

MINISTRY TO PEOPLE with Physical and Mobility Disabilities



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Physical and Mobility Disabilities

- › Mobility challenges may be caused by a chronic health condition, a congenital condition, an accident or an injury.
- › People with mobility challenges often have difficulty using their legs or feet or may fatigue easily or have difficulty traveling long distances.
- › In the United States, 10 percent of adults report having a mobility difficulty. This number is expected to grow as the number of people with these conditions is expected to increase dramatically throughout the next decades.
- › In 1990, Congress passed the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), mandating that reasonable accommodations are made so that people with disabilities can access public buildings and spaces. Religious organizations are not required to adhere to the ADA.

Tezzoni, L.I. (2003). *When Walking Fails: Mobility Problems of Adults with Chronic Conditions*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Ministry Challenges

People with mobility issues may be prevented from participating in the life of the church by the following challenges:

- › **Attitudinal challenges** from the disappointment of missing out on church in the small inaccessible balcony to the neck strain caused by looking up at everyone during coffee hour to the embarrassment of being ignored by the person down the pew who only sees the wheelchair and not the person using it. Negative attitudes and thoughtless actions displayed by people within a congregation can send a strong message to a person with a mobility disability that they are not welcome in the congregation.
- › **Environmental challenges** from a communion rail only reached by stairs or narrow pews, to a round bathroom door handle, to a coffee dispenser placed on a high counter. The setup of the surrounding environment can provide barriers to people with mobility issues.
- › **Financial challenges** from the cost of an elevator, to the cost of expanding a bathroom, to the cost of repair for a wheelchair lift. Owing to limited finances, some congregations with good intentions may be prevented from including people with mobility challenges.
- › **Spiritual challenges** from the temptation of the world, of the devil, and our flesh. Like all people, a person with a mobility disability needs to know about the love, mercy and forgiveness of Jesus.





Ministry GOAL

Break down barriers and attitudes to welcome, witness and be in ministry with people with mobility disabilities participating in the life of the church together.

Resources

The LCMS Disabilities Ministry Task Force members suggest these books and other resources for ministry to and with people with physical or mobility disabilities. This list does not reflect an exhaustive accounting nor an endorsed list by The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

- › **Congregational Disability Assessment Tool**, a free downloadable resource available at www.lcms.org/disability.
- › **Americans with Disabilities Act**, www.ada.gov
- › **Principles of Universal Design** from The Center for Universal Design at North Carolina State University www.ncsu.edu
- › **National Organization on Disability** offers useful resources for physical and mobility disabilities www.nod.org
- › **Blindsided by Grace: Entering the World of Disability** by Robert Molsberry, published by Augsburg Fortress, shares reflections from a pastor who sustained a spinal cord injury and his resultant experiences in life and ministry. www.augsburgfortress.org
- › **Contact local building professionals** to learn about local and state building codes and requirements.
- › **Congregation members with mobility impairments** may have suggestions about how their participation in the congregation could be improved.