INCORPORATING PERSONS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

INTO THE WORSHIP MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH

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A Thesis

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by

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APPROVAL SHEET

INCORPORATING PERSONS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

INTO THE WORSHIP MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH

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I dedicate this thesis to my family for willingly sacrificing time and resources

to support this endeavor.

To my wife, Margie, who spurs me on toward excellence in research and writing.

To our sons, Caleb and Josiah, who are constant sources of encouragement.

And to our son, Andrew, who daily demonstrates that God gives spiritual gifts to

individuals with autism to edify the church and to glorify Christ.

This thesis would not be possible without your love and support.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADA   Americans with Disabilities Act

ASD   Autism Spectrum Disorders

ASL   American Sign Language

EACHA   Education for All Handicapped Children Act

FAPE   Free and Appropriate Public Education

IDEA   Individuals with Disabilities Educational Act

IQ   Intelligence Quotient

LRE   Least Restrictive Environment

OCD   Obsessive Compulsive Disorders

UDL   Universal Design for Learning

PREFACE

I am deeply indebted to the congregation of Calvary Baptist Church in Holland, Michigan, who have encouraged and supported me throughout this process. Through countless prayers and also allowing me the opportunity to write this thesis, you contributed to a much need area of ministry in the church. I have written for the church in general, but specifically with my church in mind. Thank you for allowing me to shepherd you in worship these past twenty-two years.

I could not have completed this work without the constant love and support from my wife, Margie, and our children. Margie introduced me to the world of special education and has been a faithful research assistant and impeccable proof reader. Thank you for sacrificing time and resources to allow me to pursue writing this thesis. The Lord has allowed us to experience ministry *to* and *with* people with disabilities in very personal ways, and I am grateful for our life experiences together, which has added urgency to this thesis.

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Trent Broussard

Holland, Michigan

December 2018

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The term *special needs* has become common in today's culture to describe individuals who have a disability or impairment that may make interaction within a community difficult.[1] Recent studies indicate that 12.9 percent of students in American public schools receive some type of special education services due to a disability.[2] Census data from the US Census Bureau reveals that in 2000, nearly 21 million families in the United States had at least one relative with a disability.[3] In 2007, between 4 and 6 million adults and children in the United States had been diagnosed with some type of developmental disability.[4] A 2012 study by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention indicates the prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) among children to be 1 in 68.[5] A research project led by Erik Carter, Cornelius Vanderbilt Professor of Special Education at Vanderbilt University, examined the community experiences of 12,000 adults

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[1] Person-first language is used throughout this thesis. Rather than referring to a person as "autistic" or "disabled," I identify the person first and then the disability. I refer to a "person with autism" or "people with disabilities." This more cumbersome language is common among communities who serve persons with disabilities. Referring to the disability first is generally considered offensive.

[2] Peter L. Wright and Ruby L. Owiny, "Special Needs Goes to Church: A Special Education Primer for Ministry," *Christian Education Journal* 13, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 85-108.

[3] US Census Bureau, "Disability and American Families: 2000," July 2005, accessed February 22, 2018, https://usa.ipums.org/usa/resources/voliii/pubdocs/2000/censr-23.pdf.

[4] Erik W. Carter, *Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities: A Guide for Service Providers, Families, & Congregations* (Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes, 2007), 2.

[5] US Department of Health and Human Services, Center for Disease Control and Prevention, "Prevalence and Characteristics of Autism Spectrum Disorder among Children Aged 8," *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, Surveillance Summaries 65, no. SS-3 (2016): 1-23, accessed February 22, 2018, https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/65/ss/ss6503a1.htm?s_cid=ss6503a1_w.

with developmental disabilities.[6] Only 48 percent of those adults reported attending religious services at least one time in the prior month. Another survey from the Kessler Foundation disclosed that 57 percent of adults without disabilities attend church monthly as compared to 45 percent of adults with a disability.[7] This data demonstrates a significant number of people who are not being reached by the church. Recognizing individuals with special needs as fellow image-bearers of God, churches are placing a greater emphasis on hospitality and are planning ministries to reach people with disabilities with the gospel. This is reflected in numerous denominational resolutions and position statements as well as in the growing number of conference gatherings and workshops addressing faith and disability.[8]

Hospitality may be increasing in the church, but inclusion is not necessarily growing.[9] Churches lag behind the broader culture in terms of inclusion, specifically in engaging individuals with disabilities as members of worship teams. Many churches seem to place an emphasis on the outward appearance of those who participate on stage in prominent roles, guarding a look or presentation style. More congregations broadcast their worship gatherings via online streaming, and the emphasis on outward appearance seems to be growing. As recently as 2011, Elevation Church removed a young boy with

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[6] Erik W. Carter, Elizabeth E. Biggs, and Thomas L. Boehm, "Being Present versus Having a Presence: Dimensions of Belonging for Young People with Disabilities and Their Families," *Christian Education Journal* 13, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 128.

[7] Erik W. Carter, "A Place of Belonging: Research at the Intersection of Faith and Disability," *Review and Expositor* 113, no. 2 (2016): 167-80.

[8] Erik W. Carter, "From Barriers to Belonging for People with Disabilities: Promising Pathways toward Inclusive Ministry," in *Religion, Disability, and Interpersonal Violence*, ed. Andy J. Johnson, J. Ruth Nelson, and Emily M. Lund (New York: Springer, 2017), 25.

[9] The use of the terms *inclusion* and *inclusive* are applied as used in the realm of special education to identify environments where students with disabilities are educated alongside their non-disabled peers in the same classroom and with the same programming. In light of the current environment, the usage of these terms is not intended to communicate any association with reference to gender identity and sexual orientation.

cerebral palsy who was enthusiastically engaging in worship. He was moved from his seat in the worship center to another location in the church in order to offer a distraction free environment for other worshippers.[10] Carter identifies the church experience gap between people with disabilities and people without disabilities:

> Within the life of a congregational community, faith is formed, shared, and strengthened; relationships are forged and deepened and gifts are discovered, developed and dispensed. . . . Unfortunately many people with disabilities do not experience the same opportunities as others to grow spiritually, enjoy community, and experience relationships.[11]

Finding a church ready to welcome and embrace a child with disabilities can be an impossible journey for some families. Churches in general feel unprepared to provide appropriate hospitality and discipleship opportunities to guests with disabilities. Pastors, parishioners, parents, and professional service providers often have no plan or strategy to disciple people with developmental disabilities. Thus, people with disabilities remain on the margin of the church even when they are present in the congregation.[12]

Kathy McReynolds, Adjunct Professor at Biola University and Director of Academic Studies at the Christian Institute on Disability and the Joni and Friends International Disability Center, contends, "The unfortunate reality is that society has been more willing to come alongside people with disabilities than the church."[13] Society today is characterized by inclusive schools, inclusive neighborhoods, and inclusive workplaces, yet the church seems to have neglected to look beyond the disability to see the abilities and

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[10] Skye Jethani, "Special Needs Boy Removed from Worship: Can the Values of Entertainment and Hospitality Coexist?" *Christianity Today* (June 2011), accessed April 21, 2018, https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2011/june-online-only/special-needs-boy-removed-from-worship.html.

[11] Carter, *Including People with Disabilities,* 2.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Kathy McReynolds, "The Gospel of Luke: A Framework for a Theology of Disability," *Christian Education Journal* 13, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 176.

contributions that this under-utilized demographic might possess[14]. Many people with disabilities have extraordinary gifts that could be utilized within and for the Body of Christ. Unfortunately, the unique and exceptional gifts possessed by those with special needs can be hidden under the cloak of their disability, and therefore they are often absent from serving in any public ministry role. If members of the church are not exercising their spiritual gifts for ministry, then the church may not grow to spiritual maturity (Eph 4:7-16).[15]

A careful exegesis of the biblical account of creation affirms that all human beings are created in the image of God. Though that image is marred by sin, the fact that Christ took on flesh in the Incarnation provides evidence of the intrinsic worth of human beings as image-bearers. This worth applies to all human beings, regardless of ability. Further, an exegesis of Ephesians 4, which identifies grace gifts that are given to believers for ministry, concludes that the Holy Spirit has bestowed gifts on every believer for ministry. If individuals with disabilities are created in the image of God and are regenerate, then it is reasonable to surmise that they have also been gifted by the Holy Spirit for ministry.

There is a significant body of scholarly research affirming the concept that individuals with special needs are image-bearers. There have also been numerous research projects and articles written encouraging the church to minister to these individuals through regular programming or even specialized programming to accommodate their specific disability. McReynolds compares individuals with special needs to the outcasts in Luke's Gospel who received Jesus and His message with joy. Jesus singled out and had compassion upon the poor, disabled, and marginalized throughout Luke's Gospel.[16]

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[14] Carter, *Including People with Disabilities,* 3-8.

[15] Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the English Standard Version.

[16] McReynolds, "The Gospel of Luke," 176.

The church seems to be encouraged to minister to individuals with special needs but has been given little guidance on how to serve alongside them.

This research presents a biblical model of inclusion of individuals with special needs in the church and gives particular attention to inclusion in the worship ministry.

Trends in Current Literature

Ministering to individuals with special needs and including them as participants in the educational ministries of the church is an increasingly popular topic of research and writing. The ministry of hospitality is often encouraged. Barbara Newman, Inclusion Co-Director for Zeeland Christian Schools and Consultant for the Christian Learning Center Network, appeals churches to provide hospitable environments to persons with autism and their families. In *Autism and Your Church,* Newman details how churches can be hospitable, sensitive, and understanding to the needs of individuals and families of those with autism. Newman's approach is designed specifically to help churches create an atmosphere that will accommodate needs, remove distractions, be conducive to inclusion, and nurture spiritual growth among individuals with ASD and their families.[17]

The effort by two churches to build community among individuals with disabilities is the topic of a report from Belva Collins and Melinda Jones Ault, researchers and educators at the University of Kentucky.[18] Collins and Ault report on program models implemented to reach individuals with special needs and to change attitudes within their congregations. The report traces the history of progress as these two churches implemented inclusive practices designed to place an emphasis on hospitality to individuals with special needs. The goal of these inclusive practices did not encompass ministry leadership;

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[17] Barbara Newman, *Autism and Your Church: Nurturing the Spiritual Growth of People with Autism Spectrum Disorders* (Grand Rapids: Faith Alive Christian, 2006).

[18] Belva C. Collins and Melinda Jones Ault, "Including Persons with Disabilities in the Religious Community: Program Models Implemented by Two Churches," *Journal of Religion, Disability, & Health* 14, no. 2 (April 2010): 113-31.

however, the narrative from Collins and Ault indicates that inclusion within the congregational life of the church opens the door for inclusion in leadership.

While Newman, Collins, and Ault take a necessary practical approach, offering suggestions for how to accomplish inclusion, a theological argument for inclusion is presented by Herman Meininger. Meininger is Professor of Ethics and Social Inclusion and the Willem vanden Bergh Chair, Faculty of Theology, at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. In "The Order Of Disturbance," Meininger advocates the idea of extending hospitality to individuals with specials needs in the same way the Bible commands hospitality to strangers.[19] The impetus for extending hospitality to the stranger in the Old Testament is because Israel was a stranger in Egypt and should therefore identify with the stranger (Lev 19:34). Meininger posits the concept of loving one's neighbor is based directly on the concept of extending hospitality to the stranger.[20]

Bill Gaventa, Director of the Summer Institute on Theology and Disability and the Director of the Collaborative on Faith and Disability, champions the idea that all people are strangers in need of welcome and hospitality in the article, "From Strangers to Friends: A New Testament Call to Community." Gaventa, like Meininger, goes on to proclaim that welcoming individuals with special needs is not about special needs, it is simply about biblical hospitality. Gaventa points to the potential contributions of individuals with special needs as co-laborers but does not define a fully inclusive ministry in this article.[21]

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[19] Herman Meininger, "The Order of Disturbance: Theological Reflections on Strangeness and Strangers, and the Inclusion of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities in Faith Communities," *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 12, no. 4 (2008): 347-64.

[20] Ibid., 348.

[21] Bill Gaventa, "From Strangers to Friends: A New Testament Call to Community," *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 16, no. 2 (May 2012): 206-14.

Penina Goldstein, educator for Fayette County Schools in Lexington, Kentucky, and Melinda Jones Ault, make the case for the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in ministry, but when they write of inclusion, the emphasis is on making accommodations so that individuals with special needs can participate and be reached with the gospel or feel fully welcomed into the church community.[22] Charlene Schultz, instructor at Southeastern University and Polk County Schools in Lakeland, Florida, also advocates for inclusion of individuals with disabilities into the faith community. She compares the church to the story of the great banquet in Luke 14:16-24 where the host seeks the outcasts of society to come to his feast.[23] Like Goldstein, Ault, and Newman, Schultz places the emphasis upon ministry *to* individuals with disabilities because the church has been slow to respond and show hospitality. Inclusion as presented by these writers does not encompass co-laboring *with* individuals with special needs in ministry.

Other writers also promote inclusion for the purpose of ministering to or discipling people with disabilities. Wayne Morris and Brett Webb-Mitchell are researchers who advocate full inclusion of individuals with disabilities into the church. Morris, Head of Theology and Religious Studies at Chester University, promotes the idea of individuals with disabilities as unique image-bearers with valuable contributions. Morris seeks to overcome stereotypes often assigned to people with disabilities by exploring the particular gift or gifts an individual may possess.[24] Webb-Mitchell, founder and director of the School of the Pilgrim, calls for a new methodology of education for full inclusion, moving

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[22] Penina Goldstein and Melinda Jones Ault, "Including Individuals with Disabilities in a Faith Community: A Framework and Example," *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 19, no. 1 (March 2015): 1-14.

[23] Charlene Y. Schultz, "The Church and Other Body Parts: Closing the Gap between the Church and People with Disabilities," *Journal of Religion, Health & Disability* 16, no. 2 (May 2012): 191-205.

[24] Wayne Morris, "Church as Sign and Alternative: Disabled People in the Churches," *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 14, no. 1 (March 2010): 47-59.

beyond segregated programming.[25] While both Morris and Webb-Mitchell are advocates of full inclusion, neither offers a model of ministry accomplishing full inclusion.

Amos Yong, who chastises the church for lagging behind the broader community in its acceptance of individuals with disabilities, is a strong proponent of full inclusion. Yong is Professor of Theology and Mission at Fuller University. In "Disability from the Margins to the Center: Hospitality and Inclusion in the Church," Yong outlines the benefits for both the disabled and non-disabled from worshipping in a fully-inclusive environment, citing public education as an example, but Yong lacks specificity in how full inclusion might be achieved in the church.[26]

The call for inclusion has grown significantly in recent years among communities of faith. The *Journal of Religion, Disability and Health* has an entire issue devoted to promoting inclusion in Christian Schools.[27] Amy Jacober, Assistant Professor at George W. Truett Theological Seminary-Baylor University, advocates for full inclusion in the context of youth ministry.[28] Children's Sunday school and inclusion is the focus of an article by Erica Howell and Melinda Pierson, educators at California State University.[29] Martin Erhardt of Princeton Theological Seminary encourages full inclusion of individuals with special needs in the ordinance of baptism, which has traditionally been

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[25] Brett Webb-Mitchell, "Educating toward Full Inclusion in the Body of Christ: People with Disabilities Being Full Members of the Church," *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 14, no. 3 (December 2010): 256-68.

[26] Amos Yong, "Disability from the Margins to the Center: Hospitality and Inclusion in the Church," *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 15, no. 4 (November 2011): 339-50.

[27] Thomas B. Hoeksema, "Inclusive Christian Schooling: Introduction to the Theme Issue," *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 14, no. 4 (November 2010): 335-37.

[28] Amy E. Jacober, "Youth Ministry, Religious Education, and Adolescents with Disabilities: Insights from Parents and Guardians," *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 14, no. 2 (April 2010): 167-81.

[29] Erica J. Howell and Melinda R. Pierson, "Parents' Perspectives on the Participation of Their Children with Autism in Sunday School," *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 14, no. 2 (April 2010): 153-66.

the doorway for membership into the church body. Erhardt proclaims, "A catechumen's intellectual capacity near either end of the ability spectrum should not be understood as a handicap or advantage for a climb up a mountain of theological understanding or righteousness leading to salvation."[30] If salvation is not dependent upon a certain intellectual capacity, neither should church membership.

Each writer promoting inclusion, whether into youth ministry, children's Sunday school or any other educational setting assumes that the individual with special needs is coming to church or to class as the learner and never as the teacher. The person with a disability is assumed to be an attender but never a teacher. Full inclusion in the church means that individuals with special needs come not only to receive but also to contribute and to serve. McReynolds imagines the ministry and impact that individuals with special needs could have in the church and for the gospel when she writes, "However, when those with disabilities have found themselves in Christ, they are mighty ministers and witnesses to the grace, love, and mercy of the Savior."[31] The glimpse given by McReynolds only alludes to the potential benefit of inclusion without suggesting a model or means for inclusion.

