

# ELCA Accessibility Guide



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
God's work. Our hands.

## ELCA Accessibility Guide

*But in fact, God has placed the parts of the body, every one of them, exactly how God wants them to be.*

1 Corinthians 12:18

God has formed creation exactly how God wants it to be: Diversity abounds! We try to honor this Holy diversity through the inclusion of all God's people in the church. This often means making our church buildings, our meetings, and our activities more accessible to people with disabilities. With intention and planning, all God's people can feel the warm embrace of God's welcome in the church.

This document represents a way to get started in that process of welcoming. It is a guide to assist you in exercising the church's ministry of inclusion in your meetings, conferences, and other events. This guide does not constitute legal advice. If you have specific questions regarding your legal obligations under the Americans with Disabilities Act or any other state or federal law; you are advised to contact your attorney. This guide merely suggests how a congregation or other expression of this church may carry out its ministry of inclusion.

## Getting Started

### Planning an Accessible Meeting

There are four important items that anyone who is serious about inclusion issues should keep in mind as they begin to plan their meeting or conference.

1. Consult with people who are differently-abled, blind, and people who are deaf in planning meetings and conferences. They are your best source for knowing the needs of the people who will be attending these meetings.
2. When doing a site visit, try to see the location through the eyes of people who are differently-abled. Nothing will be as effective as envisioning the barriers people who are disabled could encounter at the event that is being planned.
3. Walk through the program both in your mind and physically. If more than one site is being used for an event, drive or walk the route between sites to make sure that no barriers have been overlooked.
4. Make sure you have an area on your registration form to indicate special needs. When special needs are indicated, the person should be contacted by event planner(s).

## **Architectural Accessibility**

The Mission Investment Fund (MIF) is a resource for congregations that want to expand, renovate, purchase land or relocate. MIF church building consultants are available to consult on a building project from its inception to completion. The consultants are specialists in church planning and construction. They are valuable resources who can successfully guide a congregation through the building process, help to maximize resources, provide information about Mission Investment Fund loan options, and advise on how to meet mission and ministry goals. The consultants also assist congregations that want to ensure their facilities are accessible. Services are available to congregations at no charge. Contact the [Mission Investment Fund](#) church building consultant who serves your synod.

## **Mobility**

### **Planning an Accessible Meeting**

- Parking stalls are visibly marked and reserved for people with disabilities.
- Parking stalls for people with disabilities are located closest to the nearest accessible entrance on an accessible route.
- An accessible route with curb cuts exists from the parking lot to the accessible entrance.
- Accessible entrances are clearly marked by the international symbol of accessibility.
- Ramps with a slope no greater than 1' rise in 12' and a width of no less than 36" are easily seen. There are level landings at the top and bottom of the ramp.
- Doorways have a clear opening of 32" or more. Doors have lever or push handles. This includes the accessible doors to get into the building, doors inside the building that will be used during the event, and doors to restrooms.
- Adequate space for wheelchairs at conference and banquet tables is provided. This space should be in the same location as other participants.
- Table top height is between 28" and 34" above the floor.
- There is seating space with extra leg room for people with crutches, walkers, braces or casts.
- At least one water fountain on each floor is easily usable from a wheelchair.
- Corridors are at least 36" wide; 60" wide is preferred if there is two way traffic.
- If more than one floor of a building is used, there must be either an elevator or wheelchair lift available.

- Elevator or lift cab is large enough to accommodate a wheelchair. Call buttons and panel buttons should be within reach of a person in a wheelchair.
- Wall mounted objects do not project into accessible corridor.
- Fire alarms are mounted to accommodate a person in a wheelchair.
- Ideally, there is an accessible restroom on each floor that is being used by event participants.
- There are grab bars on each side of the accessible toilet.
- There is a turning space of at least 5'x5' in the restroom stalls.
- The sink has 29" of clearance from the floor to the bottom of the sink. Pipes are wrapped.
- Towel dispensers are no higher than 40" from the floor.
- Accessible electrical outlets and closet rods are at an appropriate height in guest rooms.
- Arrangements have been made for accessible transportation to/from the meeting for those people who request it. These arrangements have been double checked the day the participants are due to arrive.
- If more than one site is to be used for an event, accessible transportation to and from each site has been arranged.
- A local arrangements committee has been used to handle any special needs.

