



CENTER FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Best Practices for Building Belonging in Congregations: Ideas and Resources

What's your role?

No matter what role you fulfill, you can be a part of creating a community of belonging in your congregation for persons of all abilities. To get started, look up your role in the congregation. As you read through the various roles, consider how the suggestions might benefit everyone in your community, regardless of ability, age, or stage of life. The list of ideas and tools is not intended to be exhaustive rather to start you thinking of additional ideas for your congregation and setting.

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Definition of Terms

In this document, you will see the terms **universal design** and **responsive design**. Here is a brief explanation of each term:

- **Universal design** is a way of designing buildings, products, and environments that make them accessible to all people, with and without disabilities.
- **Responsive design** is the process of getting to know an individual and then responding to that person's strengths and challenges by putting together a personalized plan for use within the activities of the church.

To see these definitions explained further, view these videos: [Universal Design Defined](#), [Responsive Design Defined](#)

The tips listed under each role are made up of both universal and responsive design ideas.

Universal and Responsive Design Tips and Practical Tools for

Roles Within A Communal Worship Setting

Accessibility or Inclusion Advocate / Coordinator

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

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1. Identify and recommend changes to overcome barriers for inclusive community.
 2. Coordinate information, training, and other resources to equip your community to include people of all abilities. Your role is to resource existing ministry leaders to include persons with disabilities within their ministries, *not* house a separate program.
 3. Identify and connect with individuals/families impacted by disability to gather information and provide the right support.
 4. Along with that individual, advocate for those in your church who have disabilities (e.g., offer a discussion with the individual or family to ask the church to make accommodations so they do not have to do it themselves).
 5. Equip and support church staff and volunteers; share your appreciation regularly.
 6. Learn more about and share All Belong’s “Puzzle Piece” perspective, theology of inclusion, and the “See/Think/Do” process.

Practical Tools:

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Contact All Belong at (616) 245-8388 or info@allbelong.org for information about the ongoing support of Membership, or to find out about consultation, observation, training, and/or congregational assessment services. We would love to help you set up a Wrap Around Support Team, or train your staff and volunteers to do that!

See denominational resources such as:

- Christian Reformed Church and Reformed Church of America’s Disability Concern’s blog and website for Disability Advocate resources: crcna.org/disability
- UMC umcdmc.org/
- Catholic Church kairosforum.org/category/living-fully/
- PCA pcamna.org/engaging-disability/

Western Theological Seminary offers a Graduate Certificate in Disability and Ministry: westernsem.edu

Calvin University offers a Masters Program in Inclusion: calvin.edu

The Christian Leader’s Institute has an online course by Barbara Newman and Victoria White on Creating Congregations of Belonging for a 12-week overview of this topic. Find out about it from CLI: youtube.com/watch?v=NbcBoucRG28

The *Together* Curriculum by Friendship Ministries offers many ideas for adapting inclusive adult small group curriculum to the needs of individuals: togethersmallgroups.org

Joni and Friends has a short document to help advocates think about how to approach leadership in the church: joniandfriends.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/talking-to-church-leadership.pdf

Dr. Erik Carter’s work on the 10 Dimensions of Belonging is a great resource. Watch his presentation on the 10 Dimensions of Belonging at youtube.com/watch?v=sRZHwj6CarM , and see handouts and other materials (including a guide on welcoming people with disabilities in congregations) at erikwcarter.com/calvin.

Browse the All Belong blog and online store for more resources: allbelong.org

Announcement Communicator / Presenter

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

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1. Use a microphone connected to the sound system.
 2. Highlight available accessibility services, items, and options (e.g. accessible bathrooms, valet parking, elevator, gluten-free options, location of fidget tools, website location for visuals, etc.).
 3. Communicate options, such as the fragrance-free zone, gluten-free options, or where to find praise streamers.
 4. Have announcements/bulletin available in various forms for easy accessibility (e.g. digital, print, on screen, a picture option, etc.). Large print copies should be available for attendees who have visual differences. For all print and projected materials, strive for optimum readability for all participants
 5. Work with the presentation creator to ensure images of worship and activities include persons with disabilities.

Practical Tools:

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Utilize the [All Belong Preferred language guide](#) and [Philosophy of Language](#)

See also: cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/pdf/DisabilityPoster_Photos.pdf

See this people-first language reference: askearn.org/topics/retention-advancement/disability-etiquette/people-first-language/

Commonly used accessibility icons (with descriptions) can be found at graphicartistsguild.org/downloadable-disability-access-symbols/

Optimum readability guidelines: network.crcna.org/disability-concerns/tips-optimum-readability

Assistant / Buddy -See Wrap Around Support Team Leader/Member

Caregiver

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

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1. Be willing to share and receive help for your own needs, as well as the needs of the person for whom you care. Be understanding about how much others can step in to do.
 2. Consider a *Wrap-Around Support Team* to develop intentional, supportive community around you and your loved ones.
 3. Share information about the gifts of the person for whom you care, so they are meaningfully serving God within community.
 4. Get involved in service and fellowship opportunities in the church (outside of the caregiver role). For example, use a respite day to participate in an outreach project, spa day, class, crafting event, or service day. Spend time developing your own gifts and talents.

Practical Tools:

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Utilize organizational tools such as *The Caregivers Notebook: An Organizational Tool and Support to Help You Care for Others* by Jolene Philo: differentdream.com/2014/11/caregivers-notebook-vlog-series-how-to-use-it/

Individually study or join a study/support group of Mary Tutterow's *The Heart of the Caregiver: From Overwhelmed to Overjoyed*: theheartofthecaregiver.com/

Find resources, information, and support groups to connect caregivers on the Family Caregiver Alliance National Center on Caregiving website: caregiver.org

Contact All Belong for assistance creating a *Wrap-Around Support Team*. We would love to help you set that up or train your staff and volunteers to do that! Info@allbelong.org, 616-855-3112.

