

NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION

DISABILITIES MINISTRIES

H A N D B O O K

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INTRODUCTION

But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

~ 1 Corinthians 12:24-26, NKJV

Based on the biblical principle that all are one in Christ, the mission of the North American Division (NAD) of Seventh-day Adventists is to reach all people with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Additionally, the NAD invites each member to fully participate in this mission. To support this aim, the Seventh-day Adventist Church took several actions. In 1989, the NAD's Office of Human Relations established the Commission for People with Disabilities. At the 1995 General Conference Session, a ministry for people with disabilities was approved. And in 2005, the NAD voted and created a new position, coordinator for Disabilities Ministries, to report to the NAD Vice President of Ministries.

All members, those with disabilities and those without disabilities, bring unique talents and gifts to the church. Ellen White explains, "God takes men [and women] as they are, with the human elements in their character, and trains them for His service, if they will be disciplined and learn of Him. They are not chosen because they are perfect, but notwithstanding their imperfections, that through the knowledge and practice of the truth, through the grace of Christ, they may become transformed into His image" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 294, whiteestate.org). As Disabilities Ministries leader, your mission is to promote the full inclusion of adults and children with disabilities in your church as they develop their spiritual gifts and grow in their relationship with God. This is a task you cannot do alone. As the Disabilities Ministries leader, you are responsible for educating your local

church leaders and members about welcoming and including members with disabilities, as well as, ministering to people with disabilities in the community.

Over 1 billion people worldwide have a disability. Throughout the NAD, individuals with disabilities are making great strides towards acceptance by the community and full participation in all areas of life: family, employment, education, recreation. Legal mandates, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act , Section 25 of the Canadian Human Rights Act, and the Human Rights Act of Bermuda, provide civil rights protection for people with disabilities and grant access to people with disabilities to many activities previously denied them. However, religious organizations are generally exempt from these mandates, and, unfortunately, individuals with disabilities have not made the same strides at church as they have in the public sector.

As a Seventh-day Adventist, you have a higher mandate than civil laws to welcome, accommodate and include individuals with disabilities into your congregation. This mandate is to love one another. Jesus explained, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35, NKJV). Of the 35 miracles that Jesus performed, 27 were for people with disabilities, and an estimated 77% of his time was spent in ministering to those with disabilities. Jesus' life demonstrated the importance of reaching all with the Gospel message.

As Disabilities Ministries leader, you can put this mandate into practice in your own life and the life of your church. May God bless you as you collaborate with individuals with and without disabilities to ensure that your church is welcoming and inclusive of all of God's family.

1

MISSION AND GOALS

North American Division Mission Statement

The mission of the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists is to reach all people within its assigned territory with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Mission

The mission of Disabilities Ministries is for all members to live Christ's model of reaching and nurturing all people and to promote full inclusion of adults and children with disabilities into God's family.

Goals

- To support all people in their relationship with Christ.
- To nurture all people as they develop and use their talents given by God.
- To educate local church leaders about the needs of adults and children with disabilities.
- To promote full inclusion of church members with disabilities in church activities, including worship, education, fellowship, service, and leadership.

“Love, mercy, and compassion were revealed in every act of His [Christ's] life; His heart went out in tender sympathy to the children of men” (Ellen White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 3).

- To advocate for individuals with disabilities within the church and the community.
- To provide information to people with disabilities and their families about disability services, programs, and resources provided by national and local agencies of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.
- To share the Gospel with adults and children with disabilities in the community through fellowship, outreach, and community service.

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DEFINITIONS, TERMS AND PRACTICE

It is useful to have a common definition of disabilities and a shared language when ministering to individuals with disabilities and when working with service agencies. While Canada and Bermuda currently do not have a national definition of disability, the United States does. This definition is part of the U.S. law, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). ADA's definition of disability is widely recognized, even outside of the United States, and is the definition used in this handbook. According to the ADA, a disability is a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of a person's major life activities. Major life activities include breathing, seeing, hearing, walking, communicating, learning, taking care of one's self, manual tasks, and working.

