



10

ways to
make my church
more inclusive

10 ways to make your church more inclusive.

Most churches have a sign or a website that boldly declares “Everybody Welcome.” We want to encourage faith communities to practice that kind of hospitality in all aspects of their ministry.

The reality is, most churches want to be inclusive, but struggle with how.

This guide is intended to get you started. Remember that you don't need any qualifications or even experience with additional needs to be a church that makes people feel welcome and a part of their congregation.

1. Make a list of what is already being offered to accommodate additional needs



Many churches have already implemented more things than they realize. Some accommodations have become so universal, we don't even think about them any more. Rather than focusing on what isn't happening, take some time to list all the things that are... and then choose to add 1 more (It will feel less overwhelming and more doable).

Does your church offer?

- print resources for service
- large print or Braille song sheets
- ramps
- accessible bathrooms
- hearing loops
- separate space
- 1:1 volunteers in children's programming

2. Appoint a Designated Person

Have a designated person that oversees and coordinates the support and overall vision of the church for inclusion, as well as the practical implementation of support for people with additional needs. Who in your congregation would have passion and experience? Perhaps a retired teacher? Having a person also means that families or individuals have a contact person to ask questions of.

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3. Get to Know a Person

A person with a disability is often seen in light of that disability and how it impacts their life. Find ways to get to know a person beyond that. What do they like? What are they good at? What is their favourite hockey team? Food? There are many questionnaires that are designed to help you respectfully ask questions to help you better understand. The more you know about a person, the easier it is to find creative ways to help them connect within your congregation.

4. Understand that Language Matters

When you gather prayer requests, do you ask for prayers for a “wheelchair-bound person” or “a person who is a wheelchair user”? Do you pray for an “invalid” or for “someone with a physical disability”? Do you use phrases like ‘suffers from’? Do you invite people to stand “if able”?



Words matter. Learn more about person first language in order to practice affirming word choices. Small changes such as inviting your congregation to “rise in body or in spirit” make a big difference.

5. Equip Volunteers and Leaders

Consider adding training or workshops to your calendar to help your church volunteers feel more confident in responding to different needs. Hope Centre Ministries has a variety of workshops available and would be happy to help you find something that is a good fit for your congregation.

6. Understand Sensory Differences

Each person interprets sounds, tastes, smells, sights, touch, and more differently. For some people loud noises are exciting and fun, but for others they are painful and frightening. Experiment with different music, lighting, greeting ideas to allow for more differences. Consider having a space available for people to use that may be adapted to their sensory needs. An underused church library can double as a small and intimate fellowship area for someone who struggles with crowds and noise.

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7. Invest in Resources

There are many practical resources available to help your church grow in understanding inclusion. Books such as “Autism and Your Church” and “Helping Kids Include Kids with Disabilities” both by Barbara J. Newman are invaluable and can lead to great brainstorming and discussion sessions. Include books about disability and inclusion in your church library as well!

8. Help Your Congregation Understand “Why”

One in seven Canadians aged 15 years or older reports living with a disability. Church stats often do not reflect that. Jesus' ministry gave us many examples of radical welcome. As a representation of the body of Christ on earth, we are called to include in order to strengthen the entire body. A body with missing pieces is weakened. Disability Awareness Sundays help remind and teach congregations of the biblical mandate of inclusion. There are many resources available such as litanies, prayers, hymns, and sermon outlines that can help highlight. Consider inviting a special guest speaker or a family living with a disability to share with your congregation.

9. Make Room for Different

Worship is a conversation with God. Provide multiple sensory options for both input and output. Singing is one way to say “I love you” to God, but people in your group can also sign those words or wave a streamer. Perhaps encourage prayer request pictures rather than spoken requests. Include pictures/visuals to be projected during the sermon. Did you know that the majority of Pastors are auditory learners (learn by hearing) but that the majority of congregants are visual learners (learn by seeing)?



10. Give People the Script

Some churches have completely eliminated the passing out of an order of service. While it is environmentally friendly, it can also be a barrier. Many people who live with disabilities need to know the order of what is happening. It lessens anxiety and increases participation. Consider making your order of service available (maybe even as a checklist!) so that people can follow along.

Next Steps: What You Can Do Today

Do you need some help implementing these suggestions? Are you interested in a disability audit that will help you identify areas where you can improve? Do you want to book a consulting session or a speaker to help you improve how you include people living with disabilities?



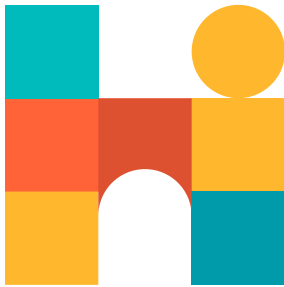
204-479-4893



info@hopecentreministries.org

Contact Hope Centre today. We'd be happy to provide practical ways your church can become a place where everyone feels welcomed and valued — like they matter.





About Hope Centre

Hope Centre Ministries exists to celebrate the gifts and uniqueness of individuals who live with disabilities and support them in their walk with God and their faith community.

We envision a time when all people who live with a disability, together with their families and their friends, are fully incorporated in the worship and life of Christ's Church where all employ their gifts for the benefit of local congregations and their ministry.