The Benefits

of Including People with Disabilities in Church Life

Rev. Mark Stephenson, Director of Disability Concerns, Christian Reformed Church in North America

www.crcna.org/disability

network.crcna.org/disability

www.facebook.com/disabilityconcerns

A Caveat

1. *What keeps people with disabilities from being included in church and in society?*
2. *God is a friend to strangers.*

Deuteronomy 10 *“17For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. 18He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. 19And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt. 20Fear the LORD your God and serve him. Hold fast to him and take your oaths in his name. 21He is your praise; he is your God, who performed for you those great and awesome wonders you saw with your own eyes. 22Your forefathers who went down into Egypt were seventy in all, and now the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars in the sky.”*

1. *Benefits of including people with disabilities in church life include these:*
   1. Complete the body of Christ

*“The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable.”* (1 Cor. 12:22)

* 1. Fulfill justice

*“Cursed is the man who withholds justice from the alien, the fatherless or the widow." Then all the people shall say, ‘Amen!’”* (Deuteronomy 27:19)

*“My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism.”* (James 2:1)

* 1. Enhance outreach

*“Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, . . . ’”* (Matthew 28:18,19)

* 1. Deepen care

*The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats* (Matthew 25:31-46)

* 1. Enrich hospitality

*The parable of the Great Banquet* (Luke 14:15-24) “At the King’s table”

* 1. Increase joy

*“If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.”* (Phil. 2:1-2)

* 1. Develop stewardship of God’s grace

*“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.”* (1 Peter 4:10,11)

* 1. Grow in love

*“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”* (John 13:34, 35)

* 1. What are your ideas?

For further reading: "Spirituality and Hospitality: What the Church Can Learn by Welcoming Persons with Disabilities," Commission on Theology, Reformed Church in America, 2008 General Synod.