MAJOR DISABILITY GROUPS

The ADA identifies seven major groups of disabilities. Some people may fall into more than one category.

Cognitive: A cognitive disability affects a person's ability to comprehend what is seen or heard, and then infer information from social subtleties and body language. Cognitive disabilities may include, but are not limited to, autism, learning disabilities, Down Syndrome, and traumatic brain injuries.

Hearing: A hearing disability affects a person's ability to hear sounds and, in some instances, the ability to discriminate speech. Hearing disabilities may range from mild to profound hearing loss.

Hidden: A hidden disability is a physical condition that is not easily observed. This term encompasses many conditions including, but not limited to, arthritis, epilepsy, high blood pressure, diabetes, cancer, and conditions related to obesity.

Mobility: A mobility disability limits an individual's ability to perform the activities of daily living. The individual may need assistance in moving from one place to another.

Psychiatric: A psychiatric disability is a mental disorder that may affect daily living. This may include, but is not limited to, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and phobias.

For more information on the Americans with Disabilities Act, visit ada.gov. For disability information in Bermuda, visit bermuda-online.org/BPHA.htm. For information on Canadian law, visit disabilitypolicy.ca.

Speech: A speech disability affects a person's ability to communicate and can be characterized as language and voice disorders, articulation errors, dysfluency, or stuttering.

Visual: A visual disability affects a person's ability to see. Visual disabilities range from limited vision, glaucoma, and cataracts to blindness.

CONFIDENTIALITY

It is extremely important that all information pertaining to a person's disability be kept confidential. In fact, in the United States the Americans with Disabilities Act requires that information regarding disabilities be kept confidential. Just as you would not want your medical records or condition shared, people do not want information about their disability shared with others, unless they have given permission to do so.

As Disabilities Ministries leader, you should educate the congregation about confidentiality, explaining that information about a person with a disability will be kept confidential and only shared when necessary and with permission of the person with the disability. Church members do not need to know who has a disability or the details of the disability in order for accommodations to be made.

When you file reports about the number of church members with disabilities served by your ministry, report only the type of disability and the number of members with the disability. Do not use the church member's name, unless you have received permission from the individual with the disability or his or her guardian.

ACCOMMODATION

At times, people with disabilities will need changes made to the environment, the material, or a process in order to be able to participate at church or in other activities. Some familiar accommodations are the use of interpreters, large print, or accessible parking. Just as each person is unique, so are the accommodations that he or she may need. What works for one person may not work for another. The best way to identify what type(s) of accommodation someone needs is to ask her or him.

For accommodation suggestions, visit Job Accommodation Network at askjan.org. This site is designed to help employers identify accommodations in the workplace. These ideas are helpful for churches as well.

DOCUMENTATION

Documentation of a disability is generally done by a professional with expertise in the area of the disability: a medical doctor, an educational psychologist, or a psychiatrist. Documentation states that an individual has a specific disability, explains how the disability impacts the person, and suggests possible accommodations the person might need. In the workplace or school, individuals with disabilities must provide documentation in order to receive accommodations or modifications.

In contrast, church members who ask for accommodations or modifications do not need to provide documentation. Documentation can be costly and burdensome and is rarely necessary for the specific changes needed to provide full inclusion for church members and visitors with disabilities. However, if you are working with outside agencies, they may require that the individual with a disability provide current documentation of her or his disability.

DISABILITIES MINISTRIES LEADER RESPONSIBILITIES

To lead your congregation in Disabilities Ministries, you *don't* need a degree in medicine or education. You do need to welcome and include adults and children of all abilities into your church, to listen to and act on the needs of individuals with disabilities and their families, and to have the desire to live God's grace through your ministry.