Find examples of how to share the gifts of the person for whom you care in *Body Building: Devotions to Celebrate Inclusive Community* by Barbara J. Newman: allbelong.org/shop/

Children’s Message Provider / Teacher

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

1. Know the “big idea” in your message and use multisensory ways to emphasize it in your message (e.g. object in special container, music and songs, catchy saying, movement, pictures, or video).
2. Provide multiple ways for all children to interact with the message (e.g. pressing a button on a pre-recorded device (see link below), answering by pointing to pictures or giving a thumbs up/thumbs down, being the Scripture reader, etc.).
3. Provide opportunities for movement as well as structured seating options (e.g. sitting or standing, fidget tools, small rocker, carpet squares, pair planned movement with the message, etc.)
4. Be familiar with the children of your church community and connect with the Disability Advocate/Inclusion Coordinator to provide any support that is needed for all children to participate (e.g. wheelchair accessibility, sound blockers, a large print Bible, etc.).
5. Invite a child who may be anxious or need extra time to adjust to new settings the chance to visit the space or sanctuary when it's empty. This could involve arriving early or visiting the space the day before. Practice your children’s message with that child and their parent and allow the child to practice where to sit, how to participate, and when to ask questions. Give the child the option of “reserving a seat” with a name card.

Practical Tools:

Recording devices, such as “speech buttons” are available at ablenetinc.com/

Use *Friendship Ministries’* guide for adapting lessons to the needs of your group:

access.togethersmallgroups.org/general/adapting-the-sessions-to-the-needs-of-your-group/

The *Inclusive Worship Kit* includes a sample visual schedule you can use in a children’s ministry setting along with many tools for non-verbal communication. Order online at allbelong.org/shop/

The *Inclusion Awareness Kit* contains a lesson plan and the needed supplies to allow children and adults to see each individual as an important and gifted piece of “God’s body puzzle”. The lesson plan lets you target any age group and offers an appealing final display. The plan also suggests ways in which you can allow group members to better understand the gifts and needs of an individual with a disability. Order online at allbelong.org/shop/

Helping Kids Include Kids with Disabilities by Barbara J. Newman supplies tools for teachers, peers, and parents of peers by giving basic information for educators concerning specific disabilities, lesson plans for teaching peers about those areas of disability, and sample letters that can be adapted to send home to parents of peers. Order online at allbelong.org/shop/

Every Child Welcome by Katie Wetherbee and Jolene Philo, walks through the steps of creating a welcoming children’s ministry for children with disabilities, and includes practical tools, resources, links and ideas. Order from your favorite book retailer.

Utilize the [All Belong Preferred language guide.docx](#).

See also: [cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/pdf/DisabilityPoster_Photos.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/pdf/DisabilityPoster_Photos.pdf)

See this people-first language reference: askearn.org/topics/retention-advancement/disability-etiquette/people-first-language/

Clerical Support

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

1. Consider adding pictures to the Order of Worship (see our samples for examples), and/or have an interactive bulletin for children and adults who learn best through pictures and hands-on activities.
2. Provide printed or digital copies of the sermon outline and other materials if requested, including large print or making it available online (for use on a personal device).
3. Your church’s accessibility options should be described on the church voicemail and website, as well as clearly marked throughout the church.
4. Good universal design practices will make specific requests rare. However, when you do receive a request for a specialized need (e.g. equipment, sign language interpreter, etc.), respond within a day. Let the individual or care giver know the length of time until the need will be met, what the process is, who else they will connect with, etc.
5. Connect individual’s gifts and needs with the appropriate resources or ministry. Use intake and attendance forms to learn of an individual’s areas of interest and needs, and pass those on to the appropriate personnel.
6. Provide a preview of the church setting and activities with a *Church Welcome Story*.

Practical Tools:

View examples of integrating images and universal design elements into your Order of Worship at allbelong.org/church

Use a personalized, informational story like the *Church Welcome Story* to provide a preview and information on your church and its programs. View a [sample PDF](#) and [video](#).

Tips for visual accessibility of projected and printed material:

- Tips for Optimum Readability: network.crcna.org/disability-concerns/tips-optimum-readability
- sightlossfriendlychurch.org.uk/resources/preparing-materials.
- Using Computers for Inclusive Worship: network.crcna.org/church-web/using-computers-inclusive-worship

Congregation Member

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

1. Work to make your church the most welcoming group of people in your community. Follow the example of Jesus and make a practice of showing hospitality to people of all abilities, cultures, and backgrounds.
2. Get to know individuals and families in your church, their areas of strength and areas of struggle so that you all can support one another and participate in worship.
3. Encourage the gifts of all persons to be included in the church community.
4. Learn disability etiquette and person-first language.
5. Become informed about topics that impact fellow congregants such as areas of disability, issues related to mental health, cultural contexts, and trauma.

Practical Tools:

Discover where you are within Elim Christian Services' Five Stages of Disability Attitudes; strive to reach stage five: the5stages.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/The5Stages_2014IMG.jpg.

Consider purchasing copies of the *Inclusion Handbook* for study groups and to make available in your church library: faithaliveresources.org

Utilize the [All Belong Preferred language guide.docx](#).

See also: cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/pdf/DisabilityPoster_Photos.pdf

See this people-first language reference: askearn.org/topics/retention-advancement/disability-etiquette/people-first-language/

Dr. Erik Carter's work on the 10 Dimensions of Belonging is a great resource. Watch his presentation on the 10 Dimensions of Belonging at youtube.com/watch?v=sRZHwj6CarM , and see handouts and other materials (including a guide on welcoming people with disabilities in congregations) at erikwcarter.com/calvin.