## **Blindness or Visual Impairment Planning an Accessible Meeting**

- Elevators have an audible signal.
- Directions for elevators, other equipment and locations throughout the building(s) are written in Braille.
- All stairs have handrails.
- All meeting rooms are well lighted with adjustable lighting.
- Dog runs are available in the hotel or convention center for dog guide users.
- Written materials are provided in a variety of formats, such as raised print and large print, and audiotape.
- Audio visual aids are completely legible, with large print and sharp, contrasting colors. There is adequate time for the audience to read the visual aids. All materials are delivered orally as well as in written form.

## **Deaf or Hearing Impairment Planning an Accessible Meeting**

- A TDD or TTY is available some place in the building.
- Deaf participants using a Sign Language interpreter are seated near the front. The interpreter is in an area which can be easily seen by the participants who are deaf.

- The interpreter is placed as close to the speaker as possible. When there are multiple speakers sitting at a table, the interpreter is placed across from the deaf or hard of hearing person(s).
- A good quality sound system is being used.
- Necessary adjustments are made to the sound system for participants who are hard of hearing.
- A closed-captioning service or real time captioning is provided whenever audiovisual presentations are used.
- Background noise is eliminated to the greatest extent possible.
- Qualified, professional interpreters, who are trained in the preferred communication style, are used. Interpreters are often available through your local community college or university.
- There are an adequate number of interpreters for meetings, meals, and social events.
- Guest rooms are equipped with alternative emergency devices such as visual alarms and indicators (e.g., flashing lights on doors, telephones, and fire alarms, beds which vibrate, volume-controlled phone lines, and closed-captioned television.)
- Hearing enhancement units are available for hard of hearing participants.

## **Chemical Sensitivity Planning an Accessible Meeting**

- There are air filters on furnace and air conditioning units.
- There are fragrance free rooms available (i.e., no scented candles, soaps, detergents, cleaning supplies, air fresheners, facial tissues or potpourri pots.)
- If you intend to use incense, make sure participants are notified in advance.

## **Suggestions Planning an Accessible Meeting**

- Show participants who have visual impairments the site by explaining the layout and walking through the meeting area with them.
- Offer to help participants with visual impairments find a seat in the meeting room.
- Have a staff member or volunteer available to sit with the participant and describe the presentations, if the participant so desires.
- Have photocopies of audio visual aids available upon request for closer examination.
- Design exhibits so that they may be touched and/or heard.
- Limit the amount of time an interpreter must interpret to twenty minutes, then have a five minute break. When two interpreters are used, rotate every twenty minutes.

- Use one interpreter if the meeting will last less than one and a half hours with continuous interpreting. Use two interpreters when the meeting lasts longer than one and a half hours.
- Have a staff member or volunteer available to take notes during the presentation, allowing the participant to focus on the speaker and interpreter.
- Arrange seats in a circle for small group discussion. When an interpreter is used, he or she should be directly in front of the participant who is deaf or hearing impaired.
- When possible, plan for interpreters to be available for meals and social events.
- Check for the special needs of presenters with disabilities. Special needs may include ramping or podium requests, a reverse interpreter (an interpreter for the speaker), an orientation and mobility specialist, or a guide for a person with limited vision.
- Include personal assistants and interpreters in the estimated number of participants. Include their registration fees with the registration fees of the person they are assisting or provide the assistant with reduced registration fees.
- Avoid buffet lines in meal situations or provide assistance with carrying food for people who need it.
- Assign someone to work with people with disabilities in making travel arrangements (airline, hotel reservations, car rental).