Void in the Literature

Numerous authors and researchers make a strong and necessary case for hospitality in the church and for accommodating both ministries and facilities to reach individuals with special needs. Reaching this people group and their families is a matter of working to fulfill the Great Commission and should become a priority for the church. People with disabilities are clearly included when Jesus said to make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:19). Dan Vander Plaats, Director of Advancement at Elim Christian

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[30] Martin Erhardt, "Affirming Baptism: Recommendations for Pastors and Teachers Teaching Students with Intellectual Disabilities," *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 14, no. 2 (April 2010): 134.

[31] McReynolds, "The Gospel of Luke," 178.

Services, writes, "There is no asterisk on these verses, like an asterisk that would send your eyes to the bottom of the page, where you would see 'except for people who have disabilities,' or 'except for people who are depressed,' or 'except for children who can't communicate.'"[32]

Understanding the difficulties faced by families of individuals with special needs and working to overcome those difficulties is a gospel issue. To make disciples of persons with disabilities, the church must create accessible environments and hospitable cultures. Thankfully significant literature supports a wide range of ministry to individuals with special needs and to their families. Including individuals with disabilities in the educational ministries of the church has strong support among numerous authors and researchers.

While much has been written about ministry *to* individuals with special needs, there is a gap in the literature pertaining to ministry *with* these individuals. Researchers have not explored the benefit received by ministries utilizing the giftedness and contributions of individuals with special needs. Scant research points to how the church displays the glory of God when the least of these are fully included in ministries. The articles intended to encourage the discipled individual with special needs to participate in making disciples are limited and the topic of full inclusion is left unaddressed. Including persons with disabilities as leaders in worship ministry is a subject that has little or no research known to this researcher.

Thesis

The church has affirmed the value of persons with special needs and is being encouraged to exercise biblical hospitality to all persons regardless of ability. The church must now disciple individuals with special needs. When persons with disabilities come to

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[32] Dan Vander Plaats, *There Is No Asterisk: Changing Attitudes about Differences Using the 5 Stages* (Palo Heights, IL: Elim Christian Services and Disability Matters, 2016), 35.

faith in Jesus Christ, they must be assimilated into the work of the ministry, thus employing the gifts they are given by the Holy Spirit. Christ called his disciples to make disciples (Matt 28:19). As the church makes disciples of individuals with special needs, it is making disciples of the kind of people Jesus refers to as "the least of these" (Matt 25:40). When people with differing levels of abilities and disabilities serve the church together, the power of the gospel to unite people and overcome marginalization is on display in all its glory.

Conclusion

Numerous scholars have encouraged the church to rethink how to minister *to* people with special needs and the church is making progress in that area. The next step toward full inclusion is to rethink how congregations minister *with* individuals with special needs. Churches must incorporate regenerate people with disabilities into the work of the ministry and utilize the gifts they have been given by the Holy Spirit for the glory of God and the edification of the church. The ultimate goal of this thesis is biblical inclusion. This thesis will outline and promote a model of ministry where churches enable gifted people with disabilities to serve alongside other believers on the church worship team to the glory of God. Finally, a charge is issued to the church at large to engage with a growing community of people with disabilities who can no longer be ignored.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL, SOCIETAL, AND CULTURAL REVIEW:
SETTING THE CONTEXT FOR INCLUSION
IN THE CHURCH

An ugly story can be told about the treatment of individuals with disabilities

throughout much of American history. In a world system established by and built for the

physically and cognitively abled, opportunity may not exist for the person born blind or

with a cognitive disability. Discrimination is one of the themes in the history of the

United States. Racism and sexism are commonly understood to be social constructs that

favor a dominant race or sex. Discrimination against those with disabilities is called

ableism. Amos Yong offers a helpful definition of ableism:

> Abelism names the discriminatory attitudes, negative stereotypes, and sociopolitical
> and economic structures and institutions that together function to exclude people
> with disabilities from full participation in society. . . . Historically, and even across
> wide spectrums of contemporary life, ableism presumes that people with disabilities
> are subhumans, menaces to society, or objects of pity, dread, or ridicule.[1]

Abelism has a long history in America. Ongoing discrimination against people with

disabilities has been evidenced in education, employment opportunities, and in

reproductive medicine.[2]

Disability in America

Prior to the American Revolution, families were expected to care and provide

for individuals with disabilities without any system of supports, but a family member

who could not work or contribute to the welfare of the entire family was often neglected

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[1] Amos Yong, *The Bible, Disability, and the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 11.

[2] Kim E. Nielsen, *A Disability History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012).

or mistreated. Laws were written in the original thirteen colonies to exclude settlers who could not support themselves.

Benomi Buck was the son of the Reverend Richard Buck and his second wife. Richard Buck was known for officiating the marriage of John Rolfe and Pocohontas. Reverend Buck died when Benomi was ten years old, leaving significant amounts of land, slaves, and personal property that should have been plenty to care for his children. Benomi Buck had a cognitive disability and was considered an idiot in his day and unable to care for himself personally or financially. Benomi died at the age of twenty-nine in part because the funds that should have been used for his care had instead been stolen and used to enrich his legal guardians. Benomi's sister, Mara, who was also had a cognitive disability, had to be guarded from men seeking to marry her to gain access to her father's riches.[3] Colonial America was not a safe place for individuals with disabilities.

Historian Kim Nielsen chronicles the treatment of those with disabilities shortly after the Revolutionary War as politically repressed and unrepresented.[4] Full citizenship and the right to vote were denied to people with disabilities. Advocates for women's suffrage and for abolition of slavery made claims to equal citizenship based on the capacity of individuals. Only those with cognitive or severe mental impairments should have voting privileges withheld.[5] Nielsen writes about a Massachussetts law from 1796, allowing local officials to imprison individuals considered "mad," without any due process.[6] Discrimination in the form of withholding basic rights considered available to every

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[3] Nielsen, *A Disability History*, 23-24.

[4] Ibid., 51.

[5] Ibid., 52.

[6] Ibid., 69.

American citizen was common. Disability, gender, and race were common factors used to justify voting exclusions in pre-Civil War America.[7]

By the middle of the nineteenth century, institutions were built to house those with disabilities, segregating them from society at large to protect individuals considered too frail to deal with the harsh realities of life. Safeguarding people with disabilities was a noble concept, but it only functioned as a means of further marginalization. The idea of protecting individuals with disabilities from society had turned to protecting society from those with disabilities by the early 1900s. Social Darwinism gave rise to the eugenics movement that sought to eliminate those with mental and physical disabilities from society. Laws were established in many states to prevent people with disabilities from marrying and having children.[8] Numerous cities adopted statutes, known as "ugly laws," designed to prevent people with noticeable disabilities from being present on city streets and public places.[9] Those with deformities had to become invisible. People with disabilities were thought by some to be a pariah on society that needed extermination. Oscar McCulloch and David Starr Jordan led the movement in Indiana that created a forced sterilization law in 1907, for those deemed degenerate or impaired.[10] A people once deemed worthy of charity were now viewed as targets for destruction. Douglas Diekema of the University of Washington writes,

> Beginning in 1907, states began to pass laws that allowed, and in some cases required, the involuntary sterilization of those with developmental disabilities and mental retardation. Within 10 years, 17 states had passed sterilization laws. The justification

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[7] Nielsen, *A Disability History*, 76.

[8] David Pfeiffer, "Eugenics and Disability Discrimination," *Disability and Society* 9, no. 4 (1994): 481-99.

[9] Nielsen, *A Disability History,* 89.

[10] Paul A. Lombardo, *A Century of Eugenics in America: From the Indiana Experiment to the Human Genome Era* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 11-12.

for these laws relied on the eugenic argument that society would be better off if certain individuals were not able to reproduce.[11]

By the late 1920s, the eugenics movement was losing momentum in the United States. The state supreme court ruled the Indiana eugenics law unconstitutional in 1921.[12] Although American scientists had discredited the movement, eugenics was still popular among state legislatures and citizens.[13] It was not until the end of World War II that public perceptions toward forced sterilizations began to change. This change in attitude was brought about as Americans witnessed the application of eugenics in Nazi Germany. Though attitudes toward eugenics changed, it was not until the 1960s that many state laws began to be repealed.[14]

Employment and Educational Discrimination

In the early twentieth century, employers would often bypass applicants for jobs who had disabilities or simply hire them at a lower wage. Even work programs through the New Deal in the 1930s rejected workers who were handicapped because they were deemed unemployable. Those in charge of making policies believed that individuals with disabilities would be less productive than their typical peers and more prone to injury.[15] World War II produced a temporary change in the perception of employers regarding the abilities of those with disabilities as the war effort required many more

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[11] Douglas Diekema, "Involuntary Sterilization of Persons with Mental Retardation: An Ethical Analysis," *Mental Retardation & Developmental Disabilities Research Reviews* 9, no. 1 (2003): 22.

[12] Indiana Historical Bureau, "1907 Indiana Eugenics Law," accessed April 21, 2018, https://www.in.gov/history/markers/524.htm.

[13] US Commission on Civil Rights, "Accommodating the Spectrum of Individual Abilities," Clearinghouse Publication 81, September 1983, 17-20, accessed January 20, 2018, https://www.law.umaryland.edu/marshall/usccr/documents/cr11081.pdf.

[14] Diekema, "Involuntary Sterilization of Persons with Mental Retardation," 21-26.

[15] *Typical peers* is a term commonly used by educators to identify persons without disabilities in an inclusive classroom setting.

workers. Therefore, people who had been marginalized prior to the war soon found work. Factories employed women, people of color, and those with disabilities. The performance of workers with disabilities was rated equal to the performance of nondisabled workers. However, when the war was over, the bias of employers returned as workers with disabilities, women, and people of color lost their jobs to soldiers returning from battle.[16]

Not all soldiers returning from World War II found employment or educational opportunities. While the G.I. Bill of Rights of 1944 provided four years of funding for college education, the roughly 1.6 million disabled veterans could not find equal educational opportunities.[17] Paraplegic veterans were denied enrollment in the University of Illinois due to officials who were hostile to their admission out of fear they would drive away students without disabilities. Court battles were fought before disabled veterans could gain admissions.[18] Paul Longmore, who was a professor of history at San Francisco State University and founder of the university's disability studies program, spoke of the discrimination he faced being denied a graduate fellowship and told no one would ever hire him to teach writing: "My professors' discriminatory denial of a fellowship was not illegal at the time. No law prevented disability-based discrimination. I needed that legal protection as much as I needed my teachers to believe in me."[19]

Historical narratives paint an unseemly picture of the struggle of individuals with disabilities to achieve equal access of opportunity. Ableism has been apparent in citizenship laws discriminating against those with disabilities, in the eugenics movement,

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[16] Paul K. Longmore, "Making Disability an Essential Part of American History," *OAH Magazine of History*, July 2009, 11-15.

[17] While person-first language is generally employed throughout this thesis, veterans who are disabled predominantly refer to themselves as "disabled veterans." I have chosen to use the language preferred by veterans.

[18] Sarah F. Rose, "The Right to a College Education? The G.I. Bill, Public Law 16, and Disabled Veterans," *Journal of Policy History* 24, no. 1 (2012): 26-27.

[19] Deborah Deutsch Smith and Naomi Chowdhuri Tyler, *Introduction to Special Education,* 7th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill, 2010), 10.

in hiring practices, and in educational admissions in the United States. Individuals with disabilities were marginalized and given no voice to advocate for change. Ableism created institutions where people with disabilities were forced into segregated communities with no opportunity to contribute to the culture. For those with disabilities, dependency upon government agencies resulted in diminished freedoms and loss of basic human dignity. Inequality and marginalization reverberated through the narrative of the history of disability in America. Only those with financial means would be able to see their children with disabilities educated. Universal education for individuals with special needs in the United States did not begin until the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) in the 1970s, though nearly 200 years earlier, in isolated instances, teachers such as Jean-Marc-Gaspard Itard, Edouard Sequin, and Marie Montessori were educating students with cognitive disabilities.[20] Generally, a disability meant no opportunity for formal education during the first two centuries of the United States of America.

Progress through Legal Reform

The reality of ableism is evidenced by the need for laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Educational Act (IDEA), which serve to provide access and educational opportunities for individuals with disabilities. These laws transformed the culture for individuals with disabilities and ultimately created new access points into society previously denied to them. The ADA was signed into law in 1990, and prohibits discrimination in employment, transportation, public accommodations, and telecommunications.[21] The IDEA has two significant provisions that have been the source of confusion and much litigation since its passage. First, the IDEA requires a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) for students with

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[20] Smith and Tyler, *Introduction to Special Education*, 21.

[21] Ibid., 14.

disabilities. Second, education must be provided in the least restrictive environment (LRE). These requirements mean that students with disabilities must be educated alongside their typical peers whenever possible.[22] It took a court ruling in 1972, to extend the right for special education to children with disabilities. Further court rulings in 1984, 1989, and 1993, after the IDEA was passed into law defined FAPE and clarified that a public education is the right of every student regardless of disability.[23] The late US Senator Robert Stafford championed the LRE. Stafford helped design the EAHCA, which would later become IDEA. Stafford's goal was to enable children with disabilities to flourish in situations that would prepare them for life beyond the world of education and give non-disabled persons the opportunity to acclimate themselves to working in inclusive environments.[24] Stafford was a strong proponent for inclusion in education.

Given the advances in education and employment laws, there is likely no better time in history than today to live with a disability or impairment. Multiple challenges still exist, but in the United States a person with a disability has a legal standing to all the rights and privileges afforded to nondisabled persons, including the opportunity for free and appropriate public education. Banks, private businesses, and governmental agencies must accommodate people with disabilities. Agencies exist to provide employment training and help with job searches. The opportunities to make valuable contributions to society are greater than ever before.

Advances and Strategies in Public Education

Significant progress has been made over the past forty years in education as the aforementioned laws and court rulings were enacted. The Education for All Handicapped

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[22] Mitchell Yell and Antonis Katsiyannis, "Placing Students with Disabilities in Inclusive Settings: Legal Guidelines and Preferred Practices," *Preventing School Failure* 49, no. 1 (Fall 2004): 28-35.

[23] Smith and Tyler, *Introduction to Special Education,* 13.

[24] Stacey Gordon, "Making Sense of the Inclusion Debate Under IDEA," *Brigham Young University Education and Law Journal* 1 (2006): 189-225.

Children Act (EACHA), which later became IDEA, created a seismic shift in education for individuals with disabilities. Prior to its passage in 1975, only 20 percent of students with disabilities were educated in American public schools. Some states even had laws excluding individuals with disabilities from public schools. Educational changes for individuals with disabilities grew out of the Civil Rights Movement as people began to look for other categories of individuals who might be marginalized.[25] By 2014, more than 6.5 million students received educational services required under IDEA, and 65 percent received their high school diploma.[26]

Preparing students with disabilities for life after high school is the goal of educators today thanks to IDEA. This goal can mean preparation for college, the workforce, or simply some level of independent living. Post-secondary preparation may include life-skills training beyond the academic rigor of high school. Research indicates a significant post-secondary readiness gap exists between abled and disabled students. Almost two-thirds of high school graduates pursue post-secondary education.[27] Over half of all students who begin a four-year college program graduate.[28] While 60 percent of high school graduates with a disability go on to post-secondary education, only 34 percent of these students enrolled in a four-year program complete their studies. Non-academic skills such as attitude, discipline, and self-esteem appear to be more correlated to successful

[25] Anotinis Katsiyannis, Mitchell Yell, and Renee Bradley, "Reflections on the 25th Anniversary of the Individuals with Disabilities Act," *Remedial and Special Education* 22, no. 6 (August 2016): 324-34.

[26] National Center for Educational Statistics, "Children and Youth with Disabilities," last modified May 2016, accessed February 25, 2017, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cgg.asp.

[27] Floyd Norris, "Fewer US Graduates Opt for College after High School," *New York Times,* April 25, 2014, accessed April 30, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/26/business/fewer-us-high-school-graduates-opt-for-college.html.

[28] Elizabeth Chuck, "Just Over Half of all College Students Actually Graduate, Report Finds," NBC News, November 18, 2015, accessed April 30, 2018, https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/freshman-year/just-over-half-all-college-students-actually-graduate-report-finds-n465606.

academic and employment outcomes than cognitive skills.[29] Researchers have found the

readiness gap is not due primarily to the lack of academic ability, but to non-academic or

social skills. The core belief behind the educational process is the student will have

something to contribute to society as a whole and will live a meaningful life. Students

often exceed expectations when those expectations are high. Educators are designing

instruction to address the readiness gap.