Facility / Maintenance Crew Leader or Member

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

1. Welcome congregants' use of their gifts and abilities, supporting them as needed.
2. Post clear signs that direct people to accessible entrances, services, and other options.
3. Conduct an Accessibility Audit (see practical tools below for links).
4. Work toward your entire church campus being barrier-free.
5. Assure that there is adequate lighting in all of the church's common areas (for signing and individuals with low vision). Make sure sign language interpreters and individuals who are speaking, or reading are not in the shadows.
6. Maintain all railings, steps, ramps, doors, seats, etc. so that all remain safe and sturdy.
7. Ask families and individuals what needs they have. Be sensitive and willing to accommodate by offering gluten-free foods, fragrance-free areas, quiet spaces, sound control, even thinking about ways to support individuals in their homes if worshipping from home is their best option.

Practical Tools:

Accessibility audits:

- Catholic LAMB Inclusive Participation Assessment Tool: ncpd.org/files/resources-toolkits/LAMB_Assessment_Key_English.pdf
- Congregational Accessibility Network Checklist: canaccess.org/accessibility/quick-checklist/
- Lutheran Church Missouri Synod Improving Ministry Accessibility: goo.gl/APNHfe
- The United Church of Christ has an "Accessible to All" assessment process, available at uccdm.org/a2a/
- UMC Accessibility Audit: umdisabilityministries.org/access/audit.html
- A more comprehensive approach uses Dr. Erik Carter's assessment of the Indicators of Welcome, found at erikwcarter.com/calvin (Congregational Reflection Tool).

Utilize the [All Belong Preferred language guide.docx](#). See also: cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/pdf/DisabilityPoster_Photos.pdf and askearn.org/topics/retention-advancement/disability-etiquette/people-first-language/

Finance Team Leader or Member

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

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1. Get to know individuals with disabilities and their families. Ask about their gifts, along with the needs they may have.
 2. Budget for universal design of the physical environment and communications. This might include budgeting for building changes, special foods, special equipment, transportation assistance, additional staff, etc.
 3. When appropriate, raise funds for needs of a family or members of the congregation with a disability, or for special equipment or items for the church.
 4. Provide an avenue for those involved in various ministries to share what items are needed for full participation.
 5. Consider costs associated with accessibility and inclusivity as an on-going budget item for your congregation.
 6. Consider adding a staff member (full or part time) who can support each ministry of your congregation in being intentional about including people of all abilities.

Practical Tools:

Grants are available through various organizations to support inclusion and universal design:

- The Calvin Institute of Christian Worship offers Vital Worship Grants focused on projects that connect public worship to intergenerational faith formation and Christian discipleship. If your need fits within this theme, consider applying for a [Vital Worship Grant at worship.calvin.edu](http://worship.calvin.edu).
- Through the Open Hearts Awards, Pathways.org provides grants up to \$1,000 to recognize houses of faith and religious schools across the U.S. for their efforts to welcome individuals of all abilities and help fund access and inclusion projects. Learn more at pathways.org/team-w/overview/.
- Depending on your denomination, some funds may be available through your governing structure.

In some cases, further costs for your congregation may need to be considered based on your situation (e.g. insurance due to equipment, building maintenance or materials to increase accessibility, etc.)

Hospitality Crew Leader or Member

(This includes individuals who welcome guests, serve refreshments, provide transportation or meals, and more.)

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

1. Invite persons of all abilities who have the gift of friendliness to be greeters (or similar positions).
2. Train greeters and others to be welcoming and understanding of persons who may miss social cues or respond differently.
3. Offer to transport individuals with physical or mobility limitations to congregational functions (this may involve a little research into transportation options).
4. Present dietary need-based options with equal ease of access and proper identification. Alternatively, when putting out refreshments, communicate whether foods contain common allergens (such as sugar, wheat/gluten, corn, soy, dairy, or nuts).
5. Know the tools and services available in your church (such as large print Bibles, sensory tools, and the sign language interpreter) as well as persons to connect families with who have questions regarding accessibility.
6. Create a welcome video. Similar to how you might look up photos of a hotel for an upcoming trip, consider having a video of your church available on your website to offer guests a preview of what they can expect when they visit for the first time. Provide the information in a printed book form if website is not available.

Practical Tools:

See All Belong's free resources for churches, including templates for a Church Welcome Story at <https://allbelong.org/for-churches/church-resources/>, or contact us to train your hospitality team in inclusive practices, info@allbelong.org, 616-855-3112.

Learn about the importance of using person-first language in this blog post:

allbelong.org/why-i-choose-person-first-language/ (and be aware that some individuals may prefer identity-first language).

Use person-first, honoring language. See the [All Belong Preferred language guide.docx](#).

See also: cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/pdf/DisabilityPoster_Photos.pdf

See this people-first language reference: askearn.org/topics/retention-advancement/disability-etiquette/people-first-language/

Library / Bookstore Supplier

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

1. Stock books about disability theology, specific disabilities, mental health, trauma and inclusion.
2. Have certain books in multiple formats, such as digital and large print.
3. Provide opportunities for persons with disabilities to work in the library (based on their abilities). Make accommodations if necessary. A person with a disability can be a great resource to others in the church!
4. Communicate the resources on disability that are available in your library or bookstore.
5. Be prepared to suggest links to online book options for those unable to access print materials.

Practical Tools:

Consider carrying books and resources from All Belong such as *I Choose Adam*, and *Accessible Gospel*, *Inclusive Worship* or other titles on our [recommended resources list](#). Call us at 616.245.8388 for special pricing or inquire at allbelong.org

A Membership with All Belong provides access to an online library of resources (articles, training videos, and more) as well as connects your congregation with consultants.

Lord's Supper (Communion) Server

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

1. Have a gluten-free option available and communicate its placement.
2. Provide a non-alcoholic option.
3. Make sure the method you use for distributing the elements will connect with each person who wishes to partake. For example, a person with Cerebral Palsy may need someone to make the bread very soggy and place it in a specific spot in their mouth. You must know the individuals in your congregation and/or offer alternatives.
4. Make the Lord's Supper delivery method physically accessible to each participant. Are there stairs involved? Are the elements passed in the pew? Will someone present participation options to those unable to get up or reach for it?
5. Clearly communicate (through spoken and written words, and visuals) how your church distributes and takes the Lord's Supper and who is welcome to participate.

