is not apparent to many people in this world who are concerned primarily only of themselves. Justice, or the fair distribution of life's necessities, is something that needs to be worked for to attain.

The Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. apparently felt similarly. He wrote this in his [Letter from a Birmingham Jail](#) in 1963: "We must come to see that human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability. It comes through the tireless efforts and persistent work of people willing to be coworkers with God, and without this hard work, time itself becomes an ally for the forces of social stagnation."

So, you might ask: what does all of what I've written have to do with disability and the work of Faith4All? It is the goal of Faith4All to help inspire and guide interested faith communities as they attempt to make the changes in the physical plant of their community, their programming, and the nature of their interactions with and expectations of community members so that people with disabilities are more likely to feel welcomed and supported in the community. In almost every faith community should feel this call.

Beginning with the next issue of The Inclusive Times and continuing for several editions, we will detail several efforts that can be undertaken by any faith community to strengthen its honest welcome and inclusion of people with disabilities into their house of faith.

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**We hope you are enjoying our Spring weather and praying for more rain!**

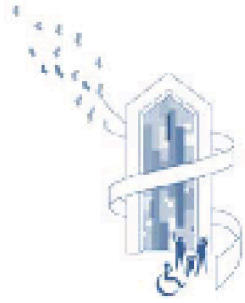
#### Future Inclusive Times Topics:

- **Steps towards full inclusion: An Honest Welcome!**



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## Inclusive Times

**Latest Edition:**  
This will be the first  
article in a series  
titled "Steps toward  
full inclusion".

Issue No. 13

July 2023

## **Steps towards full inclusion: An Honest Welcome!**

When considering possible limitations which restrict the involvement of people with disabilities (PWD) in their local faithful institution, many people usually think of the problem (and expense) of adding an elevator in order to allow people in wheelchairs to ambulate between different floor levels within the faithful institution's facilities. While sometimes this issue may be an issue that's difficult to face, the fact is that the majority of PWD don't use a wheelchair and the local faith institutions' lack of elevators is not the primary detriment to faithful involvement of PWD in communities of faith. People with disabilities who might be interested in joining a faithful community that do not attend services at any community of faith primarily explain that it has been the distasteful experiences that they've had when visiting a faithful institution that has hindered and halted their participation. Often, PWD are made to feel that they are unwelcome when first visiting faithful institutions and this begins with either a half-hearted or an exaggerated, overly joyful welcome that they are greeted with at the entrance of the institution.

Usually, for those of us who live with an outwardly apparent disability, when first entering a community of faith we are greeted with furrowed brows and looks of concern. (This is certainly not an honest welcome!) Greeters' brows are furrowed because they are unsure of how to respond to any possible request for assistance. It should be remembered that adult PWD who have chosen and managed to get to any particular worship service, probably DON'T need any special assistance. If any particular assistance is required for participation in the activities in a service of any faithful institution, adults who live with disabilities usually have made these requests many times before and are able to and will express their needs politely!

**If** this individual with a disability has **never** visited this faithful community previously, the first person greeting this person might want to casually inform them "If you might want anything that can help you to participate more fully in this worship experience, feel free to let me know. I would be happy to see if we can help you to do this." The important thing to remember is that this question should be asked of any individual **only once!** (I can guarantee you that if this statement is asked of any individual repeatedly, it will be understood as demeaning.) If any PWD might return to faithful community's service, it is probably best if this sort of statement is **not** repeated weekly. Rely on any adult PWD to clearly express any needs that might be helped in any way.

Depending on their age, children with disabilities might not be able to express their needs or ask for any help that they might require. However, children are almost always accompanied by a caregiver who will know of this child's needs. Again, depending on their age, this could be a good time **not** to address the individual with a disability directly and instead address questions regarding assistance to this child's caregiver; however, it is important to consider this child's age, and only address their caregiver if a child would be unable to answer this question. **Never** ask questions to someone accompanying a PWD regarding the person with a disability, instead of addressing the individual directly. This is exceedingly demeaning! (While we're listing demeaning activities, please remember what your vocal tone and speed of your speech suggest about your intentions and attitudes regarding PWD. Very frequently, PWD are spoken to more slowly and at an abnormally high pitch. Please just remember: **DON'T BABY TALK** individuals because of their disability!)

When dealing with someone with an apparent brain disorder, a developmental or intellectual difference, it is also best to treat them in an age appropriate way, as you would anyone else their age. If this person is unable to comprehend what you mean, it will quickly become apparent. Get to know them first and make no assumptions about them, their challenges, or their needs!