As the number of students with disabilities in the classroom has grown,

educators have found traditional methods of teaching and learning are often inadequate,

necessitating new methodologies. Many popular pedagogical methods for teaching music

education rely upon the skill of imitation. Kodály, Orff-Schulwerk, and Suzuki methods

all rely on the ability of students to imitate.[30] Yet the skill of imitation may not be present

or developed in the student with disabilities; therefore, the music educator must adapt to

new instructional methods. Sheila Scott, Associate Professor of Music Education at

Brandon University, observes that effective teaching strategies may require modification:

> Established teaching strategies are sometimes appropriate for children with ASD;
> other times familiar techniques must be adapted for the distinctive learning styles of
> these children. Through continued experiences with children on the autism spectrum,
> music teachers learn to trust themselves to observe how an individual child reacts
> (or does not react) to music, to respond appropriately to the child's diverse learning
> styles, and to adjust the learning environment to meet these individual needs.[31]

Music teachers like educators in other fields have had to adapt their teaching styles and

methodologies to be inclusive in their instruction. Assistant Professor of Music Education

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[29] June Gothberg et al., "Successful Transition of Students with Disabilities to 21st Century College and Careers: Using Triangulation and Gap Analysis to Address Nonacademic Skills," *Teaching Exceptional Children* 47, no. 6 (July 2015): 345.

[30] Natalie Sarrazin, "Music and the Child," Lumen Learning, accessed April 21, 2018, https://courses.lumenlearning.com/suny-music-and-the-child/chapter/chapter-4-approaches-to-music-education-2/.

[31] Sheila Scott, "The Challenges of Imitation for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders with Implications for General Music Education," *Update: Applications of Research in Music Education* 34, no. 2 (February 2016): 20.

at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, Sara Jones, identifies how teaching methods have changed to make music education inclusive: "Classrooms needed to be structured for students of all abilities and that teachers could facilitate meaningful and creative musical experiences for students by implementing different strategies and making music activities more open-ended."[32] The goal, regardless of subject matter, is to have an inclusive classroom that benefits all students.

Methodologies to achieve inclusion and the goals of IDEA vary in differing schools but a common methodological goal is collaboration between general and special education teachers. General education teachers are considered the experts in their subject matter while special education teachers are more specifically trained to assess educational strategies and learning styles. Teacher education and training programs are being revamped so that training is not remarkably different for general and special education teachers. The goal of revamping teacher education is to equip teachers to collaborate in the educational process of the student with disabilities to provide the most inclusive environment possible.[33] The philosophical and methodological shift in teacher training is part of what is known as Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Universal design is a modern trend coined in the realm of construction and manufacturing that involves the development of products, environments, or procedures that can be utilized by the entire population without the need for additional accommodations. Universal design eliminates or reduces environmental barriers and is helpful not only to those with disabilities, but also to the general population. One example of universal design is curb cuts and ramps. People using wheelchairs are able to use sidewalks and cross streets independently because of the

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[32] Sara Jones, "Teaching Students with Disabilities," *Update: Applications of Research in Music Education* 34, no. 1 (November 2015): 13-23.

[33] Marleen Pugach and Charles Peck, "Dividing Practices: Preservice Teacher Quality Assessment and the (Re)production of Relations between General and Special Education," *Teacher Education Quarterly* 43, no. 3 (Summer 2016): 3-23.

installation of curb cuts and ramps. This benefit is not limited to people in wheelchairs. Parents pushing strollers and persons pushing a shopping cart have benefitted from curb cuts and ramps. While the term applies often to architectural design, it is also the concept behind teacher training programs promoting inclusive education.[34] UDL means establishing educational strategies that may assist students with disabilities but may also benefit the entire population of students.

Not only is collaboration of general and special education teachers helpful to enhance and support the education of students with disabilities, educators have found peer collaboration among students with disabilities and their nondisabled peers in cooperative learning environments to be effective in accomplishing multiple educational goals. Peer collaboration is another strategy in the family of UDL having benefits for both the student with disabilities and non-disabled peers. The implications of the aforementioned and resulting benefits have immediate and valuable applications for strategies of inclusion in the local church. Sitembiso Neube, of the San Bernadino City Unified School District, writes, "Students with disabilities learn academic and social skills from general education students while general education students learn the social skills of tolerance and acceptance of others who are different."[35]

Conclusion

Progress for individuals with disabilities has been made in America. Legal and educational reforms have influenced cultural attitudes as areas where discrimination and exclusion had dominated are becoming inclusive. Citizenship and voting rights are not dependent upon physical or cognitive capacity nor is bearing children the sole right of

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[34] Sheryl Burgstahler, "Universal Design: Processes, Principles and Applications," Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology, accessed February 27, 2017, http://www.washington.edu/doit/universal-design-process-principles-and-applications.

[35] Sitembiso Neube, "Peer-Collaboration: An Effective Teaching Strategy for Inclusive Classrooms," *The Journal of the International Association of Special Education* 12, no. 1 (2011): 79-80.

cognitively abled persons any longer. Education is mandated and free for all with abilities and disabilities. The ADA has provided accessible buildings and transportation. Life is better today for those living with disabilities than it has been at any time in the history of the United States.

While progress to be made, living with a disability is certainly no utopia. Cultural challenges still exist, and the financial burden of the ADA and IDEA could cause future legislators to revisit laws that have standardized accessibility. The advances in business and education are noticeably absent in the church. The church remains largely exempt from the provisions of the ADA and the cost of renovating worship spaces or other church buildings to increase access remains a deterrent to inclusion. Those with disabilities are likely to find a more accessible environment in a public school than in a church.

CHAPTER 3

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS
FOR INCLUSION: A CALL TO THE
AMERICAN CHURCH

The Church Lags Behind

While society at large has made significant strides toward inclusion, participation in a faith community can be difficult for persons with a disability. According to a 2004 survey, 44 percent of adults with severe disabilities reported attending a church or faith community at least once a month, compared to 57 percent of adults without disabilities. The same survey found equal percentages of people with and without disabilities consider faith somewhat important.[1] If faith is equally important, the question must be asked why a participation gap exists. While persons with disabilities may be welcome and a congregation may seem hospitable, the opportunities to serve or utilize spiritual gifts are limited. An analysis of a 2010 population survey by Debra Brucker of the University of New Hampshire Institute on Disability reveals that only 11.8 percent of adults with cognitive impairments engaged in congregational activities beyond worship service attendance in the previous twelve months, compared to 17.3 percent without disabilities.[2] Not only is there a participation gap in church attendance, there is also a participation gap in service within the church. The accommodations needed for a person with a disability to be a contributor to the faith community are not made. Potentially valuable contributors and their contributions are simply overlooked or not desired.

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[1] Erik W. Carter, *Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities: A Guide for Service Providers, Families, & Congregations* (Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes, 2007), 6-8.

[2] Debra L. Brucker, "Social Capital, Employment and Labor Force Participation among Persons with Disabilities," *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation* 43, no. 1 (2015): 17-31.

Marginalization is the experience of many individuals with disabilities who have found ways to partake and create within the greater culture and society but still find themselves ostracized when they come to church.

In the Old Testament law, a person with a disability, even a descendent of Aaron, was not allowed to participate in the burnt offering rituals (Lev 23:17-23). The late Nancy Eiesland, who served as a professor at Candler School of Theology at Emory University wrote, "These and similar passages have historically been used to warrant barring persons with disabilities from positions of ecclesiastical visibility and authority."[3] Levitical law specifically barred a person with a disability from participating in the burnt offering ritual, not from the priesthood altogether. Though there were barriers in ancient Israel for individuals with disabilities, there was also an understanding that care was needed. Leviticus warns against cursing the deaf or placing a stumbling block before the blind (Lev 19:14). Though the only specific prohibition for priests with disabilities involved the burnt offering rituals, it is easy to look at the restrictions given in the law and conclude that anyone with a disability is a lesser person or that they have sinned in some manner and have brought upon themselves the judgment of God. Jesus's disciples made the same assumption when asking whose sin caused a man to be born blind (John 9:2). Unable to work and support themselves, individuals with disabilities are seen begging in the biblical narrative and have historically been dependent upon the charity and generosity of others.

While education and the culture at large have been forced by law to make significant progress in eliminating ableism, the church has made little progress in addressing ableism. Yong states, "In many respects, the church is still at least one or two steps behind the wider culture in matters pertaining to disability, if not being rather closed

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[3] Nancy Eiesland, *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 71.

toward changes advocated by disability rights advocates."[4] While the church sees the need to care for and welcome individuals with disabilities and their families, it has lagged behind education and the broader culture in nurturing an environment of inclusion that allows people with varying abilities to exercise their gifts for ministry. The church has been slow to make accommodations allowing someone having a special need or disability to make meaningful contributions to the ministry or culture of the church. Although Erik Carter lists more than 100 position statements across the spectrum of denominations affirming the value of persons with disabilities participating in the life of the church, seminaries are not adequately preparing pastors to minister to and with people with disabilities.[5] In a 2014 study of seminaries in North America by Naomi Annandale and Erik Carter of Vanderbilt University, 74 percent of respondents indicated their seminary training had not prepared them to answer spiritual or theological questions related to disability experiences or to engage those with disabilities in religious service.[6] Pastors, those in position to make the most significant impact in the church's response to disability, are not being equipped and trained to minister to the entire community of people with disabilities.

Including people on the margins of society was central to the ministry activity of Jesus and would seem to be an area where the church would seek to far surpass the efforts of the broader community. Michael Beates writes,

> Jesus intentionally crossed social and even religious boundaries in order to
> encounter the broken and rejected. In doing so, Jesus not only offered the hope of

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[4] Amos Yong, "Disability from the Margins to the Center: Hospitality and Inclusion in the Church," *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 15, no. 4 (November 2011): 340.

[5] Erik W. Carter, Elizabeth E. Biggs, and Thomas L. Boehm, "Being Present versus Having a Presence: Dimensions of Belonging for Young People with Disabilities and Their Families," *Christian Education Journal* 13, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 128.

[6] Naomi H. Annandale and Erik W. Carter, "Disability and Theological Education: A North American Study," *Theological Education* 48, no. 2 (2014): 92.

existential salvation through bodily restoration, but he also touched hearts and souls by grafting such people into the covenant community of God's people.[7]

Because all persons, regardless of their ability or disability, are created in the image of God, and because the Holy Spirit gives gifts for ministry to every regenerate believer without discriminating, human dignity should be a cherished value of the church. The church should understand that the regenerate individual with a disability has been uniquely gifted by the Holy Spirit for ministry. This means the church must do far more than simply offer hospitality to those with special needs. Local congregations must look for ways to utilize the gifts of every believer without regard to any disability. Thus, *accommodation* should become a term used far more often in the church than in the realm of education. Inclusion means that every believer in the church has the opportunity to use their Holy Spirit given gifts to edify the church. Hospitality is needed, but the church must also make appropriate accommodations so all members can contribute. Only then can a church be called inclusive.

The church has been given the explicit task of making disciples (Matt 28:19-20). Discipleship means equipping people for ministry. The church must train believers and equip them for every good work (2 Tim 3:16-17). All believers have been created in Christ for good works (Eph 2:10). There is no qualifier or exception clause that allows the church to ignore discipling individuals with special needs or disabilities. The call for the church to go into the entire world to make disciples is by nature an inclusive call intended to reach men and women of all nationalities, races, ethnicities, and abilities or disabilities.

As the call for inclusion has grown in the realm of education and the culture at large, the church is simply failing. The church can learn from educators and other cultural entities how to discover the gifts individuals with disabilities possess and unleash those gifts for ministry. Making and deploying disciples who have disabilities allows the church to reflect the glory of God and display biblical community in ways that the best educational

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[7] Michael S. Beates, *Disability & the Gospel: How God Uses Our Brokenness to Display His Grace* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 50.

and societal efforts can never attain. The gospel can bring unity to believers without regard to disability or ability.

The Church's Response to Disability

The church has not always extended hospitality to those with disabilities. Instead of being a place of refuge and acceptance, the church has reinforced stereotypes and segregation. Lamenting the treatment of the disabled in the church, Nancy Eiesland writes,

> The history of the church's interaction with the disabled is at best an ambiguous one. Rather than a structure for empowerment, the church has more often supported the societal structures and attitudes that have treated people with disabilities as objects of pity and paternalism. For many disabled persons the church has been a "city on a hill"—physically inaccessible and socially inhospitable.[8]

Eiesland's criticism is warranted as instead of leading the way for inclusion, the church has waited for building code enforcement and societal pressures before considering accessibility. Numerous writers are calling for a shift in historic attitudes and methodologies concerning the way churches interact with people who have disabilities. Malcolm Gill notes the absence of the poor, aged, and disabled in modern church planting movements where the emphasis seems to be on building a homogenous community rather than caring for the least of these.[9]

Ministry to the disabled has been the focus Joni Eareckson Tada's work. As early as 1981, Joni Eareckson Tada and Gene Newman were writing to encourage local churches to minister to those with disabilities.[10] Despite their efforts, the response of the church has not significantly changed in the last forty years. Even as churches display hospitality, segregation within the ministry is ubiquitous. Brent Webb-Mitchell writes

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[8] Eiesland, *The Disabled God,* 20.

[9] Malcolm Gill, "Missing in Action: Theological Reflections on the Absence of the Aged, Poor, and Disenfranchised in Contemporary Church Planting Movements," *Journal of Disability & Religion* 21, no. 1 (2017): 84-97.

[10] Gene Newman and Joni Eareckson Tada, *All God's Children: Ministry to the Disabled* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 1-128.

about segregation common in churches based upon disabilities: "Society's labels and categories have kept many people with disabilities outside the doors of the church."[11] Webb-Mitchell advocates for a more inclusive church culture and a transformation in how the liturgy is presented and congregants are engaged. Andrew Wood encourages the church to begin ministering to individuals with intellectual disabilities:

> The local church is responsible for ministering to all people regardless of their human need, degree of suffering, or the level of their ability to respond. Therefore the church should be concerned about mental retardation and its consequences for the individual, his family, the church and the community.[12]

Nancy Eiesland's book *The Disabled God* is considered ground-breaking in the area of disability theology. Eiesland challenges the notion that God is perfect and abled. Her contention is that the resurrected Christ, with nail scars in his hands, feet, and side bears commonality with and brings hope to the physically disabled.[13] While primarily concerned about self-acceptance and minority power rather than the gospel and salvation issues, Eiesland's concept of the disabled God adds perspective to the idea that disability had no direct relation to sin issues.[14] Eiesland writes, "The disabled God repudiates the conception of disability as a consequence of individual sin."[15] Eiesland makes the case that individuals with disabilities express the image of God through their disabilities: "Our bodies participate in the imago Dei, not in spite of our impairments and contingencies, but through them."[16]

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[11] Brent Webb-Mitchell, *Dancing with Disabilities: Opening the Church to All God's Children* (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1996), 37.

[12] Andrew H. Wood, *Unto the Least of These: Special Education in the Church* (Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist Press, 1984), 33.

[13] Eiesland, *The Disabled God,* 99-100.

[14] I do not agree with or espouse Eiesland's view of God as disabled; however, due to the popular reception of her work and my agreement that specific sin is not the cause of disability, I have chosen to include her work.

[15] Eiesland, *The Disabled God,* 101.

[16] Ibid.

Imaging God through disability is something I have seen first-hand. My son Andrew was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) as a two-year-old. Though autism has presented numerous challenges for Andrew, it has enabled him to express the image of God in unique ways. Andrew can take any calendar date and identify the day of the week with amazing accuracy and speed. This savant skill along with the presence of perfect pitch is clearly an expression of the image of God in Andrew.

Amos Yong promotes an uncommon idea in his book *The Bible, Disability, and the Church,* articulating, "Disabilities are not necessarily evil or blemishes to be eliminated . . . many who have lost the functionality of an arm or a leg lead very productive and satisfying lives—they don't need to be healed."[17] The person with a disability is not necessarily in need of healing. The person with a disability needs a place to belong.[18] Yong strongly challenges the lack of biblical hospitality in the church toward individuals with disabilities: "The church communicates the message 'you are not welcome here' to people with disabilities."[19] Yong is a leading voice for the inclusion of individuals with disabilities into the entire congregational life of the church. But he is not alone.

Diane McGee writes, "Welcoming children with disabilities is not simply being nice or 'politically correct.' The inclusion of persons with disabilities is a moral issue."[20] All children need to be presented the gospel regardless of their ability. John Swinton pushes further than inclusion. His message is that individuals with disabilities not only need to be included, they need to belong. They must become central to the group.[21] Yet

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[17] Yong, *The Bible, Disability, and the Church*, 13.

[18] Carter, Biggs, and Boehm, "Being Present versus Having a Presence," 131.

[19] Yong, *The Bible, Disability, and the Church,* 16.

[20] Diane McGee, "Widening the Door of Inclusion for Children with Autism through Faith Communities," *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 14, no. 3 (July 2010): 287.