Practical Tools:

Customize the Communion Story to help individuals understand the significance of taking the Lord’s Supper. Find a sample here: allbelong.org/media/Communion-Story-Sample.pdf

There is a written version of the social story for “Celebrating Communion at Faith Church” in Barbara J. Newman’s book *Autism and Your Church* (see pg. 115), found at allbelong.org/shop.

Mental Health Liaison

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

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1. Equip yourself and share the importance of speaking about mental health in the church.
 2. Provide training in mental health awareness and etiquette to all leadership.
 3. Have a list of resources for local supports, such as your community mental health agency, local counselors, hotlines to call, helpful websites, etc. so that you become known as a church that has help for people when they need it.
 4. Pray for people with mental health challenges but listen to their prayer needs (trying to pray away demons, or even praying for cure can be counter-productive).
 5. Minister with people with mental health challenges. Those who are willing to, share stories with the congregation. Welcome individuals to serve with their gifts, being aware that they may need times off, or a quiet environment, or gentle accountability, or other supports.

Practical Tools:

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Inform yourself through books such as *Mental Health and the Church* by Dr. Steve Grcevich, and *Finding Jesus in the Storm: The Spiritual Lives of Christians with Mental Health Challenges* by John Swinton.

All Belong hosted a webinar on Supporting Mental Health in Times of Uncertainty: Faithful Mindfulness for Inclusive Communities, with Dr. Irene Kraegel. Her book, *The Mindful Christian* is also an excellent resource. Watch the hour-long webinar here: youtube.com/watch?v=KFebv0KHbvo

Grace Alliance has excellent resources and guidance for support groups, training, and conversations about mental health. Their free downloadable *Thrive* workbook is available at mentalhealthgracealliance.org/thrive.

John Swinton is a major voice in the work of Sanctuary Mental Health Ministries. Their free course prepares small groups to raise awareness and have conversations about mental health. They also have resources specifically regarding trauma and race at sanctuarymentalhealth.org/race-mental-health-and-faith-resources/.

Reach out to your local counseling centers, community mental health agency, schools and universities so that you become part of the web of support for families.

Ministry Director

(Includes Children’s Ministry, Women’s Ministry, Outreach Ministry, etc.)

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

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6. Share the vision for welcoming all individuals into the church body and ministries of your church.
7. Provide training in accessibility awareness and etiquette to all leadership.
8. Include people with disabilities in committees and/or other leadership roles based on their gifts.
9. Have an Accessibility Advocate and/or Inclusion Team.
10. Adopt a policy on disability.
11. Hold training sessions and discussion or support groups for the congregation on topics such as dementia, mental health, trauma, autism, etc.
12. Encourage people of all abilities to engage in the various ministries and activities in the congregation, showing you are ready to include each person in these areas and provide needed accommodations.

Practical Tools:

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Watch Barbara J. Newman’s presentation “Universal Design for Worship” with your ministry staff: worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/universal-design-for-worship-symposium-2016-plenary-address/

This webinar with Barbara Newman, LaTonya Penny and Victoria White shares best practices for inclusive education settings: faithanddisability.org/webinar/webinar-inclusive-religious-education/

Many denominations offer resources on Disability Awareness:

- network.crcna.org/disability-concerns/ways-celebrate-disability-awareness-sunday
- rca.org/resources/disability/disability-awareness-sunday-resources
- engagingdisability.org/ministries/engaging-your-church/

Our team of consultants would love to support your ministry, and equip you to minister well, through our [Member Church program](#), with coaching opportunities and resources available to Members.

Pastor as Counselor

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

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1. A family affected by disability may have specific concerns, needs or questions that you may have difficulty addressing. That's ok! Be willing to learn from them about the issues, so that you can help them apply Scripture to their lives.
2. Have a list of local counselors you trust, so that you can call on them and refer families to them for professional counseling as well as your relational, pastoral counseling.
3. Encourage and equip support groups in your congregation around specific areas of need. Maybe there are several families who have a person with autism, or physical disabilities, or who have been through medical trauma or other forms of trauma.
4. Practice what you preach and preach with care. See the tips and tools on Preaching, and as you have families seeking counseling, have in mind that visuals, movement, options and flexibility may be a bigger part of counseling sessions than you might be used to. Talking about varied abilities from the pulpit invites families to share their stories with you in efforts to grow in the church and in their walk with the Lord. See tips from other sections to see how you can listen well and share Scriptural truth in ways that will connect.

Practical Tools:

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Rick Warren provides 8 unchangeable truths to cling to at <https://pastorrick.com/focus-on-what-is-unchanging>, which you can use to pray with families through their situations.

All Belong has free downloadable 1-page resource pages on some common areas of disability. Access them and other resources by requesting them at allbelong.org/informational/church-resource-downloads-form/

Together curriculum & supports?

Talk to a church consultant at All Belong

Presentation Creator

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

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5. Videos and other media should include captions when possible.
6. Words on screens should not be crowded. Make sure the text is large enough to easily read (we suggest a minimum font size of 36, with 8 lines or less on a slide).
7. If you use backgrounds on slides with words, do not add effects or distracting images.
8. Use contrast to make words clearer. For example, a blue background with yellow text is easier to read than black text on white screen.

9. Presentations should be available ahead of time for individuals to download onto personal devices, especially if other visual accommodations are more difficult.