As you lead your congregation in full inclusion for all of God's family, may these words from Ellen White guide you in your ministry:

I saw that it is in the providence of God that widows and orphans, the blind, the deaf... and persons disabled in a variety of ways, have been placed in close Christian relation to His church; it is to prove His people and develop their true character. Angels of God are watching to see how we treat these persons who need our compassion, love, and disinterested benevolence. This is God's test of our character. If we have the true religion of the Bible, we shall feel that debt of love, kindness, and interest is due to Christ in behalf of His brethren; and we can do no less than to show our gratitude for His immeasurable love to us while we were sinners unworthy of His grace, by having a deep interest and unselfish love for others.

~ *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 3, p. 511

Depending on your church's size and location, your tasks as Disabilities Ministries leader will vary. However, there are some basic tasks that are the responsibilities of all Disabilities Ministries leaders.

- Advocate for full inclusion of church members with disabilities.
- Serve on your church's Personal Ministries council.
- Establish and chair a Disabilities Ministries committee that functions as a subcommittee of the Personal Ministries council.
- Conduct surveys to discover the needs of both church members and community members with disabilities.
- Assess Disabilities Ministries activities to ensure the quality of each activity.

- Keep confidential information regarding a person and his or her disability unless permission is given to disclose the information.
- Train and support local church leaders and members on the inclusion of adults and children with disabilities.
- Encourage the appointment of members with disabilities to church offices and ministries.
- Identify areas of the church that are not physically accessible and make suggestions for improvement to the appropriate person or committee.
- Arrange transportation to church and other events for people with disabilities.
- Identify community outreach opportunities to adults and children with disabilities and their families in which your church can participate.
- Serve as liaison between the local church and Seventh-day Adventist agencies that serve adults and children with disabilities.
- Connect with local agencies that assist adults and children with disabilities and their families.
- Create and submit reports required by your local conference.
- Pursue continuing education on best practices in Disabilities Ministries for yourself and your team members.

Disabilities Ministries does not stand alone. Rather, it supports every other ministry since adults and children with disabilities should be involved in all ministry areas.

CREATING A SUCCESSFUL DISABILITIES MINISTRIES TEAM

Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. ~

Hebrews 10:25, NKJV

Team Membership

Before you begin asking individuals to be a part of your Disabilities Ministries team, consider the goals you would like for Disabilities Ministries to accomplish. You should be intentional about your selection of team members, seeking out

those with the skills and contacts necessary for the success of your ministry. The team should model the mission of Disabilities Ministries by being diverse and by including members with disabilities and their families.

If any of the team members will be working directly with adults or children with disabilities, it is important to screen volunteers. Check with your church board to find out what volunteer screening policies are in place. For additional assistance, visit Adventist Risk Management's site at adventistrisk.org and click on "Forms" to read the NAD guidelines regarding volunteers, or to download volunteer application forms in English, Spanish and Portuguese.

Team Purpose and Responsibilities

As a team leader, you'll need to make sure each member understands the function of the team. Teams need to know why they exist (the mission), what they are supposed to accomplish (goals) and who is involved. If these directives aren't clear, the result often leads to frustration and ineffectiveness. It's a good idea to give each team member a written statement of the team's purpose (mission and goals) and each team member's responsibilities. Remember that a team is fluid and flexible. The team goals may change during the year and so may individual responsibilities. The point of defining your purpose and team member responsibilities is to create a ministry that is well organized and gives the team a sense of satisfaction. However, if something isn't working, you and your team should make the necessary changes.

The Disabilities Ministries team reports to the pastor and church board regarding any new major projects and expenditures. Also, the team should report regularly to the church board and the membership about the exciting, successful activities the team has completed, needs of those with disabilities in the church and community, and physical accessibility modifications needed to the church facility.

Team Training

To keep your team functioning at its best, provide a wide range of training and informational opportunities on a variety of topics about disabilities. The following are just a few of the ways you can accomplish this:

- As a group or individually, attend Conference, Union, or Division leadership training.
- Invite a local expert or individual with a disability to talk to the team.
- Watch a webinar or DVD.
- Read and discuss a book.
- Sign up for a free e-newsletter.
- Keep up-to-date on areas of interest through podcasts, blogs, Facebook or Twitter.

Additional tools, information and resources for you and your Disabilities Ministries team are located at the end of this book.