[21] John Swinton, "From Inclusion to Belonging: A Practical Theology of Community, Disability and Humanness," *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 16, no. 2 (July 2012): 172-90.

the group seems slow to make accommodations so individuals with disabilities feel welcome. Victoria Slocum notes, "People with disabilities are expected to adapt to fit the faith community, rather than the community adapting to become more inclusive of people with disabilities."[22] Slocum's point is that the person with a disability is often expected to change to accommodate the group. After reviewing current literature on inclusion in the church Slocum concludes, "One of the most common recommendations for creating an inclusive environment involved the use of strategies commonly employed by special educators in the religious education classes."[23] Slocum's recommendation for using strategies employed by special educators will be explored further in the next chapter of this thesis. Pastors', theologians', and educators' concern about inclusion in the church may indicate a shift in the culture of ableism in the church.

Barb Newman, who works with individuals with autism, writes, "I believe that in order to be obedient to God's Word, the line at the church's door must represent all kinds of people, including those with disabilities."[24] Newman offers specific strategies to help churches practice hospitality toward children with autism and their families. Her strategies often follow the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) model, which are helpful not only for children with autism but also for their typical peers.[25]

In *Leading a Special Needs Ministry,* Amy Fenton Lee provides a comprehensive outline for churches to follow in beginning a ministry to individuals with special needs and to their families.[26] Lee begins with the premise that ministry to the child

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[22] Victoria Slocum, "Recommendations for Including People with Intellectual Disabilities in Faith Communities," *Christian Education Journal* 13, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 110.

[23] Ibid., 123.

[24] Barb Newman, *Autism and Your Church: Nurturing the Spiritual Growth of People with Autism Spectrum Disorders* (Grand Rapids: Friendship Ministries, 2006), 8.

[25] Ibid., 11.

[26] Amy Fenton Lee, *Leading a Special Needs Ministry* (Nashville: B & H, 2016).

with special needs and their family should begin through building loving relationships. In describing modern trends within the church, Lee points to a growing number of churches who are establishing ministries to individuals with special needs and are employing UDL in their facilities and programs.[27] The rationale for this move is the gospel, as Fenton Lee writes, "It's the church's responsibility to thoughtfully, intentionally, and respectfully engage everyone—because God loves them all. That's the gospel being lived out for all of us to see and experience."[28]

Disability ministry does not end with ministry to people with special needs. Erik Carter of Vanderbilt University, Elizabeth Biggs, assistant professor in the Department of Special Education at the University of Illinois, and Thomas Boehm, Ann Haskins Assistant Professor of Special Education at Wheaton College, insist it is not enough for individuals to be merely present in the gathered church. Being present is a starting point, followed by being noticed, welcomed, cared for, supported, accepted, known, befriended, needed, and finally, loved. These are the ten dimensions of belonging identified by research from Carter, Biggs and Boehm.[29] Full inclusion does not mean being present in the gathering of the church. To fully belong to the church community, the person with a disability must have a noticeable presence. Figure 1 shows the progress moving from being present to having a presence based on the research from Carter, Biggs, and Boehm.[30]

Modern trends in churches seem to point to greater numbers embracing the concept of individuals with special needs bearing the image and likeness of God. This is shown in the growing number of voices calling for inclusion in the life of the church. Yet

[27] Lee, *Leading a Special Needs Ministry*, 47.

[28] Ibid., 48.

[29] Carter, Biggs, and Boehm, "Being Present versus Having a Presence," 132.

[30] Ibid., 132.

the concept of regenerate individuals with special needs having spiritual gifts to use for the edification of the church is rarely seen in the literature and modern trends. The church seems unable to look beyond the disability to see the ability or the gifts possessed by the person with a disability. The church should be leading rather than lagging behind the culture in this arena, but the topic has simply not been raised to a level of importance or urgency.
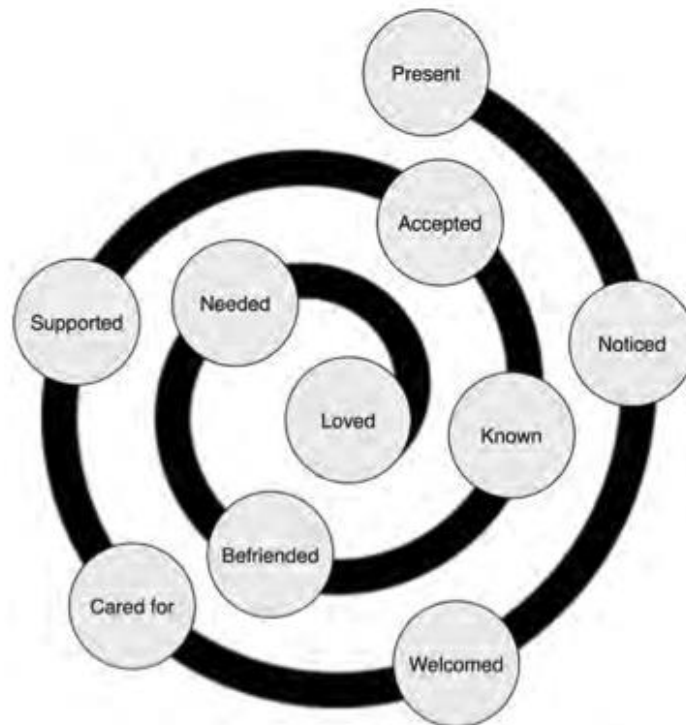
Figure 1. Ten dimensions of belonging

Many churches lack the basics of hospitality. Some churches are succeeding in hospitality but lack any type of inclusion. Theses churches may offer a special needs ministry but one that is completely segregated. Fully inclusive ministries are rare, and for previously articulated reasons, this lack of inclusion is not an expression of the gospel. Lack of inclusion is not a cultural issue, nor is it a societal or methodological issue. The failure of the church to be inclusive is a gospel issue. Public school teachers have shown more gospel grace than the church. Ministries in the church separating the abled and

those with disabilities is similar to the racist segregation of the deep south in the 1950s. Educational classes and worship services that separate the church by ability do not serve to unite the church in Christ. While the sign above our drinking fountain will not say "abled only," the drinking fountain being positioned in such a manner that no one in a wheel chair get a drink from the fountain communicates a severe lack of welcome.

Biblical Support for Inclusion

Three biblical concepts or doctrines help to advance the argument for inclusion in the church. The doctrines of *imago Dei,* spiritual gifts, and the Great Commission are properly understood to include people with disabilities.

Imago Dei, the Image of God

The creation account from Genesis clearly states man is created in the likeness and image of God (Gen 1:26-27). The concept of mankind being created in the image and likeness of God is not limited to the Old Testament as Paul and James both reaffirm this truth in the New Testament. Paul admonishes the church at Ephesus to "put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph 4:24). In writing about the destructive power of the tongue, James states, "With it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God" (Jas 3:9).

The affirmation of individuals with special needs as being fellow image-bearers has strong support across a diverse spectrum of theological thought. In "Creation and the Theology of Humanness," Hollie Holt-Woehl of Luther Seminary cites Walter Brueggeman and Terrance Fretheim as examples of modern theologians who view disabled persons as being created in the image of God. Brueggeman views the image of God as displayed in power and responsibility. Fretheim views the image of God as simply humanity mirroring God and participating in his activity in the world.[31] While Brueggeman

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[31] Hollie M. Holt-Woehl, "Creation and a Theology of Humanness," *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 16, no. 2 (May 2012): 121-32.

and Fretheim hold different views on what it means to be an image-bearer, both affirm the idea that those with disabilities are image-bearers. Paul Jewett, who taught at Fuller Seminary, held the common view that the image of God was manifest in man's ability to reason. He wrote, "To recognize our rational powers as evidence of the divine image compels one to say a word about the severely retarded . . . that such persons are incapable of manifesting the image does not mean that they are not in the image."[32] While one may take issue with Jewett's assertion of what it means to be created in the image of God, Jewett still held the view that the disabled are indeed image bearers.

On the conservative side of the theological spectrum, Wayne Grudem adds to the conversation of what it means to be created in the image of God, stating, "A full understanding of man's likeness to God would require a full understanding of who God is in his being and in his actions and a full understanding of who man is and what he does."[33] Grudem further articulates his position concerning individuals with disabilities being fellow image bearers in the following way:

> Every single human being, no matter how much the image of God is marred by sin, or illness, or weakness, or age, or any other disability, still has the status of being in God's image and therefore must be treated with the dignity and respect that is due to God's image-bearer. This has profound implications for our conduct toward others. It means that people of every race deserve equal dignity and rights. It means that elderly people, those seriously ill, the mentally retarded, and children yet unborn, deserve full protection and honor as human beings.[34]

As fellow image-bearers, individuals with special needs have an intrinsic value and worth that cannot be denied or excluded from the church. Michael Beates holds the position that people with disabilities are also image-bearers: "Humanity has been created *imago Dei,* 'in the image of God,' but with the advent of sin, that image has in some fashion been

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[32] Paul Jewett, *Who We Are: Our Dignity As Humans; A Neo-Evangelical Theology,* ed. Marguerite Shuster (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 67.

[33] Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction To Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 443.

[34] Ibid., 450.

marred."[35] Human value comes from the fact that people are created in the image and likeness of God, not in the possession of any ability. Thus, any marginalization based upon the perception of the evidence of the image of God in the individual is taking what Yong would call an ableist or discriminatory position.[36]

Spiritual Gifts

The second biblical doctrine supporting the argument for the inclusion of individuals with special needs within the ministries of the church is the doctrine of spiritual gifts. In writing to the church at Corinth, Paul states,

> Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given a manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. (1 Cor 12:4-7)

To the church in Rome, Paul teaches,

> For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned . . . having gifts that differ according to the grace given us, let us use them. (Rom 12:3, 6)

And to the church at Ephesus Paul writes, "But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift" (Eph 4:7). Paul is writing specifically to the church about each of the members being gifted for ministry. The clear implication is that every regenerate person has some spiritual gift to contribute to the church.

The view that each believer is uniquely gifted to serve the church is broadly held. Wayne Morris encourages the church to view "every human being as the unique and wonderful creation of God with the potential to contribute to building up the church with the gifts of their uniqueness."[37] Elizabeth Cochran, Associate Professor and Director

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[35] Beates, *Disability & the Gospel,* 72.

[36] Yong, *The Bible, Disability, and the Church,* 11.

[37] Wayne Morris, "Church as Sign and Alternative: Disabled People in the Churches," *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 14, no. 1 (March 2010): 51.

of Graduate Studies at Duquesne University, describes the gifts of grace as the church engaging in love, stating, "Christ's atonement made it possible for God to work through those who live in Christ to practice mutual empathy, love, and reconciliation."[38] As he calls for inclusion and the recognition of spiritual gifts on the part of all believers, Brian Brock explores Paul's letter to the church at Corinth and the above mentioned passage on spiritual gifts: "What is special, unique and individual about each gift is not merely a result of some feature of their bearer's capacities, but lies in the antecedent and distinct apportioning of individual gifts to those individual persons as the Spirit chooses."[39] The truth presented by the apostle Paul and by Cochran and Morris is that the Holy Spirit gives gifts to regenerate persons to build up the church. The gifts given are not based on the capacities or abilities of the person, but as Brock implies, the gifts are based solely on the choice and power of the giver, the Holy Spirit.

Wayne Grudem affirms the idea that spiritual gifts are given to every believer for the purpose of fulfilling the work of the ministry and building up the church. Grudem describes the function of spiritual gifts as "given for the work of the ministry and are simply tools used for that end."[40] As to the intent of spiritual gifts, Sinclair Ferguson writes, "They are given through the Spirit of Christ to equip believers to serve one another in the body of Christ and thus to set on display the unity of the church in the context of its diversity, and vice versa."[41] These views affirm Paul's teaching in the New Testament letters that the Holy Spirit gives gifts to believers to build up the church.

[38] Elizabeth Agnew Cochran, "The Full Imago Dei," *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 9, no. 3 (October 2008): 40-41.

[39] Brian Brock, "Theologizing Inclusion: 1 Corinthians 12 and the Politics of the Body of Christ," *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 15, no. 4 (November 2011): 359.

[40] Grudem, *Systematic Theology,* 1031.

[41] Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 209.

If every believer has been given spiritual gifts for ministry in the church, this must include regenerate individuals with special needs. The late Baptist minister Leslie B. Flynn held the view that there could be no such thing as an ungifted believer. He wrote, "Every child of God has a gift or gifts. Our gifts are assigned us when we are born by the Holy Spirit into the family of God."[42] Flynn's words cannot be read in any manner that would exclude regenerate individuals with disabilities from being counted among those believers who have been given gifts by the Holy Spirit for ministry. Every member, every believer is gifted by the Holy Spirit for ministry. On the near universal acceptance of the idea that every believer is gifted by the Holy Spirit, J. I. Packer writes,

> The thrust of Romans 12:3-13; 1 Corinthians 12; and Ephesians 4:7-15 is appreciated, and Catholics and Protestants, liberals and conservatives, charismatics, ecumenical and evangelicals of all denominations nowadays agree that all Christians have gifts and tasks of their own within the church's total ministry. Good News![43]

The gifts given by the Holy Spirit are for building up or edifying the church. The end goal is the maturity of the believer for the glory of God. Gregg Allison, professor of Christian Theology at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, explains there is a divine and human side of spiritual gifts having a common goal. The divine purpose of spiritual gifts "is for the 'building up of the body of Christ' so that the church will attain 'to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ' (Eph. 4:12-13) with the ultimate aim that Christ will be exalted (Rom. 8:29)."[44] Allison goes on to describe the human perspective or dimension of spiritual gifts:

> As the gospel is announced, it is the evangelist who proclaims it. As a meeting is directed, it is guided by one who has the gift of leadership. As comfort is extended,

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[42] Leslie B. Flynn, *19 Gifts of the Spirit: Which Do You Have? Are You Using Them?* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1974), 12.

[43] J. I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit: Finding Fullness in Our Walk with God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 69.

[44] Gregg Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church,* ed. John Feinberg (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 470.

one with the gift of mercy is ministering. As a revelation is communicated, it is spoken by a prophet.[45]

The goal from the human perspective is still to build up the body of Christ and to see believers being conformed to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29). The divine and human side of spiritual gifts accomplishes the same goal, building up the church so that the members grow in Christlikeness for the glory of God. On one hand the Holy Spirit chooses and empowers. This means that the individual with disabilities is just as capable of ministering in the church and building or edifying the body of Christ as the member without any measurable disabilities. The Holy Spirit is not limited in his power regardless of the abilities or disabilities of the individual through which he is working. On the human side of the equation, real people use real gifts to minister to others in order to edify the church for the glory of God. Barb Newman describes spiritual gifts as someone's green space. Green space is the area in which someone excels or has a passionate interest. Newman teaches that every believer has a green space, and the church must help discover that green space to deploy the individual into effective ministry.[46]

No sub-group of Christians is exempt from receiving spiritual gifts. No classification of believers are exempt from edifying the church. Therefore, if a church marginalizes individuals with disabilities and does not utilize the gifts they have been given for ministry, then the church will not function as God has designed.

The Great Commission

The third biblical concept supporting inclusion is the Great Commission (Matt 28:19-20). The Great Commission is the call for the church to go into all the world and make disciples. Theologian Michael Horton writes, "The Great Commission is entrusted to the saints and is fulfilled by their testimony to the gospel, by baptism, and by teaching

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[45] Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 470.

[46] Barbara Newman, *Accessible Gospel Inclusive Worship* (Wyoming, MI: CLC Network, 2015), loc. 3545, Kindle.

everything that he (Christ) has declared."[47] The expectation placed upon the church is that every member will engage in helping to fulfill the Great Commission.

David Platt, pastor and author, describes the Great Commission as an uncomfortable call for most Christians. The command to go, baptize, and make disciples of every nation is for all Christians.[48] Every Christian, even those with a disability, is to be involved in making disciples. Mark Dever, pastor and founder of Nine Marks Ministries, acknowledges the Great Commission is one of the purposes of the Church. The gospel is brought to all nations by the local congregation.[49] The Great Commission cannot be construed in any manner that would exclude people with disabilities. Believers with disabilities are called to make disciples.

Gregg Allison addresses the influence of the Great Commandment (Matt 22:37-38) upon the Great Commission: "The church's responsibility to engage the world with particular concern to care for the poor and marginalized may be viewed as flowing from its embrace of the good news of Jesus Christ."[50] Making disciples of all nations involves justice and caring for the poor. Embracing the gospel will cause the church to show concern for and include those with disabilities. The evidence that one loves his neighbor is found when Christ is shared with his neighbor.

Those with disabilities who would be disciples of Christ must also make disciples. Platt writes, "According to Jesus, from beginning to end, to be a disciple is to make disciples."[51] There is no exemption for people with disabilities. Every Christian,

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[47] Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 526.

[48] David Platt, *Exalting Jesus in Matthew,* Christ-Centered Exposition, ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida (Nashville: B & H, 2013), 375.