Practical Tools:

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The Training and Advocacy Support Center provides a helpful list of best practices for making PowerPoint presentations accessible:

[aucd.org/docs/add/sa_summits/AccessiblePowerPoints%20text%20\(1-22-09\).pdf](http://aucd.org/docs/add/sa_summits/AccessiblePowerPoints%20text%20(1-22-09).pdf)

Turning Bridges into Barriers: The Inclusive Use of Information and Communication Technology for Churches in America, Britain, and Canada by Dr. John Jay Frank details using visuals and other technology well within congregations: [amazon.com/Turning-Barriers-Into-Bridges-Communication/dp/1887835229](https://www.amazon.com/Turning-Barriers-Into-Bridges-Communication/dp/1887835229)

Here are tips for visual accessibility of projected and printed material:

- Tips for Optimum Readability: network.crcna.org/disability-concerns/tips-optimum-readability
- Using Computers for Inclusive Worship: network.crcna.org/church-web/using-computers-inclusive-worship
- From the Institute on Theology and Disability:
 - PowerPoint Accessibility – WebAIM (webpage) webaim.org/techniques/PowerPoint
 - How to Make Presentations Accessible to All – Web Accessibility Initiative (webpage) w3.org/WAI/training/accessible
 - Presenter Guidelines: Accessibility & Inclusion – Association of University Centers on Disabilities (webpage) aucd.org/conference/template/page.cfm?id=50129
 - Disability Style Guide – National Center on Disability and Journalism ncdj.org/style-guide
 - Guidelines for Audio Describing Meetings and Presentations – Elizabeth Kahn/ National Association of the Deaf (PDF) dcmp.org/caai/nadh207.pdf
 - Event Planning for Universal Accessibility and Full Inclusion – Disability Visions – Ability Matters, Rocky Mountain Conference, United Methodist Church rmcumc.org/files/content/missions/disability/event+planning+for+universal+accessibility+and+full+inclusion++disability+visions-ability+matters+final.pdf

Prayer Team Member

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

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1. Some individuals may need instruction in prayer. For example, instead of just speaking the Lord’s Prayer, give a context for those words or write a small explanation or add visuals.

2. Develop relationships with the congregation and provide multiple ways for members to communicate prayer needs (e.g. email, text, phone call, anonymously, written, pointing to a picture, signing, using a communication device, etc.).
3. If you are praying one-on-one with an individual, make sure you ask permission before you touch that person.
4. If you are praying one-on-one with an individual, carry post it notes and a pen. Some individuals may benefit from you writing down key phrases or an illustration of your prayer to take with them.
5. If asked to pray for healing of a person with a disability, be very cautious and proceed ONLY by following the lead of the individual with the disability.

Practical Tools:

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The Vertical Habits are eight relational words we utilize in worship and conversation with God. The Calvin Institute of Christian Worship website has many resources for implementing the Vertical Habits in your community: worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/practical-resources-for-vertical-habits/

Accessible Gospel, Inclusive Worship by Barbara J. Newman provides an explanation of the Vertical Habits and suggestions for implementing them in an inclusive worship community. Order online at allbelong.org/shop/

Use person-first, honoring language. Utilize the [All Belong Preferred language guide.docx](#).

See also: cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/pdf/DisabilityPoster_Photos.pdf

See this people-first language reference: askearn.org/topics/retention-advancement/disability-etiquette/people-first-language/

Liturgical prayer and prayer scripts can be helpful at times. [This document](#) contains one of each. You can also find prayer scripts and suggested resources in All Belong’s Phone Call Guides, part of our COVID-19 Resources For Churches, at allbelong.org/home/covid-19-resources.

Preacher

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

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1. Know your “big idea” and emphasize that big idea in multi-sensory ways (e.g. make up a catchy phrase, set the big idea to music, show a picture on a Power Point, have an object to show and/or interact with, include congregational movement, or make sermon notes with words and pictures).

2. Plant times within the sermon where there can be interaction between the congregation and pastor (e.g. respond to a question, give a thumbs up or thumbs down response, participate in a role play, talk about something with the person next to you, or act out an example or section of Scripture).
3. Not only think about the words you want to say but also how those words will be received. What would you understand if you were an individual with failing memory, a person who interprets language literally, a person with a lower IQ, an English Language Learner, a person with limited hearing, a new believer, a person from a different country, background, or denomination? How could you change one thing in your sermon to make a better connection?
4. If your sermon is lengthy, consider offering options for movement (e.g. a rocking chair for an individual that needs to move, options to sit or stand, a smaller environment where movement is welcome, and providing hand fidgets or tools throughout the sanctuary).
5. Watch your wording. “Please rise in body or in spirit” allows all to participate whereas, “Please stand” will leave out those who are unable to do so.
6. Consider making a sermon outline available for people to pick up before the service for the sake of people with differences in hearing, attention span, language processing and memory.
7. Take care when preaching on healing miracles not to assume that all people with disabilities want to be healed.
8. When announcing births of children with disabilities, announce the birth of a child, not a disability.
9. Remember people with non-visible disabilities in the congregational prayer sometimes, such as asking God for grace for people living with mental health conditions and their family members.
10. Ask for help! Others in the congregation may be gifted at finding visuals or objects to accompany your ideas, making outlines, or adding in movements.

Practical Tools:

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We encourage you to review all of the other roles, including the resources available in each section, to inform your preaching and support for your congregation.

View examples of integrating images and universal design elements into your Order of Worship at allbelong.org/church

Look into the tools available in the *Inclusion Tool Kit* and *Inclusive Worship Kit* available at allbelong.org/shop/

Friendship Ministries offers an inclusive adult Bible study known as *Together*. The study has great ideas and techniques which can apply in a corporate worship setting. togethersmallgroups.org

Use person-first, honoring language Utilize the [All Belong Preferred language guide.docx](#).

