



Action Strategies for a Physical and Mobility Challenge Ministry

Actions to Build Awareness

Ask the Experts

1. Always include people with mobility and physical needs in building and renovation projects (for example, ask them where they want to sit, rather than assigning them).
2. Provide opportunities for people with physical and mobility needs to share their stories, through testimony and preaching (this is the most important recommendation about creating awareness).
3. Create media and even print materials to educate church members and others about the needs of people with physical and mobility disabilities (i.e., short videos and print material with images of people using mobility devices). These resources may be shared in bulletins, newsletters, social media, etc.

Media as a Tool

1. Use social media to educate church members. For example, create short testimonials, share statistics, and promote knowledge about the needs of this population.
2. Conduct an accessibility audit of the church website. While this is useful for all areas of APM, for physical and mobility ministries, focus on ensuring information about the physical accessibility of the church and its programs is evident on your website, and easy to find. Have someone with a physical or mobility challenge give you feedback.

Providing Education

1. Organize educational opportunities for pastors, church leaders, and APM leaders on accessibility needs and the stigma faced with physical and mobility challenges.

2. Teach basic disability etiquette to church greeters, Sabbath School leaders, and other leaders.

Actions to Foster Acceptance

The Building Itself

1. Modify the church facility to the extent possible. Being inside the building is essential to belonging.
2. Architectural and physical barriers must be addressed and eliminated. For worshipers with mobility limitations, the APM team will need to be alert to observe areas of limited physical access and conditions that pose safety risks for all worshipers. In addition, preferential seating may be a helpful accommodation for some worshipers with limited physical mobility.
3. Consider accessibility from the parking lot. Individuals using a cane, crutches, a walker, or a wheelchair, or those who are unsteady on their feet when walking independently, will need a parking area that allows them safe navigation from their vehicle to the sanctuary entrance.
4. Safe access from the parking lot into the sanctuary entrance should be considered. If the church building is at a different level from that of the parking lot, stairs should be marked with reflective tape and/or edged with red paint to decrease the risk of falling. Handrails should be available for use when ascending or descending stairs. Ideally, a ramp should be available for worshipers using walking devices such as walkers or wheelchairs. If a ramp is not available or feasible, the Special Needs Ministries team must have a well-communicated plan to help people with mobility impairments gain safe access to church buildings.
5. Parking lot surfaces with deep holes and ruts pose safety challenges for individuals using a cane, crutches, or a walker. Even for those with mobility challenges who do not use a physical device, care must be taken to provide safe walking surfaces.
6. In wet weather, ensure that walkways are slip-resistant and that entry area, such as the foyer, are free of slippery flooring that could be extremely unsafe for individuals with mobility challenges.
7. Transportation needs to and from the church should be considered. If the lack of transportation keeps someone from joining the congregation in worship, it will be important that the church family consider transportation options that they may be able to offer to extend the opportunity of worship to every person interested in joining the church family

8. In the case that a building cannot be modified further, take the “experience of community” provided by church involvement directly to people who cannot get into the building (live video communication software for groups, live broadcasting, community celebrations in physically accessible settings, community events in physically accessible settings, have outdoor church).

Outreach

1. Re-engage in targeted friendship evangelism focusing on people with physical and mobility challenges. For example, create a letter-writing or telephone ministry for people who are no longer able to leave their homes.
2. Signs, websites, or bulletin boards must offer evidence that people with physical and mobility disabilities are welcome and are included in the life of the congregation, e.g. through support group brochures, photos, pictures on the church’s social media sites.

Opportunities for Belonging

1. Provide meaningful and adaptable opportunities for contribution to the life of the church (i.e., nominating committee, church board, prayer line ministry, greeter, project opportunities, etc.). Consider offering shorter timeframes so that the person can test their stamina for the role.
2. Be intentional about identifying the spiritual and service gifts of church members with physical and mobility needs and help them develop their gifts through service and leadership opportunities (i.e., witnessing, testimony, bible study, and preaching).
3. Intentionally engage people with physical and mobility challenges in training and workshops that promote spiritual development and provide transportation to these events.

Eliminating Stigma

1. Eliminate language and doctrine that link disability to sin.
2. Provide basic hospitality and disability etiquette training to church leaders and support persons (in ways that are not patronizing or condescending- for example, asking permission to help before doing so).
3. Advocate for yearly training, at a minimum, for all church leadership, about prevalence, needs, and hospitality involved in physical and mobility ministries (for example, greetings, use of language, and accommodating without fuss (like changing classrooms if needed)).

4. Develop sermons, workshops, and written materials that show that inherent in each person, is a sense of dignity, regardless of their abilities or inabilities. This calls for genuine respect for the individual.