[49] Mark Dever, *The Church: The Gospel Made Visible* (Nashville: B & H, 2012), 75.

[50] Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers,* 462.

[51] Platt, *Exalting Jesus in Matthew*, 375.

whether fully abled, physical disabled, or intellectually disabled, is called to go and make disciples. Making disciples of all nations means no people group should be avoided. Disability advocate Albert Herzog writes, "People with disabilities are not excluded from the mandate of the Great Commission."[52] People of all ethnicities, languages, tribes, and ability should be the target of disciple making activities.

Conclusion

The concepts of *imago Dei,* spiritual gifts, and the Great Commission provide a biblical warrant for inclusion in the church. Amos Yong promotes inclusion and acceptance in the church that is modeled after what has been accomplished in the realm of public education:

> Yet at its heart, the church should welcome the central idea of an inclusive and person-centered community, and should develop ecclesial forms of such integrated environments that provide reinforcement for what students across the ability-spectrum are being exposed to in public educational systems. It should equip its teachers at their various levels of ministry so that they are not only capable of reaching out to students with intellectual disabilities, but also skilled at nurturing inclusion and welcoming ecclesial spaces. What would be involved here, then, is not only the ability to engage people with intellectual disabilities, but also the facility to foster authentic relations among classroom members regardless of their levels of intellectual ability.[53]

Examining the practices of public education, one cannot help but notice the student with disabilities is esteemed and is believed to have something of value to contribute to the whole of society. Education practice matches the biblical view that the individual with a disability has intrinsic worth and value as one created in the likeness and image of God and has gifts to utilize for the benefit of the entire community. While public educators are making progress in the area of inclusion, the church response to disability is significantly lacking in embracing and implementing inclusion. The school has been doing what the church should have been doing all along.

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[52]Albert A. Herzog, Jr., *The Social Contexts of Disability Ministry: A Primer for Pastors, Seminarians, and Lay Leaders* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017), loc. 1768, Kindle.

[53] Yong, "Disability from the Margins to the Center," 345.

Inclusion means the church recognizes the image of God in persons with disabilities and seeks to make them disciples. Further, inclusion means disciples with disabilities will be encouraged and equipped to use their gifts for ministry. The fully inclusive church will lead the way for the culture to accept and empower people with disabilities.

Making disciples of people with disabilities does not mean the church has to travel far. Bill Gaventa observes, "Faith communities around the world have been finding new mission fields right at home by intentional development of ministries that welcome and include people with disabilities and their families."[54] People with disabilities are living in the same neighborhoods where churches gather and church members make their homes. The church need only to be aware of her neighbors and seek to make disciples.

The call for inclusion is not about showing kindness or mercy to a disadvantaged or marginalized group of people. Nor is inclusion about being compassionate or hospitable. Amy Jacober encourages, "Those with disabilities have always been included by God, even when the leaders within the movement didn't get it."[55] The call for inclusion is about growing the body of Christ to maturity. It is about the gospel. It is about the glory of God. Without inclusion, the church will not attain the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph 4:13). The call for inclusion is a call for the church to be all that she was made to be and to glorify Christ by the full utilization of all the gifts in every member that God has given her.

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[54] Bill Gaventa, "Preaching Disability: The Whole of Christ's Body in Word and Practice," *Review and Expositor* 113, no. 2 (2016): 225.

[55] Amy E. Jacober, *Redefining Perfect: The Interplay Between Theology & Disability* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017), loc. 1124, Kindle.

CHAPTER 4

DESIGNING WORSHIP FOR INCLUSION

If anything in the church depicts community, it is the corporate gathering for

worship. People from diverse generations, backgrounds, educational levels, and worship

preferences gather together to worship the Lord. The only common factor among this

group of worshippers may be their relationship with Christ. Mike Cosper writes,

> Gathered worship is where the unity of Ephesians 4 is most clearly expressed when,
> as one body, we affirm one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all
> . . . declaring and remembering the gospel in community, abounding in love for God
> and one another.[1]

Together, the gathered church sings, prays, and perhaps recites creeds or Scripture

passages. The individual elements comprising the worship service have a unifying quality.

Corporate worship includes the congregation collectively listening to preaching, giving

their offerings, and taking communion. Observing the activity of the church in corporate

worship, one can clearly see community. While Cosper views worship as expressing or

displaying community, Robb Redman views worship as creating community.[2] Singing,

praying, giving, greeting, listening, and reciting together actually serves to create or build

community. The repetition of these elements over time, in Redman's view, develops a

kinship within the congregation. Whether corporate worship simply displays or creates

community, the church in worship is clearly a picture of community. Corporate worship

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[1] Mike Cosper, *Rhythms of Grace: How the Church's Worship Tells the Story of the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 120.

[2] Robb Redman, *The Great Worship Awakening: Singing a New Song in the Postmodern Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 113.

should express unity and fellowship compelled by a love for the Lord and a love for neighbor (Matt 22:37-39; John 13:34-35).

Yet unity and fellowship are not always evident nor inclusive of everyone in the church worship service. John Swinton, Chair of Divinity and Religious Studies at the University of Aberdeen, promotes the idea that a person must be missed in order to truly belong to any community.[3] A person whose absence goes unnoticed does not belong to the community. Each member of the group has a contribution to make and if someone's contribution is not desired, he is not part of the group. In their research on inclusion, Erik Carter, Elizabeth Biggs, and Thomas Boehm outline a loose pattern or cycle of moving from being present in a church to having a presence or belonging in the church. Carter, Biggs, and Boehm differentiate between simple integration and full inclusion.[4] Full inclusion and belonging are necessary for the worshipper to engage in corporate worship with the faith community.

Physical disability can often inhibit full participation with the gathered church in worship. People with diminished hearing capacity might be unable to understand what is being said or sung. Those who are blind may miss the visual cues the congregation is expected to follow. A person who cannot walk or stand is automatically excluded when the congregation is asked to stand. Older church buildings may have limited physical access entry points, which create barriers to entering the worship space.

Intellectual disabilities can also hinder full participation in corporate worship. Distracting or socially inappropriate behaviors such as verbal outbursts, inability to sit, or throwing items can be an interruption for the congregation. People with sensory issues

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[3] John Swinton, "From Inclusion to Belonging: A Practical Theology of Community, Disability and Humanness," *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 16, no. 2 (May 2012): 172-90.

[4] Erik Carter, Elizabeth Biggs, and Thomas Boehm, "Being Present versus Having a Presence: Dimensions of Belonging for Young People with Disabilities and Their Families," *Christian Education Journal* 3, no. 1 (2016): 127-46.

may struggle with sensory overload from lighting, sound, or visual presentations. A person with autism may have no physical signs of a disability and thus disrupting behaviors may be misunderstood or judged harshly.[5] People with intellectual disabilities may struggle to understand the elements of worship and how to properly participate, thus diminishing their worship experience.

Accessible Worship

Before a person with a physical or intellectual disability can serve in any capacity of leading a worship service, he must be able to fully engage in worship as a participant. Engaging people with diverse abilities and disabilities in the corporate worship of God is biblically warranted and yet is often forgotten or ignored in the church. To be fully inclusive, the church must make accommodations for full participation so that every person, regardless of disability, can engage with the community in worship.

A common form of discrimination against people with disabilities occurs when intellectual limitations are assumed to also be faith limitations. Bill Gaventa warns against equating faith with reason and assuming those with intellectual disabilities cannot grasp faith.[6] Faith is not dependent upon one's cognitive and reasoning ability. Paul expresses to the church at Ephesus that salvation is by grace through faith and faith is a gift from God and not a work of man (Eph 2:8-9). Works of man, which Paul declares do not bring salvation, include physical and intellectual works. Faith is a gift dependent upon the ability of the Giver and not the receiver.

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[5] My experience parenting a child with autism has given me insight into this particular problem in the church.

[6] Bill Gaventa, "Signs of the Times: Theological Themes in the Changing Forms of Ministries and Spiritual Supports with People with Disabilities," *Disabilities Studies Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (Fall 2006): 3.

If faith is available to all, regardless of ability, should not worship be accessible to all regardless of ability? Erik Carter makes strong statements regarding disability and worship:

> Disability is a natural part of the human experience and in no way diminishes the rights of individuals to participate in or contribute to society. . . . Churches are called to be places of welcome, belonging, and contribution for people with disabilities and their families.[7]

Inclusion begins with access to participation, but will only be fully accomplished when the spiritual gifts of all of the worshipping church are utilized. Before accommodations can be made to make worship leadership accessible, the worship service itself must be inclusive to all worshippers.

Designing and leading Christ-centered worship services to engage the entire congregation can be challenging when serving a diverse community. Fully including people with disabilities in corporate worship requires intentional measures and considerations in every aspect of the service and the facility. Accommodating individuals who suffer from certain physical disabilities, such as blindness or deafness, can be fairly uniform and consistent for the population needing to be served. However, when working with people with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), the manifestation of the disability may be unique for each individual.[8] This means there is no single accommodation efficacious for all persons. Accommodations may need to be individualized for full participation.

The church should expect that every person in the congregation has the capacity to fully engage in worship. To assume a person with a disability is incapable of understanding or fully participating in worship is a form of discrimination. Low

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[7] Erik W. Carter, "A Place of Belonging: Research at the Intersection of Faith and Disability," *Review and Expositor* 113, no. 2 (2016): 167.

[8] Amy Fenton Lee, *Leading a Special Needs Ministry: A Practical Guide to Including Children & Loving Families* (Nashville: B & H, 2016), 21.

expectations are discriminatory. The default posture of the church should be to presume that the worshipper with a disability has the potential to grasp as much meaning in the worship as his typical peers. Through studies and practices proven successful in public education, high expectations for comprehension have a strong correlation to student achievement for individuals with disabilities. Research indicates that a high parental expectation for students with disabilities directly correlates to academic achievement and graduation rates.[9] The concept of high expectations should be imported into the church.

The task of engaging the entire congregation in worship can be accomplished with careful consideration of the needs within the body. Once the specific needs are understood and appropriate accommodations are implemented, full engagement in worship becomes possible. Including individuals with disabilities into the faith community as participants is the first step toward inclusive worship leadership.

After offering a structure and model for Christ-centered worship with a sample liturgy, appropriate accommodations to enable those in the congregation with disabilities to fully engage will be suggested. The goal is to design an inclusive liturgy. Inclusion simply means that individuals with disabilities are able to participate alongside their fellow parishioners. The end product of this chapter will be an inclusive Christ-centered worship service that accommodates and engages all persons regardless of their abilities or disabilities.

A Model for Worship

Before exploring types of modifications and accommodations made for individuals with disabilities, it is prudent to outline the overarching structure and elements

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[9] Carrie Shandra and Dennis Hogan, "The Educational Attainment Process among Adolescents with Disabilities and Children of Parents with Disabilities," *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education* 56, no. 4 (November 2009): 363-79.

of the worship service as a baseline for planning.[10] A natural cycle exists in biblical worship that begins with a revelation from the Lord and follows with a response from man. Karen Roberts, of Joni and Friends, calls worship "a conversation between the Good Shepherd and his people, the sheep of his pasture. We respond to his invitation with shouts of joy and glad hearts."[11] God begins the conversation and man replies in devotion. The Lord has revealed his redemptive plan in Christ and the believer properly reacts in adoration and humility.[12] New Testament worship is the response of the Christian to the revelation of God in the person and work of Christ. God initiates worship and man responds.[13] This cycle continues throughout the Scriptures. True worship is the faithful response of the believer to the nature, character, and actions of God.[14] Thus, revelation and response is a constant pattern of worship. Biblical worship is rooted in telling the story of the gospel. It is remembering the past and anticipating the future. It is a re-presentation of the story of Christ with a longing for the culmination of that story.[15]

Historically, Christ-centered worship is shaped into the following gospel influenced contour: adoration, confession, assurance, thanksgiving, petition and

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[10] There are numerous ways to structure a worship liturgy. The suggested liturgy is presented as a model from which accommodations can be made. I do not intend to imply this is the only liturgical structure to be used.

[11] Karen Roberts, *Shout for Joy: Engaging the Whole Church in Accessible Worship* (Agoura Hills, CA: Joni And Friends, 2017), 7.

[12] D. A. Carson, *Worship by the Book* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 26.

[13] Constance Cherry, *The Worship Architect: A Blueprint for Designing Culturally Relevant and Biblically Faithful Services* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 38.

[14] Warren Wiersbe, *Real Worship: Playground, Battle Ground, or Holy Ground?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 26.

[15] Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 116.

intercession, instruction, communion, and benediction.[16] The structure provides a form where the gospel story is displayed. The congregational response to the gospel story is worship. The weekly ritual of the worship gathering builds community among believers. As worshippers engage in the liturgy, they are also growing in their relationship with Christ. Inclusion then, is important for both community and spiritual growth. Barb Newman promotes accessibility in congregational worship: "It's not just about being able to get inside the church physically, it's also about . . . prayer, praise, listening, learning, confessing, serving, and blessing, whether with family at home or our family at church, it's an opportunity to grow . . . with Jesus Christ."[17] The historical development and weekly implementation of this structured liturgy serves to reinforce the message in the hearts and lives of the gathered church. Bryan Chapell writes, "The common pattern of the order of worship in the church reflects the pattern of the progress of the gospel in the heart."[18] The sinner sees the holiness of God and the Holy Spirit brings conviction, evoking confession of sin and repentance. In Christ, the sinner finds assurance of forgiveness and responds with thanksgiving. The Triune God, who is active in salvation, is revealed in Trinitarian worship. The forgiven sinner expresses his love for God and others through prayer and intercession. The believer seeks to grow in Christ through instruction in the Word and communion. Finally, the disciple goes out to make more disciples. Each step is empowered by the Holy Spirit. This pattern reinforces the gospel to all in the congregation regardless of disability.

The liturgy outlined can be divided into what is called the four-fold structure of worship, which includes the Gathering, the Word, the Table (or Response), and the

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[16] Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship,* 118.

[17] Barbara Newman, *Accessible Gospel Inclusive Worship* (Wyoming, MI: CLC Network, 2015), locs. 934-47, Kindle.

[18] Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship*, 99.

Sending. Utilizing the four-fold structure will help in the design of an inclusive Christ-centered worship service or liturgy on a weekly basis.[19] Observing how God interacts with man in both the Old and New Testaments, one can see an order to the dialogue. Constance Cherry writes,

> Whether in the conversation with Moses at the burning bush (Exod. 3:1-12; 4:18-20), with Isaiah during his vision (Isa. 6:1-13), with Mary at the Annunciation (Luke 1:26-38), or with the disciples on the Emmaus Road (Luke 24:13-35), a similar pattern is found. God approaches (initiating a conversation). The person experiences discontinuity between the divine and the human (amazement, unworthiness, confession, denial, etc.). God speaks. The person responds. God sends. This pattern is seen repeatedly throughout Scripture.[20]

The practice of the four-fold structure offers a pattern of dialogue that fits the revelation and response cycle and allows the gospel story to be told through adoration, confession, assurance, thanksgiving, petition and intercession, instruction, communion, and benediction. Each element can be placed within the four-fold structure so the gospel is re-presented in the service. The gospel story is reinforced by the weekly cycle of the liturgy. The routine of the liturgy aligns with the model of structured teaching. Educational researchers Deborah Smith and Naomi Tyler say, "The underlying philosophy . . . is that children with ASD are missing skills that they can compensate for through visual supports and other forms of structure, but they cannot learn."[21] The consistency of the structure builds understanding over time allowing the person with ASD to overcome an initial lack of understanding to fully participate in the worship rituals.

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[19] Greg Scheer, "Four-Fold Pattern of Worship: An Explanation on Four-Fold Worship and Its Place in History," Calvin Institute of Worship for the Study and Renewal of Worship, September 17, 2014, accessed March 27, 2018, https://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/four-fold-pattern-of-worship.

[20] Cherry, *The Worship Architect,* 45.

[21] Deborah Deutsch Smith and Naomi Chowdhuri Tyler, *Introduction to Special Education,* 7th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill, 2010), 420.

The purpose of the gathering is to unite the congregation in God's presence and to prepare them to hear the Word of the Lord.[22] The Gathering portion of the service includes adoration, confession, assurance, thanksgiving, petition, and intercession, all of which can be implemented through spoken word and song. A call to worship, public prayer, scripture reading, singing, and a recitation of a creed or statement of faith may be crafted into this portion of the service. The Gathering is also an appropriate place to receive tithes and offerings. Accessibility is important to consider in the Gathering. Roberts states, "Intentionally including people of all abilities in the gathering of your church service will set the tone for the remainder of your time together in worship."[23] The Gathering is intended to unite all of the congregation.