See also: [cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/pdf/DisabilityPoster_Photos.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/pdf/DisabilityPoster_Photos.pdf)

See this people-first language reference: askearn.org/topics/retention-advancement/disability-etiquette/people-first-language/

Product Purchaser

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

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1. Choose products that are fragrance-free and hypoallergenic whenever possible.
2. Choose candles that are unscented and non-petroleum based.
3. Find out if gluten-free, sugar-free, or allergen-free foods are necessary for certain individuals and keep them in stock. ALWAYS offer a gluten-free bread or wafer option for the Lord's Supper.
4. Keep a supply of items individuals with sensory or visual differences may need (e.g. sound blockers, ear plugs, fidgets, braille Bibles and books, large print Bibles and books, etc.).
5. See that seating options are safe and appropriate. They should be sized correctly and stable for the individuals utilizing them.
6. Provide seating options that offer movement (e.g. wiggle cushion or Hokki stool) or structure (e.g. chair with arms, rocking chair, or bean bag chair).

Practical Tools:

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AbleNet carries many adaptive technology solutions (including speech buttons and other devices): ablenetinc.com

The Therapy Shoppe carries many items for sensory differences (such as wiggle cushions, theraband and fidget items): [therapyshoppe.com](https://www.therapyshoppe.com)

The *Inclusion Tool Kit* and *Inclusive Worship Kit* provide different sensory tools: allbelong.org/shop

To purchase Braille signs in English, Spanish, and Bilingual see [compliancesigns.com](https://www.compliancesigns.com)

You'll find the Hokki stool and other seating options from Kaplanco or Amazon: [kaplanco.com/shop/furniture/hokki-stools](https://www.kaplanco.com/shop/furniture/hokki-stools) or [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

Scripture Reader

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

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1. Use a microphone that's connected to a sound system.
2. Post the words on the screen. Include simple pictures whenever possible.
3. Post the reading ahead of time online for those who may use a digital device or need it in large print.
4. If gifted in this way, invite a person with a disability to be the Scripture reader or part of a team reading Scripture.
5. Consider using technology in your Scripture reading through providing audio options for those who struggle with reading. Provide speech buttons for those who could read Scripture by pressing a pre-recorded button or series of buttons.
6. Provide access to large print Bibles.

Practical Tools:

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Use tools like the YouVersion app for audio options and to share Scripture online ahead of time. Visit youversion.com for more information.

Use speech buttons to include individuals with communication differences. Order ablenetinc.com

For more information on hearing loops, see hearingloop.org.

Sound Crew Leader or Member

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

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1. Microphones should be used at all times by anyone who is speaking.
 2. Watch the volume! There are many who appreciate a quieter area or at least a way to dampen the sound. If this isn't possible, consider finding the best range and setting for persons with noise sensitivity.
 3. See how you can connect your tech systems (e.g. hearing loop, translation service, projecting the Presentation on to personal devices, etc.).
 4. Mentor someone. The tech arena is a great place to serve for an individual who may need movement or hands-on involvement to engage in church. Look for an individual who is eager to get connected in church and train that individual.

Practical Tools:

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The Calvin Institute of Christian Worship provides resources and considerations for determining “How Loud is Too Loud?”: worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/how-loud-is-too-loud/

This article highlights various options for hearing assistive technology (such as hearing loops and wifi): church.design/cover_stories/assistive-listening-update/, and this post shows how one church creatively met the needs of congregants: network.crcna.org/audio-visuals/hearing-devices-worship

See ASHA (American Speech and Hearing Association) for information on sound levels: asha.org/public/hearing/loud-noise-dangers/

This chart is great for a quick reference of sound levels: dangerousdecibels.org/education/information-center/decibel-exposure-time-guidelines/

Support Group Leader Or Member

(Such as a depression support group, or support group for parents)

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

1. Pray for and with your group regularly.
2. Set up boundaries for the focus of the group, discussion topics and times, confidentiality, and considerations for who, what, when, where, and how discussions are appropriate.
3. Engage group members with varied abilities, allowing people to share their strengths and be supported in areas that are more difficult for them. Plan group meetings in such a way that all participate, adapting as necessary.
4. As a group, host training, awareness, and/or fun events for your church and community to engage in this topic.
5. Gather and share resources available within and outside your group and church.

Practical Tools:

Utilize the blog, training, consultation, and online store resources available through All Belong’s church services division: allbelong.org/church

Refer to this list of *Key Characteristics of an Effective Support Group Leader*, created by the National Multiple Sclerosis Society: main.nationalmssociety.org/site/DocServer/keycharacteristics.pdf;docID=9164

Read books and/or participate in an online community related to prayer and the focus of the group, such as:

- Caregiving—*The Heart of the Caregiver* by Mary Tutterow (theheartofthecaregiver.com)

- Parenting – *The Power of a Praying* (Parent, Husband, Wife, Grandparent) by Stormie O’Martian (stormieomartian.com)
- Mental health – Grace Alliance (mentalhealthgracealliance.org) or Pathways to Promise (pathways2promise.org)

Resources for adapting group meetings based on the needs of group members can be found at togethersmallgroups.org/general/adapting-the-sessions-to-the-needs-of-your-group/

Teacher or Leader

(Includes adult and youth)

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

1. Wear a name tag
2. Adapt material/lessons based on the needs and abilities of your class or group.
3. Always use person-first language, unless the person with a disability requests a different way of speaking.
4. Receive training in areas of specific disabilities, behavior management, person-first language, etc.
5. Utilize the knowledge, experience, and resources of local experts: members of the congregation and community who know about the individuals with disabilities, areas of disability, assistive technology, etc.
6. Welcome buddies, assistants, discussion partners, and other team members who make it possible for everyone to participate in the learning environment.
7. Get to know individuals as much as possible (names, areas of interest, families, etc.).
8. Communicate regularly and clearly with all persons involved in including an individual (peers, family, teachers, etc.)
9. See items under “Preacher” for additional ideas.

