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FAITH4ALL

Inclusive Times

Latest Edition:

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

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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!

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**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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