The second part of the four-fold structure is the Word. The Word is essentially God speaking to man. It includes instruction in God's Word, and is accomplished utilizing elements such as the sermon, scripture reading, prayer for illumination, songs of devotion and silence. Cherry teaches that the main activity during the service of the Word is revelation. Both the sermon and Scripture readings are intended to reveal God and evoke a response of worship.[24] For man to respond in worship, there is first a revelation from God. Roberts clarifies the purpose of the Word by emphasizing the metanarrative of Scripture: creation, fall, redemption, and restoration are proclaimed.[25] All redeemed people, regardless of ability, have the capacity to respond in some fashion to the revealed works of the Lord.

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[22] Cherry, *The Worship Architect,* 55-62.

[23] Roberts, *Shout for Joy,* 28.

[24] Cherry, *The Worship Architect,* 70.

[25]Roberts, *Shout for Joy,* 28.

The third of the four-fold structure is Communion, which is a logical response to the Word.[26] Bryan Chapell sees communion or the liturgy of the table as physically demonstrating the same gospel message represented in the liturgy of the Word: "By the movements and elements of the sacrament,[27] we acknowledge God's holiness, confess our sin, and celebrate his grace; we are nourished by his provision and, thus, are encouraged and enabled to live with his blessing."[28] The gospel story is heard, seen, and tasted when the historic liturgy of the Word and the liturgy of the Table are together. The combination of these two liturgies provides a predictable schedule, which is a key element of a successful program for a person with ASD.[29] As not all churches observe weekly communion, a time of Response could replace communion in the four-fold structure. The Response can include an altar call, singing, prayer, or a verbal or written act of commitment.

The final component of the four-fold structure of worship is the Sending. Sending would include the charge and benediction. The charge is commissioning the gathered church to go do God's will and the benediction is a pronouncement of blessing from the Lord.[30] Trinitarian worship begins and ends with the Word of the Lord. He initiates worship through revelation and he closes the gathering through benediction. This segment is likely shorter than the others, but also may include music, scripture, and

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[26] Not every church will observe weekly communion. When communion is observed on a consistent basis, whether weekly or at least monthly, the worshipper with an intellectual disability has a better chance to grasp the meaning behind the symbols. The symbols may seem foreign to worshippers of all abilities if communion is observed too infrequently.

[27] The term *sacrament* may be problematic for some. In this context, the terms *ordinance* or *Lord's Supper* may be more palatable. Its usage here is not intended to imply a means in which God is enacting his grace.

[28] Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship,* 289.

[29] Smith and Tyler, *Introduction to Special Education,* 419.

[30] Cherry, *The Worship Architect,* 111-17.

prayer. The pattern of closing with a benediction can serve as a cue that the worship service is over.

A worship service fashioned by utilizing the four-fold structure of worship will develop a routine for the worshipper ingraining the story and meaning of the gospel in his mind. The pattern will reinforce the gospel story and add meaning to the symbols for the worshipper, regardless of whether he has a disability. A consistent weekly liturgy meets the American Psychiatric Association's recommendations of structure and routine for persons with ASD.[31] Repetition allows the person with ASD to become familiar and then comfortable in fully participating in worship. The gospel becomes more concrete and less abstract through the ritual. The full experience of communion is enriched as the worshipper understands the meaning of the symbols. Repetition aids the person with ASD in symbolic competence.[32] Consistent and recognizable patterns allow worship to become concrete and therefore relevant and more accessible.

Figure 2 outlines how the elements might be combined to design a worship service in the four-fold pattern of worship including most of the historical elements mentioned. The sample service is designed in the four-fold structure of worship.[33] This model provides a baseline service for which accommodations and modifications will be added.

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[31] Scott Benson, "What Is Autism Spectrum Disorder?" American Psychiatric Association, February, 2016, accessed March 29, 2018, https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/autism/what-is-autism-spectrum-disorder.

[32] Howard Shane et al., *Enhancing Communication for Individuals with Autism: A Guide to the Visual Immersion System* (Baltimore: Paul Bookes, 2015), 22.

[33] All songs listed with hymn numbers are from the *Baptist Hymnal*, 2008.

Model Service

The Gathering
Adoration
    Scripture – Psalm 34:3
    Song – *All Creatures Of Our God And King* (Hymn 11)
    Prayer of Invocation

> *God of grace,*
> *you have given us minds to know you,*
> *hearts to love you, and voices to sing your praise.*
> *Fill us with your Spirit,*
> *that we may celebrate your glory*
> *and worship you in spirit and in truth*
> *through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Confession and Assurance
    Call to Confession – 1 John 1:8-9
    Song – *Grace Greater Than Our Sin* (Hymn 105)

Thanksgiving
    Song – *Worthy Is The Lamb* (Hymn 264)

Petition and Intercession
    Scripture – Philippians 4:6-7
    Prayer
    Offering – Instrumental Interlude

The Word
Instruction In God's Word
    Scripture Reading – Sermon Text
    Message

The Table
Communion
    Words of Preparation
    Song of Response – There Is A Fountain (Hymn 224)
    Distribution of the Elements
    Prayer of Thanksgiving
    Partaking of the Elements

The Sending
Charge
    Body Life Announcements
    Song – *O Church Arise* (Hymn 663)

Benediction
    Scripture - Numbers 6:24-26

Figure 2. Sample liturgy

Accommodations for Intellectual Disabilities

While the church has fallen woefully behind in fostering spiritual gifts in the context of inclusion, strategic methods developed through public education initiatives have proven successful in identifying and utilizing the unique contributions of people with disabilities. If the church is to become inclusive of people with disabilities, she need look only to public education to find effective strategies.

Though there may be a wide variety of intellectual disabilities represented in the church, the focus of this section is to identify strategies for serving individuals with autism, sensory issues, challenging behaviors, learning disabilities (i.e., dyslexia and ADHD), or other cognitive disabilities. Persons with intellectual disabilities deserve the opportunity to fully participate in the worship service. Multiple strategies may need to be considered and explored. It is important to understand that no single solution will work for everyone.[34] The strategies and solutions to be considered are Universal Design for Learning (UDL), visual schedules and supports, social narratives, partnering/collaboration, routine, and responsive design.

Universal Design for Worship

As mentioned previously, the concept of UDL has potential ancillary benefits for the congregation at large not just those with disabilities. The principles of UDL are being applied to both access and instruction in education. UDL is intended to help all students approach the subject matter in nonstandard ways. Researchers Carol Rogers-Shaw, Davin Carr-Chellman, and Jinhee Choi write, "More than simple indicators of best practices or lists of possible accommodations, UDL offers an epistemological shift that facilitates design for all learners within a holistic framework."[35] Principles of UDL are seen in many of the suggested accommodations throughout this chapter.

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[34] Smith and Tyler, *Introduction to Special Education,* 27.

[35] Carol Rogers-Shaw, Davin Carr-Chellman, and Jinhee Choi, "Universal Design for Learning," *Adult Learning* 29, no. 1 (February 2018): 20.

One example of UDL application in the worship setting is the availability of sermon or manuscript notes. Often the sermon takes up the largest portion of the service and it can be difficult to sit still and attend to the message. By providing a sermon manuscript, the church enables the entire congregation to follow along more closely and to interact with the message long after the sermon is over. Manuscripts speak directly to visual learners and help them stay focused when they might ordinarily tune out the speaker. The manuscript is also helpful for the worshippers who become distracted at some point during the sermon to reengage with the preaching. Along with sermon manuscripts, the use of projected visuals onto a screen via PowerPoint or other presentation software enables the congregation to see a representation of the particular truth being communicated. The images on the screen serve to increase comprehension for everyone in the worship gathering.

It was not uncommon in the past for church bulletins to contain an order of service. This occurrence is becoming more rare as the church has transitioned from print technology to electronic or digital technology.[36] By providing a written order of service (which may be distributed digitally through the YouVersion application) the congregation does not have to wonder about what is coming next.[37] A person with autism may need time to prepare for the next element upcoming in the liturgy. While providing the congregation with an entire sermon manuscript on a weekly basis could be problematic, supplying those gathered with a basic order of worship is relatively easy. Most music teams facilitate worship from a printed or digital order which could easily be modified for the congregation.

Providing an order of worship can also minimize distractions. My son, Andrew, has been blessed with perfect pitch. He accurately identifies any pitch or key he hears.

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[36] Quentin Schultze, *High-Tech Worship? Using Presentational Technologies Wisely* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 20.

[37] YouVersion is a free application available to download on most personal electronic devices.

Andrew was about ten years old when we discovered he needed an order of worship. We had begun singing a song in church, when Andrew, who was seated on the second row with his mom, cried out loudly, "That's the wrong key. We can't sing it in that key." As it turned out, Andrew had been listening to the same on song on a compact disc in a different key. The order of service I provide to the worship team lists which key we will use for the song. Giving Andrew the order of worship ahead of time allowed him to prepare for any personal discrepancies (such as variations in key signatures) and certainly minimized disruptions.

Removing and reducing barriers to participation in worship does not have to be complicated and will not necessarily add significantly to a service planner's weekly task list. Many accommodations that will be suggested in the following section fall into the category of UDL.

Visual Schedules and Supports

A visual support is sometimes necessary to give a concrete cue about an activity, routine, or expectation, particularly for a person with autism. A research review group from the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill writes,

> Visual supports can provide assistance across activity and setting and can take on a number of forms and functions. These include but are not limited to: photographs, icons, drawings, written words, objects, environmental arrangement, schedules, graphic organizers, organizational systems, and scripts.[38]

A visual support might be used to identify the organization of the environment. One type of visual support could be a campus map identifying fragrance free seating areas or seating included in the hearing induction loop.

A visual support could be used to communicate the appropriate level of volume when speaking in a specific area of the church. For example, it may be quite appropriate

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[38] Connie Wong et al., *Evidence-Based Practices for Children, Youth, and Young Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2013), 104.

to speak in one's normal voice in the foyer or hallway. However, it might be necessary to speak in whispered tones in the auditorium. Visual supports remind people where to locate emergency exits, to silence cell phones, and when the service is about to start. Visual cues are also utilized to identify when the congregation should sing, stand, and participate in a responsive reading.

For the non-reader who may need picture icons, a visual activity schedule or a first-then display can be individualized to take the order of service down the ladder of abstraction. An activity schedule represents various events and the order in which they will occur. See figure 3 for an example of an activity schedule.[39] The visual activity schedule in figure 3 follows the order of service in figure 2. The visual activity schedule provides a map of the order of service for the non-functioning or low functioning reader with an icon for each event in the service.
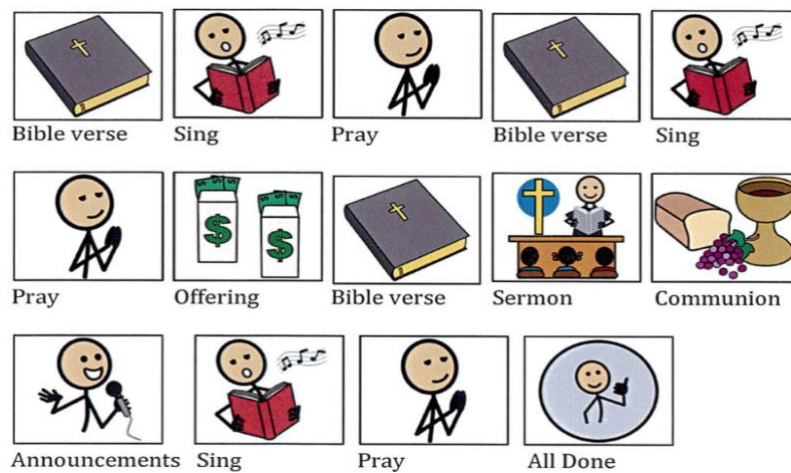

Figure 3. Visual schedule

[39] "SymbolStix Prime," News 2 You, accessed July 6, 2017, https://prime.n2y.com/SymbolStix/Home.

A First-Then display depicts two events in the order in which they will occur.[40] The First-Then display in figure 4 breaks down the specific order between two events in the service to help with transition.[41] First-Then charts assist the worshipper who has difficulty in transitioning from one activity to the next. The chart enables the worshipper to be prepared for the specific transition which may be causing difficulty. The example in Figure 4 is useful for the person who wants to pray and but does not want to wait for the singing to end. By referring to the First-Then chart, a helper is reminding the worshipper of the order of events and cueing appropriate responses.
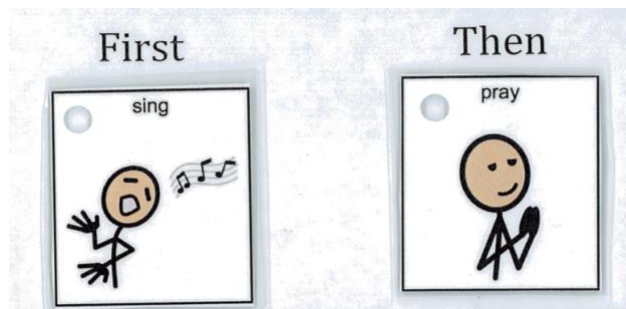

Figure 4. First-then display

Social Narratives

A social narrative is a detailed story describing a situation offering concrete cues for appropriate behavior. Social narratives do not have to be long, but can be concise and simple. They must always be true and are best written in first person. The goal is to improve social understanding and allow the individual to appropriately participate in the activity.[42] A social narrative might be useful to explain to a non-baptized congregant why

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[40] Shane et al., *Enhancing Communication tor Individuals with Autism,* 155.

[41] "SymbolStix Prime."

[42] Laura J. Hall, *Autism Spectrum Disorders: From Theory to Practice* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, 2013), 212-14.

they cannot partake of the elements in Communion while others around participate. See figure 5 for an example of a social narrative for Communion.[43]

A social narrative might also be useful in helping identify appropriate responses when the individual is bored or distracted during a sermon or extended testimony. Additionally, the narrative can provide alternative responses to talking loudly, screaming, running, or flailing of hands. Figure 6 offers an example of a social narrative for how to respond when one becomes bored or disinterested during the worship service, especially during the sermon.[44]


Communion

At church I go to the service in the auditorium.
I follow my schedule.
One part of my schedule says communion.
Communion is a special part of the service to remember Jesus Christ and that He gave His body and blood to pay the price for my sins.
People in my congregation take one piece of bread and one small cup of juice. It is not a snack. It is a special part of the service.
One of the rules for communion is that you have to be baptized to get the bread and juice. I have not been baptized. Mom and dad want to talk to me about that decision. Until I am baptized, I cannot have the bread and juice. I will sit quietly while Mom and Dad have their juice.
I can pray, draw a picture of communion, or another quiet activity that Mom or Dad says is okay.

Figure 5. Communion social narrative

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[43] "SymbolStix Prime." "Communion Social Narrative" created by Margaret E. Broussard.

[44] "SymbolStix Prime." "Boredom Social Narrative" created by Margaret E. Broussard.
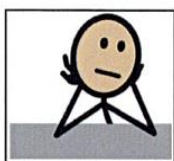
When I am Bored

I like going to church.
I like my pastor. He helps me to learn about God.
Sometimes his sermons are long because he is teaching people who have gone to church a long time and want to learn even more about God.
When I have to sit a long time I can get bored.
I need a plan for what to do when I get bored. It is important that I have a quiet mouth and a calm body while I sit.
I can keep a paper and pen to draw a picture or just scribble.
I can have a fidget toy, but it should not light up.
If I sit near a door and at the end of the row, I can get up to go to the bathroom or get a drink one time.
If I can tell it is going to be very hard for me to have a quiet mouth and calm body, I can show Mom or Dad my break picture. They will help me choose one of my activities or decide if I need to take a walk.

Figure 6. Boredom social narrative

Partnering/Collaboration

The Great Commission tells the church to go and make disciples (Matt 28:19-20). One way of discipling is to partner with an individual with special needs and help them navigate through the worship service. This section discusses the benefits of modeling and using helpers to assist. Peer-mediated instruction and intervention is a strategy where typical peers are equipped to interact and assist individuals with ASD to gain new behavior, communication, and social skills by adding social opportunities.[45] Training a peer to support an individual with special needs is certainly ideal. However, research indicates that simply providing a "peer buddy" can significantly increase the appropriate social interaction of the individual with ASD.[46] By developing a team of individuals in the church who will serve as buddies or partners to those with disabilities, the church also develops a model to assist and accommodate all guests who may be new or unfamiliar to the service.

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[45] Wong et al., *Evidence-Based Practices,* 70.

[46] Brian Reichow et al., *Evidence-Based Practices and Treatments for Children with Autism* (New York: Springer, 2011), 178-79.

Peer collaboration should thrive in the church who is told to bear each other's burdens (Gal 6:2). The principles of bearing one another's burdens are seen throughout the Scriptures. Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, "For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness" (2 Cor 8:13-14). This passage refers to financial or physical need, but the principle can be appropriately applied to disabilities. Partnering or peer collaboration underscores the principle of UDL.