Practical Tools:

Heartshaper is a children’s curriculum with built-in adaptations and tips for children through the pre-teen years: heartshaper.com/special-needs/

Consider these ten tips for making your small group more inclusive: network.crcna.org/faith-nurture/ten-ways-bemore-inclusive-and-welcoming-adult-small-group

Use Friendship Ministry’s new inclusive adult curriculum, *Together*, to include teens and adults with and without disabilities: togethersmallgroups.org

Use Friendship Ministry’s guide for adapting lessons to the needs of your group: togethersmallgroups.org/general/adapting-the-sessions-to-the-needs-of-your-group/

The All Belong blog has many helpful articles for including persons with varied abilities, such as:

- Preparing Your Ministry to Receive Persons with Disabilities: allbelong.org/preparing-your-ministry-to-receive-individuals-with-disabilities/
- 7 Strategies to Equip Volunteers to Include Children and Teens with Disabilities: allbelong.org/equipping-church-volunteers/
- 10 Tips for Church School Classroom Management: allbelong.org/10-tips-for-church-school-classroom-management/
- Making Lent and Easter Meaningful for Persons with Disabilities: allbelong.org/making-lent-and-easter-meaningful-for-persons-with-disabilities-2/
- Six Tips for an Inclusive Christmas Program: allbelong.org/6-tips-for-an-inclusive-christmas-program/
- Supporting Persons with Disabilities through the Holidays: allbelong.org/supporting-persons-with-disabilities-through-the-holidays-part-2/

There are many resources on the All Belong website that are helpful for understanding and including persons with disabilities. Visit allbelong.org/shop for more information.

Usher / Greeter

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

1. Receive training on appropriate ways to greet and ask about the needs of people with disabilities.
2. Know what your church offers, including gluten-free options, seating options, large print items, hearing loop, assistants or buddies in children’s ministry, quiet area, sound blockers, and more.
3. Be welcoming and understanding of those who do not understand social cues or respond in typical ways.
4. Wear a nametag and/or other identifiers that signal you are someone guests can come to for information or help.
5. Ask that pew cutouts or chair arrangements be created for people who use wheelchairs or walkers.

Practical Tools:

You may want to review the section on Hospitality for tips and resources.

Take a look at our *Samples of Orders of Worship* to help you think about how to best support persons with varied abilities during a service: allbelong.org/church

The United Methodist Church offers an etiquette guide at umcdmc.org/resources/ways-to-welcome-all/etiquette-and-communication/

Autism and Your Church by Barbara J. Newman has information on understanding individuals who may not understand social cues in typical ways. Order online at allbelong.org/shop/

Utilize the [All Belong Preferred language guide.docx](#).

See also: cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/pdf/DisabilityPoster_Photos.pdf

See this people-first language reference: askearn.org/topics/retention-advancement/disability-etiquette/people-first-language/

Visual Arts Worship Team Leader or Member (Dance, 2-D Arts, Etc.)

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

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1. Incorporate persons with varied abilities into arts or dance by first asking the question, “How CAN this person participate? What movements CAN this person do?”
2. Use items like flags, streamers, shakers, or banners for every individual to express their worship.
3. Use music connected to a sound system.
4. If words accompany music, be sure they are presented visually (e.g. PowerPoint, sign language, printed, etc.) for those who cannot hear them.
5. Think about those who may have difficulty viewing the arts (due to vision differences), and how to relate the message of the piece or performance to that individual. Think about how the piece or performance will be received by the congregation (some who had experienced trauma, come from a different background, understand words differently, etc.) and any information that would be helpful to relay beforehand.

Practical Tools:

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Consider this article on dance as embodied worship and disability: disabilityandfaith.org/dance-embodied-worship/

A sample wrist ribbon and instructions for making wrist ribbons are available in the *Inclusive Worship Kit* at allbelong.org/shop/

Be inspired by this video of worship by dance featuring persons with varied abilities: youtu.be/pWoBOHzIT1s

Notice the impact of the arts and accessible worship in this blog post: allbelong.org/accessible-worship-symposium-reflections/

Website Manager / Designer

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

1. Include pictures of persons with disabilities included in typical activities in your community.
2. Always use person-first language. For example, say “a man with Down syndrome” or “a child who uses a wheelchair” instead of “a Downs man” or “a crippled child”.
3. Clearly communicate accessibility options on your website. For example, share accessibility features such as barrier free facility or hearing loop. Let website visitors know that large/bold print bulletins, song books, and Bibles are available and large print words are projected on the screen at the front for worship. Make it easy to see what options are available upon request and how to request them.
4. Create a welcome video. Similar to how you might look up photos of a hotel for an upcoming trip, consider having a similar welcome video of your church available on your website to offer guests a preview of what they can expect when they visit your church for the first time.
5. Make it easy to contact the church for accessibility need requests (e.g. sign language interpreter, sermon notes ahead of time for digital device, large print requests, etc.).
6. If you offer a livestream option, remember that there are many individuals who take advantage of watching church within their own home. Consider how you may connect with the gifts and needs of individuals who regularly join your worship service remotely.
7. Design the website so it is accessible: it can be easily read and utilized on various devices.

Practical Tools:

Turning Bridges into Barriers: The Inclusive Use of Information and Communication Technology for Churches in America, Britain, and Canada by Dr. John Jay Frank details using visuals and other technology well within congregations: [amazon.com/Turning-Barriers-Into-Bridges-Communication/dp/1887835229](https://www.amazon.com/Turning-Barriers-Into-Bridges-Communication/dp/1887835229)

Examples of church websites that feature their ministry with persons with disabilities:

- First Presbyterian Church (Aurora, IL): firstpresaurora.org/disability-ministry
- Church of the Highlands (Birmingham, AL): churchofthehighlands.com/haven
- Grace United Methodist Church (Naperville, IL): peopleofgrace.org/open-doors-ministry
- Calvary Church (Grand Rapids, MI): calvarygr.org/ministries/adults/special-needs/

Examples of church websites which offer a “preview” through pictures and words of what visitors can expect:

- Menlo Church (Menlo Park, CA): menlo.church/menlopark/campus/
- Memorial Baptist Church (Columbus, IN): memorialbaptistchurch.us/virtual-tour/