Most of all, **remember not to be afraid of PWD**. Their disability is not a communicable disease! If you have any questions or concerns regarding their disability and how they might deal with situations that you anticipate they'll face in your faithful community, simply and politely ask the person (**not** anyone accompanying them)! You might not think that particular challenges can be faced successfully; however, many PWD have been successfully dealing with these challenging situations frequently, many for their entire lives. They'll know what's best for them!

**Remember: make no assumptions!**



**We hope you are enjoying our summer weather and  
that you are thankful for most all the rain we've had in Colorado!**

### Future Inclusive Times Topics:

- **Steps towards full inclusion: Sound Systems and Devices**
- **Steps towards full inclusion: An Open Door**
- **Steps towards full inclusion: Including Young Ones with a Disability**



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## Inclusive Times

Latest Edition:

This issue will address the common challenge of functional sound systems and listening devices.

Issue No. 14

October 2023

## Steps towards full inclusion: Sound Systems and Devices

In faith communities, listening devices are the most requested and commonly used assistive device. They help the many who are hard of hearing to participate more actively in the worship services of the community. These devices and systems are often the top priority (and commonly only) assistive device offered to visitors to a faith community. Because of their common use and importance, the functioning of a faith community's sound system and listening devices are a very important topic to be addressed. While most faith communities have sound systems designed to amplify anyone speaking or singing to help everyone hear, visitors and members who happen to be hard of hearing (or deaf) also deserve special attention to how the information spoken is relayed to them.

[Audio induction loop systems](#) are quite common in the USA. More than half of people who use assistive listening devices have hearing aids that have telecoils (or T-coils) installed in them that respond to the electromagnetic signals produced by a hearing loop installed in the floor or ceiling of the room where the listener is seated. T-coil induction systems use the signal from audio sound systems, send the signal into the hearing loop, and personal T-coils built into many hearing aids pick up the signals emitted by the hearing loop. Hearing aids with T-coils installed essentially act as personal speakers responding to the sound which has been sent into the hearing loop. ([HearingLoop.org](#) is a very useful website describing these systems.)

These systems require installation of a hearing loop connected to an audio sound system. Installation of a hearing loop can require a significant effort and, although professional hearing loop system installers are probably best to use, one can even design and install your own system! See [HEARING LOOP 101](#) for an installation guide for your home or office.

If an induction loop system hasn't been installed, often personal Frequency Modulated (FM) or Digital Modulated (DM) assistive listening devices (ALDs) are used to amplify sounds near a listener. A useful summary of different ALD systems can be found at this website: [www.healthyhearing.com/help/assistive-listening-devices](http://www.healthyhearing.com/help/assistive-listening-devices)

The advantage that these ALD systems have is that they can function as personal amplification systems for users and they can be kept with the user at all times.

Like FM/DM ALDs, personal sound amplification products (commonly known as [PSAPs](#)) are effective and portable, relatively cheap, and commonly used by people with new or only slight hearing loss. These devices have been commonly used in the past in many faith communities. Though used commonly, like the FM/DM ALDs, the PSAPs provide a cheaper, lower quality of sound, and in addition require the frequent replacement of batteries, which can be time consuming, costly, and harmful to the environment!



Although it seems obvious to state, those interested in improving the service experience of visitors to or members of their faith community need always remember that no matter which sound amplification system is chosen, none of these systems aid people who are completely deaf! For these individuals, several steps should be taken to aid their experience worshipping:

- Places to sit during the service near those speaking that feature a clear line of sight without distractions assists people who read lips to understand what's spoken. Space should be reserved at each service for this use.
- Depending on the number of people in the congregation who can read American Sign Language ([ASL](#)), the possibility of having an ASL interpreter at functions of accessible religious communities should be considered. The [ADA National Network](#) keeps a webpage titled "[ADA Quick Tips - Sign Language Interpreters](#)" that has a link to The National Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf ([RID](#)) hosts an online database of interpreters.
- Another possible way of allowing those in attendance at a worship service to "listen" to what it said, even if they are deaf, is to transcribe what is stated into a sound system using [realtime transcription software](#) and providing the resultant text to those with phones or other devices linked to a local wifi network.
- Of course, the easiest way to provide the text of what will be said in the service is to provide paper copies of what will be read to interested parties before the service begins. *This is also a useful addition for everyone!*

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**On these beautiful autumn days,  
we ask that you consider and pray for the many people of communities  
devastated by the several consequences of human caused global warming!**

### Future Inclusive Times Topics:

- **Steps towards full inclusion: An Open Door**
- **Steps towards full inclusion: Including Young Ones with a Disability**



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