Routine

Routines are normal patterns of life that often occur unnoticed. The hand one uses to hold their toothbrush is a routine. Persons with autism can become attached to a routine and the setting in which the routine is established. Established routines provide predictability and may allow the worshipper with autism to transition smoothly through the various events within the worship liturgy.[47] Laura Hall, professor at San Diego State University in the Department of Special Education, explains, "Transferring or generalizing from the original learning setting to another is often a challenge. To generalize skills from one place to another or from one person to another, the individual must notice the similarity in the contexts of situations."[48] The need for routine can have significant implications in the church worship setting. A deviation from the pattern or routine may require a visual support, such as an activity schedule, first-then display, or a social narrative.

Learning through patterns and routine is one reason for advocating for a more regular, if not weekly, observance of Communion. The established pattern will make it easier for the person with ASD to move fluidly through the service and will reinforce the gospel by visually telling the gospel story through Communion. In the principle of UDL,

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[47] Shane et al., *Enhancing Communication for Individuals with Autism,* 160.

[48] Hall, *Autism Spectrum Disorders,* 153.

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frequent Communion will also benefit the entire congregation as they hear and experience the visual depiction of the gospel.

Responsive Design

While UDL can serve to make the worship experience meaningful for all congregants, sometimes an individualized approach must be taken to empower the worshipper to engage in the service. Newman calls this approach responsive design.[49] She writes, "While there are many ways to welcome persons of varied abilities, there will be times when you will want to put together some supports for just one person."[50] UDL refers to accommodations benefitting the entire congregation. Responsive Design is an accommodation for a single individual. Common accommodations in an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for students include sensory breaks, providing written material at an easier reading level, providing a vocabulary list with definitions, seating the student near the front or near a positive role model, and developing a system or code word to identify when the student is not behaving appropriately.[51] All of these accommodations are examples of Responsive Design and may be used in the church worship setting.

A sensory break might be necessary for someone who simply cannot sit and attend for long periods of time. Allowing or encouraging the person with a disability to leave the worship space and get a drink of water or use the bathroom may be all that is necessary to the person attend to the rest of the service. Churches may designate a sensory room where an individual may go for a change in lighting, to sit on a stability

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[49] Barbara Newman, "Universal Design: Further Up, Come Further In" (panel discussion, Calvin Symposium on Worship, Grand Rapids, January 26, 2018).

[50] Barbara Newman, "Ten Ways To Be More Inclusive and Welcoming in Worship and Church Life," Calvin Institute of Worship for the Study and Renewal of Worship, August 3, 2017, accessed March 31, 2018, https://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/ten-ways-to-be-more-inclusive-and-welcoming-in-worship-and-church-life/.

[51] *School Accommodations and Modifications* (Minneapolis: Families and Advocates for Partnership In Education, 2001), accessed July 8, 2017, http://www.wrightslaw.com/info/fape.accoms.mods.pdf.

ball or swing, or to be loud. A sensory room can allow the individual with a disability to the opportunity to stand, stretch, and move without distracting others.

Responsive Design may prompt special reserved seating in the worship space. By positioning the person on the end of an aisle or near an exit, there will be less distraction to others when the sensory break occurs. Allowing the individual to sit near the front of the sanctuary may help minimize distractions for the individual and help them attend to the service. Seating them near an appropriate role model is a way to include others in the process of discipleship and relates to the idea of partnering and collaborating.

The appropriate role model not only serves as an example but can also cue the individual to reinforce acceptable behavior. If a code word is developed to discreetly alert the individual when they are not behaving appropriately, the role model or peer has the opportunity to disciple the individual and potentially avoid a situation where the entire congregation becomes distracted by an inappropriate behavior, such as yelling or other verbal outbursts.

Additional Accommodations

There are numerous simple accommodations to consider that allow for greater participation in worship. A church could consider utilizing contrasting colors on printed materials, text messaging or email to communicate needs such as prayer requests, furnishing fidget devices, providing a gluten free option for the Lord's Supper, or using response emoticons, such as a thumbs up or thumbs down.[52] Each accommodation would serve to grow participation in the congregation and deepen understanding of the gospel story in worship.

Sermon notes, if they are written as a manuscript, may be too much material to comprehend and therefore a simplified version of the sermon notes could be provided.

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[52] Barbara Newman, "Universal Design for Worship: Very Practical Ideas for This Coming Sunday" (lecture, Calvin Symposium on Worship, Grand Rapids, January 26, 2018).

This might be easily accomplished by converting the PowerPoint presentation into notes for the reader. Providing a vocabulary list along with definitions of difficult or uncommon words is not only helpful for the individual with special needs but can also be useful to enrich the worship experience for everyone in the congregation.

Hypersensitivity or hyposensitivity to sensory input is not unusual in individuals with ASD.[53] This can be evidenced by intolerance to certain volumes of sound or a reaction to an overstimulation of lights and video. The use of noise cancelling headphones or wearing sunglasses may be entirely appropriate for a person a with a sensory integration issue. A church with a ready supply of headphones and sunglasses available communicates hospitality and love to individuals with sensory integration issues.

One additional accommodation is the graphic organizer, which is a type of visual support that helps the learner organize, understand, and remember content.[54] A graphic organizer imposes organization upon content that might at first be overwhelming or confusing.[55] A flow chart and a Venn diagram are examples of graphic organizers. Color coding portions of text is a common method for organizing content. Figure 7 is an example of graphic organizer utilizing color coding and a pyramid to identify priorities.

Because each individual has differing needs, developing a relationship with the individual and his family or caregiver will be key in understanding and providing necessary accommodations. Being aware of the needs within the congregation affords church leaders the opportunity to individually respond to specific needs and enable all in the church to worship. Inclusive worship will incorporate principles of both universal and responsive design.

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[53] Hall, *Autism Spectrum Disorders,* 153.

[54] Smith and Tyler, *Introduction to Special Education,* 504.

[55] Ibid., 148. "Graphic organizer from Overseas Missionary Fellowship, "Facing Priorities," accessed July 7, 2018, https://omf.org/my/2018/01/08/facing-priorities/.
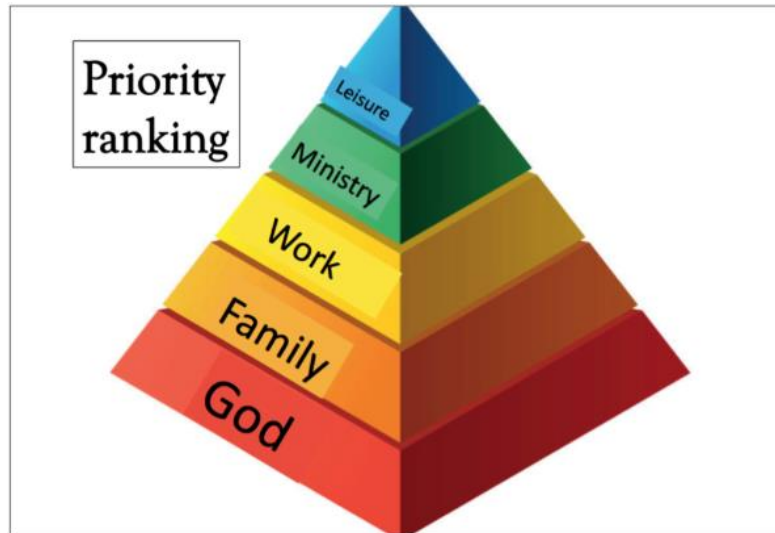
Figure 7. Graphic organizer

Accommodations for Physical Disabilities

Many accommodations for people with physical disabilities have been codified in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).[56] Doorway entry sizes, accessible parking, handrails, and ramps are examples of ADA mandated accommodations.[57] In describing principles of UDL, Newman states, "Architects don't put elevators into buildings (or ramps, or braille signs, etc.) based upon asking people if they think they'll need it installed. They put it in, expecting persons with varied abilities to come in."[58] Elevators are built assuming people (regardless of abilities) will use them. Worship spaces should be designed and built assuming people with limited mobility come. A person with limited mobility, who is required to use a wheelchair, can participate when the architecture of the worship center is designed to be accessible with ramps, automatic doors, or elevators.

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[56] US Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, "Americans with Disabilities Acts Revised 2008," accessed June 1, 2018, https://www.ada.gov/pubs/adastatute08.pdf.

[57] Smith and Tyler, *Introduction to Special Education,* 321-22.

[58] Newman, "Universal Design: Further Up, Come Further In."

Another important accommodation to consider is seating space. A person in a wheelchair may have difficulty finding space in the worship center for his wheelchair. Permanent seating can be removed to create space for wheelchairs. Removing a few chairs or even shortening a pew can provide adequate space. The church should not wait for a person to need this adaptation. The church should make the accommodation now, expecting someone to come to worship in a wheelchair. By waiting, the church effectively tells the person in a wheelchair, "You are not welcome." Removing barriers of physical access to the worship space is a strong step toward more inclusive worship.

Persons with limited mobility may enter the worship space thanks to ADA rules, but expectations placed upon worshippers may still be exclusive. When a worship leader simply asks the congregation to stand, he is automatically excluding everyone who is physically unable to stand. Asking the congregation to stand is potentially a divisive request and instead of a uniting request. Mark Stephenson, of Disability Network, offers phrases such as, "Please rise in body or in spirit," and "You may rise," as substitute phrases designed to include everyone in the gathering.[59] By creating options for standing, the worship leader communicates to the worshiper he is welcome however he may be able to participate.

UDL often utilizes technology to provide more ways for students to approach learning and participate in instruction. One example of UDL is the requirement of textbook publishers to produce e-books for their textbooks. E-books allow readers to enlarge the font for easier reading, or in many cases to listen to material as it is read. Increased font size and audio features provide greater access to learning.[60] Universal design for worship is simply a matter of applying UDL principles to the worship context. Accommodations are made that can benefit everyone universally. A perfect correlation of UDL in education

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[59] Mark Stephenson, "Language in Worship Can Welcome or Push Away," *Disability Concerns,* last updated May 13, 2014, accessed March 31, 2018, https://network.crcna.org/disability-concerns/language-worship-can-welcome-or-push-away.

[60] Smith and Tyler, *Introduction to Special Education*, 35-36.

and worship is the use of technology like the YouVersion application. Churches can upload sermon notes, outlines, and manuscripts to the application and directly link Scripture passages. The user or worshipper can follow along with the manuscript and make the text as large as necessary for easy reading.

The YouVersion application also allows for the digital submission of forms such as guest registration in lieu of filling out a visitor card and online giving. These features can clearly benefit the visually impaired by allowing the font to be larger, but also benefit those whose fine motor skills are deficient and are unable to legibly write with a pen or pencil. Of course, in the true spirit of UDL, everyone in the church can benefit from the opportunity to digitally submit forms and give online.

Resources are available to provide large print Bibles, braille Bibles, braille hymnals, and other audio materials to support the visually impaired.[61] The worship experience for the person with blindness may be completely aural and tactile, but he is included. The ADA has provided for braille signs and instructions in numerous aspects of life.

Churches may offer sign-language interpreters for people who are deaf. Hearing loops are also becoming popular so that people with hearing aids can receive a direct wireless audio feed from the sound system.[62] Hearing loops are a wireless audio induction system designed to transmit sound to a t-coil, common in many hearing aids. A t-coil is a copper coil in a hearing aid that allows the hearing aid to function as an audio receiver.[63] Churches may even keep a supply of audio receivers and headphones available for people

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[61] Association of Christian Ministries to the Blind, "Reaching The Blind," accessed July 6, 2017, http://www.reachingtheblind.info/.

[62] David Myers, "Progress toward the Looping of America—and Doubled Hearing Aid Functionality," *The Hearing Review* 17, no. 2 (February 2010): 10-17.

[63] American Hearing Loop, "What Is This T-Coil in a Hearing Aid?" accessed June 1, 2018, http://www.americanhearingloop.com/what-is-this-t-coil-in-a-hearing-aid/.

whose hearing aids do not have a t-coil. Providing sign-language interpreters and a hearing loop communicates welcome and hospitality to people who are hearing impaired.

Accommodating certain physical disabilities can be standardized and can occur every time the church gathers without any extra planning on the part of the worship designer once they are established or are in place. After the building has become physically accessible, this accommodation does not have to be revisited until it is time for a new building or renovation. Installing a hearing loop and setting up YouVersion will expand inclusion to persons with aural and visual impairments. While other physical disabilities may need to be addressed, accommodating issues of sight, sound, and mobility are important steps toward inclusion. Communicating accommodations for physical disabilities can be accomplished through signs designating the presence of a hearing loop and wheelchair accessibility.

Conclusion

Accommodating individuals with disabilities is a gospel issue. The church is either making room for the stranger or telling him to go away. By not making necessary accommodations, the church is showing partiality to those who are abled and is violating the spirit communicated by James in his letter to the church.

> My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "You sit here in a good place," while you say to the poor man, "You stand over there," or, "Sit down at my feet," have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called? If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. (Jas 2:1-9)

Paul wrote the church at Philippi admonishing them to "do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

Let each of you look not only to his own interests but also to the interests of others" (Phil 2:3-4). To the church at Thessalonica, Paul wrote, "We urge you brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all" (1 Thess 5:14). These passages inform a church culture to be hospitable and seek to engage the entire congregation in worship. The church must consider the interests of the individual with special needs and not show partiality to the abled.

To minister to and with individuals with disabilities will require patience and a commitment from the entire church. In many churches this requires a paradigm shift in the culture and thinking. The church should be encouraged to be kind, gracious, and patient to those who have needs and their families. It must be acceptable to hear an occasional outburst from a person who is struggling at the moment. A person who needs a sensory break should be able to quietly exit the sanctuary without glares and stares from congregants. The response of the church should be love and not judgment. Paul defined love for the church at Corinth in this manner:

> Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (1 Cor 13:4-7)

To effectively minister to individuals with special needs, the church can love in the manner Paul describes. By bringing the marginalized in from the fringes to the center of the ministry, the church is carrying out the work of Jesus Christ who came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). Roberts urges the church to structure worship that is accessible because of the gospel, stating,

> It matters because people matter. It matters because the gospel matters. By structuring our churches in a way that allows all people to worship, we are communicating the truth that all people can have a life-giving relationship with Jesus Christ. There is nothing more important in this life than believing and sharing the gospel. By engaging in accessible worship, we are opening the door for all people to believe and share the gospel.[64]

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[64] Roberts, *Shout for Joy,* 52.

The gospel is the reason the church and worship designers need to strive toward designing inclusive worship services that eliminate barriers for individuals with special needs.

Once the church worship service is designed to be inclusive for those with special needs or disabilities, the church can begin to include individuals in serving and leading elements of the worship service. Inclusive worship participation is the first step to inclusive worship leadership. Raising up church leaders with disabilities will allow the church to have a greater reach and impact in the lives of those on the margins of society.[65]

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[65] Erik W. Carter, "Universal Design: Further Up, Come Further In" (panel discussion, Calvin Symposium on Worship, Grand Rapids, January 26, 2018).

CHAPTER 5

THE FINAL FRONTIER: INCLUSION IN
WORSHIP LEADERSHIP

As individuals with disabilities begin to fully engage in congregational worship, the natural next step is for them to begin serving or leading in some aspect of the worship service. In any church, persons who are gifted in a particular area of ministry may be asked to serve. A person able to teach may be asked to lead a class or perhaps fill a pulpit. Worshippers with musical gifts might be asked to sing or play an instrument. Congregants who have a pleasing speaking voice could be asked to read the Scriptures or pray. An outgoing and friendly person might be asked to serve as an usher or a greeter. If a person is technically minded, they may be asked to serve on the audio or video team. It is common to find people gifted for ministry and give them an opportunity to use their gifts for the edification of the church. Entire books have been written on the topic of moving church attenders into membership and service of the church.[1]

When believers serve, they are imitating Christ, who came not to be served, but to serve (Mark 10:45). Donald Whitney, professor of biblical spirituality at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, remarks, "If you are a Christian, God has given at least one spiritual gift to you. . . . God gave it to you for you to use in His service."[2] However, what about the person with a disability who also may be gifted in one of the areas mentioned? Could that person use their gifts for ministry in the church? The answer is yes, but they

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[1] Chuck Lawless, *Membership Matters: Insights from Effective Churches on New Member Classes and Assimilation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 1-208.

[2] Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines within the Church: Fully Participating in the Body of Christ* (Chicago: Moody, 1996), 105.

may need support or help in order to serve. The same types of accommodations utilized to enable their worship participation may be needed, or even enhanced, to allow them to use their gifts in ministry leadership. A committed member of the church supports the work of the church through their time, talent, and treasures for the sake of the gospel.[3] Supporting the church is clearly the task of every able-bodied person in the congregation. But as Dan Vander Plaats has written, "There is no asterisk."[4] Not only are able-bodied persons responsible to support the church, but every member with a disability also bears a responsibility. If the church viewed individuals with disabilities as disciples who will help fulfill the Great Commission, integration and inclusion along with a system of supports for each individual would be commonplace in ministry.