This blog post shares other items to consider for your website: allbelong.org/ways-to-make-your-church-inclusive-on-easter/

Website accessibility evaluator: fae20.cita.illinois.edu/

Consider the ideas and links in this article for church website accessibility for persons with visual impairments: nvisioncenters.com/internet-accessibility-guide/

See also: Tools for Clerical Support and Announcement Communicator/Presenter

Worship Service Planner / Leader

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

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1. Consider the gifts of persons with varied abilities as you determine worship team participants and planners. For example, ask a strong reader who is a wheelchair user to read Scripture, ask a “techy” person with autism spectrum disorder to work with the sound system, ask a young artist to make a picture for the big idea of the day.
 2. Have a variety of tools available during worship so everyone can engage in the conversation with God. For example, include worship streamers which can be waved during songs, sound blockers for those with sensitive ears, the PowerPoint available ahead of time (allows a person with limited vision to access the material on a personal device), and hand tools and fidgets for those needing movement options.
 3. Provide options for individuals with limited vision and hearing. For example, have large-print hymnals and Bibles available, offer large-print handouts and bulletins, consider a hearing loop or Sign Language interpreter or Braille bulletin and make alternative media available upon request.
 4. Plan deliberate times within your year to highlight and celebrate the gifts that persons with disabilities bring to your congregation.
 5. Provide the order of worship in written and/or pictorial form to individuals who function best when they know the day’s plan and have an accompanying schedule.
 6. Be careful with your wording in the publicly shared order of worship. Do not use specific times or list events that will not happen, as some individuals may be counting on your schedule to be

completely precise and accurate. For example, someone may get agitated if the schedule says 10:00 AM worship, but the service does not start until 10:04 AM.

Practical Tools:

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View examples of integrating images and universal design elements into your Order of Worship at allbelong.org/church

The Easter Book by Barbara J. Newman has patterns for making alternate worship tools. Order from Faith Alive Resources at faithaliveresources.org/Products/301410/friendship-easter-book.aspx

Inclusive Worship Kit includes a sample visual schedule you can use in a worship setting. Order online at allbelong.org/shop/

Utilize the [All Belong Preferred language guide.docx](#). See also: cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/pdf/DisabilityPoster_Photos.pdf and askearn.org/topics/retention-advancement/disability-etiquette/people-first-language/

Worship Team Member

(includes musicians and members of choir or band)

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

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1. Recognize people with varied abilities that have a heart for worship and welcome them to participate in some way.
 2. Begin by asking the right question, “What CAN the individual do?”, and be willing to accommodate physical needs (e.g. space for wheelchair, streamers for those without words, stools for those unable to stand for longer times, etc.).
 3. Be willing to accommodate visual needs (e.g. lyrics in large print or on a digital device, adequate lighting in the worship area and space leading up to it, etc.).
 4. Be willing to accommodate other needs (e.g. songs on CD ahead of time, clothing or robe choices that will work with each participant, special location for greater comfort or lessened anxiety, etc.).
 5. There are times when the congregation needs an introduction to the behaviors or appearance of a person with a disability to best receive that individual’s gifts. Know the person, the gifts and needs, and share them accordingly (with permission from that person or that person’s parent or guardian).

6. Understand that volume level matters – many with sensitive ears may be present, so consider how instruments and voices would be most effective in leading the congregation into worship without being overly loud.

Practical Tools:

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The *Inclusion Awareness Kit* includes a lesson plan and the needed supplies to allow children and adults to see each individual as an important and gifted piece of “God’s body puzzle”. Order online at allbelong.org/shop/

Helping Kids Include Kids with Disabilities by Barbara J. Newman includes lesson plans and sample letters to help children understand their peers with disabilities. Order online at allbelong.org/shop/

Accessible Gospel, Inclusive Worship by Barbara J. Newman provides a framework and ideas to foster faith formation in everyone through creating an inclusive worship environment. Order online at allbelong.org/shop/

Hear from Ken Medema, musician, worship leader, storyteller (comedian?) and music therapist, about church-music (find out more at kenmedema.com/about-us.aspx): youtube.com/watch?v=5GVPSy9ijKU

Wrap Around Support Team Leader or Member

(This includes buddies or assistants and others who get to know a family well and support their participation in the congregation on a regular basis, under the direction of the Accessibility Advocate/Inclusion Coordinator)

Universal and Responsive Design Tips

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1. Arrange for specific requests (e.g. sign language interpreter or transportation).
 2. Collect supports in a timely fashion (e.g. get sermon notes or Presentation outline or slides and distribute digitally ahead of time).
 3. Connect with the individual or family to determine what support is needed and make it happen.
 4. Get training in specific areas of care, learn about the disability and the person.
 5. Provide necessary support during church activities, helping to modify activities and curriculum as needed.
 6. Work with Support Team members to coordinate and maintain a consistent schedule and promote healthy relationships with the individual/family and within the team.

Practical Tools:

Accessible Gospel, Inclusive Worship by Barbara J. Newman provides a framework and ideas to foster faith formation in everyone through creating an inclusive worship environment. Order online at allbelong.org/shop/

For training options in specific areas of care an disability, see allbelong.org/church, and for ideas about equipping team members in general see this blog post: allbelong.org/equipping-church-volunteers/. One way to receive training for ministry with persons with disabilities is through Buddy Break, a ministry of respite for families (nathanielshope.org/our-programs/buddy-break/).

To see how to modify activities and lessons based on the needs of an individual, see togethersmallgroups.org/general/adapting-the-sessions-to-the-needs-of-your-group/.

If you would like help setting up a Wrap-Around Support Team, or coaching in how to make one more successful, inquire about our Church Services Consultants at 616-245-8388 or info@allbelong.org.



**Who desires a
place of
belonging in
your
congregation?**



OUR MISSION:

All Belong equips congregations and schools to glorify God with purposeful, innovative inclusion of persons with varied abilities.



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