Inclusion in worship ministry does not mean that every person with a disability will take some role in serving or leading worship ministry. While every believer has been gifted by the Holy Spirit to serve the church, not every believer will serve in worship ministry. Not every person with a disability who participates in worship will take a leadership or serving role either. Though, some can and will serve if the church is willing to make the appropriate accommodations.

Theological Considerations

Numerous theological tenets properly inform a view of disability in the church. The doctrines of *imago Dei,* spiritual gifts, and the Great Commission are addressed in chapter 3. Community and worship are discussed in chapter 4. To review, all persons are created in the image of God, including people with disabilities. Every regenerate person is given gifts by the Holy Spirit to edify the church. Corporate worship should express unity and fellowship in the body in a fully inclusive manner.

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[3] Thabiti Anyabwile, *What Is A Healthy Church Member?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 70.

[4] Dan Vander Plaats, *There Is No Asterisk: Changing Attitudes about Differences Using the 5 Stages* (Palo Heights, IL: Elim Christian Services and Disability Matters, 2016), 35.

Philip Thomas of Trinity College, Bristol, England, elucidates what it means for man to be created in the Image of God in three components:

> Being made in God's image means being able to demonstrate God's moral qualities, regardless of Christian belief. . . . God's image in believers is developed through relationships with God and other people . . . the believer's destiny is to bear an image that conforms to that of Christ, who demonstrated God's moral qualities in perfection, and enjoyed unbroken fellowship with God the Father.[5]

The three components listed by Thomas refer to a person's nature, relation to the church, and eternal destiny. All persons bear God's image. The image of God is nurtured in every believer through relationships with God and others. All believers will be conformed to the image of Christ in eternity. These truths are not dependent upon human ability.

Spiritual gifts are given to every believer for the building up of the church. John MacArthur, pastor of Grace Community Church, comments, "Spiritual gifts are supernaturally given by the Holy Spirit only and always to believers in Jesus Christ, without exception."[6] Every regenerate person with a disability has also been given a gift from the Holy Spirit to serve the church.

The Great Commission is a command given to every believer to make disciples. The life of the apostle Paul gave strong evidence of his obedience to this command. He encouraged the Corinthians, "Just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved. Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Cor 10:33-11:1). Paul encouraged believers to imitate him as he sought to make disciples. Australian theologians and authors, Colin Marshall and Tony Payne observe, "It is very striking that Paul calls upon ordinary believers in Corinth to be imitators of him, as he is of Christ. And this imitating is not in some general sense, but in

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[5] Philip Thomas, "The Revelational-Relational Image: A Reflection on the Image of God in the Light of Disability and on Disability in the Light of the Image of God," *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 16, no. 2 (2012): 143.

[6] John MacArthur, *First Corinthians, The John MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1984), 290.

actively seeking the salvation of others."[7] The ordinary believer with no special skill is called to make disciples. People with disabilities are certainly called to be discipled and to make disciples too.

Corporate worship should be the most inclusive event in which the church engages. This gathering of the saints is truly a gathering of sinners (Rom 3:10). Everyone who gathers to worship, whether regenerate or not, is a sinner who has fallen short of God's glory (Rom 3:23). The call of Christ is open to all regardless of their past or what sins they are currently embracing. A typical Sunday service will be populated by some who have been on a long journey following Christ, some who are new to the journey, and others who are considering if Christ and the church are for them. Rich and poor, black and white, educated and illiterate, and young and old find community in the worship gathering of the church.

Comparing other goals and programs of the church, Robb Redman passionately expresses, "Worship towers above them as the priority of the church's corporate life and personal discipleship."[8] If worship is the priority of a church's corporate life and personal discipleship, it must be inclusive. Certain groups or classes of believers cannot be excluded from worship. Mike Cosper recognizes that corporate worship is "where those gifted to shepherd God's church are said to build up the body through the gifts he's given them . . . declaring and remembering the gospel in community, abounding in love for God and for one another."[9] Inclusion is implicit. People with a disability are surely in need of being

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[7] Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine: The Ministry Mind-Shift That Changes Everything* (Kingsford, Australia: Matthias Media, 2009), 51.

[8] Robb Redman, *The Great Worship Awakening: Singing a New Song in the Postmodern Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 113.

[9] Mike Cosper, *Rhythms of Grace: How the Church's Worship Tells the Story of the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 120.

shepherded and discipled. The community gathered for worship must include the members with disabilities or it is no more than an elitist gathering.

Responses by the church and culture to individuals with disabilities have tended to follow a progressive pattern. Bill Gaventa describes the pattern in four stages: (1) exclusion, evil, fear, (2) special services for special people, (3) rights, citizenship, justice, and (4) friends, contributors, teachers.[10] The first human response to disability is fear and exclusion. This fear is highlighted in the historic discrimination of people with disabilities. The next step of response is of pity. Numerous churches have begun special needs ministries to serve the community, but these ministries practically result in segregation. As awareness and understanding grows, society and the church respond to people with disabilities from a social justice perspective. Finally, the fourth step is inclusion as friends and contributors. When one is a friend and a contributor, he belongs to the community. Dan Vander Plaats highlights a progression of attitudes of the church toward people with disabilities. The five stages are ignorance, pity, care, friendship, and co-laborers.[11]

The importance placed on the worship gathering indicates this gathering is for all believers. Accommodations must be made so that the worship gathering will be accessible to everyone regardless of any disability. When examining the doctrines of *imago Dei* and spiritual gifts in light of disabilities, one can only conclude that regenerate people with a disability must be included in serving the church. If regenerate people with disabilities have been gifted by the Holy Spirit for ministry, it is logical to consider some may be gifted for leadership or service in worship ministry. Equipping all believers to

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[10] Bill Gaventa, "From Strangers to Friends: A New Testament Call to Community," *Journal of Religion, Disability and Health* 16, no. 2 (May 2012): 208.

[11] Vander Plaats, *There Is No Asterisk,* 21.

discover their spiritual gifts and employ them in the work of the ministry is one of the biblically defined roles of a pastor (Eph 4:11-12).

Pastoral Responsibilities

To belong, each church member must be known.[12] Generally speaking, someone in ministry leadership knows each church member. Depending on the size of the congregation, the pastor may know every member. Persons with disabilities are no different in their desire to be known. Members in the congregation who have disabilities should be known and discipled like every other church member. Pastors do many tasks in church, but primary among these roles is equipping the saints for the work of the ministry, which is discipleship. Church members who do not serve or are unwilling to serve the church are a stain on any ministry. Many pastors develop initiatives and programs to mobilize their congregation to action. Yet as Chuck Lawless, Dean of Doctoral Studies and Vice-President of Spiritual Formation and Ministry Centers at Southeastern Seminary, observes, "Equipping current members for service may be time-consuming and energy-draining."[13] Equipping members with disabilities will also be challenging, yet the pastor may find a community of people who are longing to serve in some capacity. Finally, the equipped saint must be mobilized to do the work of ministry. The pastor has a role in all three aspects: knowing, equipping, and mobilizing.

A shepherd knows his sheep. A pastor will know his congregation. Charles Malcolm Wingard, associate professor of practical theology at Reformed Theological Seminary, explains, "Biblical pastors are shepherds. They know their sheep by name. They know their needs and, using the resources of God's Word, are ready to meet those

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[12] Erik W. Carter, Elizabeth E. Biggs, and Thomas L. Boehm, "Being Present versus Having a Presence: Dimensions of Belonging for Young People with Disabilities and Their Families," *Christian Education Journal* 13, no. 1 (2016): 127-46.

[13] Lawless, *Membership Matters,* 110.

needs with the compassionate skill that a true shepherd has for his sheep."[14] A pastor desiring to engage people with disabilities within his flock will need to know them by name and understand their abilities. To know the person with a disability will require more effort from the pastor. The person with a communication disorder or some other cognitive disability is unlikely to invite the pastor over for lunch on Sunday afternoon. The pastor must move beyond hospitality to compassionate ministry in order to faithfully shepherd members in his flock who have special needs. The late J. Oswald Sanders, author and consulting director of Overseas Missionary Fellowship, exhorted, "Leaders who want to show sensitivity should listen often and long, and talk short and seldom."[15] If the need to take time and listen is important for a pastor with a member of his flock, it is even more vital with a person with disabilities. It may take time for the individual to trust the pastor and build a relationship where true discipleship can take place. A patient pastor will take the time to know his church member and understand both his abilities and disability.

The focus of the pastor's ministry is to equip or build up the church—not just the able-bodied members but those of all ability levels. Christopher Beeley, the Walter H. Gray Associate Professor of Anglican Studies and Patristics at the Yale Divinity School and Berkeley Divinity School at Yale, encourages,

> The focus of pastoral leadership is on the people because all Christians, not church leaders as such, are the primary ministers of the gospel. . . . Pastoral leaders serve to build up the body of Christ, so that the entire church can bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to a very broken world.[16]

Beeley uses words such as *all* and *entire*, which indicate no members in the church are exempt from serving. The primary ministers of the gospel are all believers, not simply

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[14] Charles Malcom Wingard, *Help for the New Pastor: Practical Advice for Your First Year of Ministry* (Phillipsburg, NJ: R & R, 2018), 95.

[15] J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership: Principles of Excellence for Every Believer* (Chicago: Moody, 2007) 74.

[16] Christopher A. Beeley, *Leading God's People: Wisdom from the Early Church for Today,* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2012), 17.

those engaged in vocational ministry. Therefore, the pastor must be about equipping all the saints for the work of the ministry. Commenting on Ephesians 4:12-16, MacArthur states, "The first task within God's design is for the evangelists and pastor-teachers to be properly equipping the saints."[17] The pastor has a responsibility to equip all the saints, including those with disabilities.

Mobilizing the church for ministry is the third aspect of pastoral ministry. Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34). The pastor will find himself encouraging the believer to follow Christ. As the believer grows, the pastor also shepherds him to serve Christ. Pastors not only equip the church to do ministry, they also mobilize and encourage the church to do ministry. Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, insist, "Simply by being a disciple of Jesus and filled with the Holy Spirit of the new covenant, all Christians have the privilege, joy and responsibility of being involved in the work God is doing in our world."[18] Every believer by virtue of being a Christian is to be engaged in God's work in the world. Pastors should encourage all their church members to be engaged in the ministry. Although a person with a disability may not be eager to enlist into ministry service, the pastor must become aware of the gifts present in the church member with a disability and seek to deploy that person for ministry. The pastor and church leaders should look beyond the disability to see the ability or gift of the person with special needs. Discovering the gifts of a person involves asking the right questions. Barb Newman submits,

> So often we focus on what that person CAN'T do. She can't sing, he can't speak, she can't write, he can't walk. While these things may be true, they rarely lead us to any strategies to try. It seems important to ask the right question—What CAN the person do? She can wave a praise streamer, he can point to a picture to communicate,

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[17] John MacArthur, *Ephesians, The John MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1984), 152.

[18] Marshall and Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine*, 49.

she can use a computer that converts her speech to written words, and he can steer his wheelchair (in fact, he pops wheelies in the hallway!).[19]

Seeking to understand what a person can do rather than focusing on what they cannot do will yield more productive ministry engagement. The pastor or ministry leader needs to know and understand the gifts and abilities in the congregation. Conversations with a parent or caregiver may help ministry leaders understand what a person with a disability can do or gifts they may possess. Observing a student in the school environment can provide clues as to his abilities or strengths. Once the gifts and skills are known, ministry deployment is a wonderful possibility.

A healthy church sees all members serving and using their gifts to build up the church. Paul wrote to the church at Corinth about the importance of utilizing the gifts of everyone in the body:

> As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. (1 Cor 12:20-25)

Pastors are tasked as the primary equippers of the church and must take the responsibility to equip or disciple the entire congregation. To disciple well, the pastor needs to know his flock and comprehend the gifts the Holy Spirit has placed in his congregation. As the pastor effectively equips his congregation, he also mobilizes them for ministry. The call to make disciples is given to every person in the church and is not limited to those in ministry leadership. Therefore, the pastor disciples people in his church with and without disabilities so they can go and make disciples.

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[19] Barbara Newman, *Accessible Gospel Inclusive Worship* (Wyoming, MI: CLC Network, 2015), loc. 1543, Kindle.

Responsibility of Serving and Leading with a Disability

Pastors are responsible to see their congregation mobilized for ministry and members of the congregation are responsible to serve and lead in ministry regardless of their level of ability. People with disabilities come to church needing to give of themselves and not only to receive. Gaventa advocates a public serving role for people with disabilities noting,

> Participating as a reader, speaker, leader of prayer, acolyte, deacon/usher, or in other roles gives them a chance to contribute to the community as well as giving the community the opportunity to see a person with a disability as an agent of faith—a giver as well as a receiver.[20]

The general format of this section is to describe a specific ministry role and list specific accommodations that will allow someone with a disability can serve if they have gifts for a particular area of ministry.[21] Worship ministry roles will be considered in the following areas: musical leadership (vocal and instrumental), technical production, liturgical presentation, hospitality, and administrative support.[22] In general, any person with mobility issues requiring a wheelchair or other device to allow mobility can serve in any of these areas as long as the ministry location is accessible. Installing ramps and allowing enough seating area to accommodate a wheelchair may be a financial burden; however, they provide permanent solutions that do not need to be addressed weekly. The presence of ramps, automatic doors, and wheelchair signs communicates that the church welcomes people with mobility issues.[23]

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[20] Bill Gaventa, "Preaching Disability: The Whole of Christ's Body in Word and Practice," *Review and Expositor* 113 (2016): 231.

[21] The accommodations listed are not intended to be exhaustive. Instead, the accommodations are an overview of actions to consider. Responsive design may require accommodations not listed in this thesis.

[22] The list of ministry roles is generally reflective of the ministry of Calvary Baptist Church in Holland, Michigan. The list is not intended to be exhaustive of the possible roles a person with a disability could take in a church worship ministry.

[23] Chap. 4 addresses accommodations for individuals with visual or hearing disabilities that would allow them to successfully minister in the church. The focus of this chapter is to address the needs of individuals with autism, sensory issues, challenging behaviors, learning disabilities (i.e., dyslexia and ADHD), or other cognitive disabilities.

It should be noted some disabilities may not allow a person to engage in serving the church. While Scripture affirms that every regenerate person has been gifted by the Holy Spirit for ministry, there are cases of cognitive impairment so severe it becomes impossible to communicate any profession of faith. For example, while it is not an exact measurement, someone who scores in a range below 20 in Intelligence Quotient (IQ) level may not have the capacity to communicate issues of faith.[24] Without the ability to express faith in Christ, one cannot assume regeneration for the purposes of using spiritual gifts. According to Smith and Tyler, an individual so severely impaired typically "demonstrates severe limitations in self-care, continence, communication, and mobility; requires continuous and intensive supports."[25] A person with severe disabilities preventing him from communicating a profession of faith is created in the image of God and should be the focus of love and hospitality even if he may never have a place to serve.

Musical Leadership

Serving on a music team will require time and commitment beyond the Sunday worship gathering.[26] Weekly rehearsals for the worship team, praise band, and technical team are non-negotiable for service. Singers and instrumentalists at Calvary Baptist Church in Holland, Michigan, are also expected to prepare prior to rehearsal by utilizing Planning Center to access the liturgy, music, recordings, and any graphic organizers.[27] Volunteers are able to confirm their availability by responding to scheduling emails and confirm their participation in a given service. Choir and orchestra members are expected

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[24] Deborah Deutsch Smith and Naomi Chowdhuri Tyler, *Introduction to Special Education*, 7th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill, 2010), 270.

[25] Ibid.

[26] The commitments listed are expectations of the worship ministry at Calvary Baptist Church in Holland, Michigan. Churches may differ in the expectations or requirements for ministry leadership.

[27]Planning Center is an online subscription service designed for worship planning and scheduling.

to attend all rehearsals (generally two or three) leading up to their ministry service. All volunteers are expected to personally prepare outside of the rehearsal time.

The church choir is a leadership and fellowship opportunity allowing someone with a disability to utilize their giftedness. By developing peer mentors within the choir, appropriate behavior can be modeled and reinforced. A peer mentor's tasks may vary depending upon the need of the mentee, but they might include helping the person know which piece of music is next, when to be quiet and when to sing, reminding him of the expectations of the choir, pointing out when he might need a sensory break, or helping him navigate the social expectations of choir. Sensory breaks during rehearsal help a person who cannot attend for long periods of time to make it through the rehearsal. A sensory break could be as simple as allowing the individual to go to the bathroom or get a drink of water. Varied instruction and sensory breaks are also a form of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). The choir director who plans rehearsals with the idea that singers need to alternate from sitting to standing and includes movement in rehearsal can build in sensory breaks for everyone and allow the time to move more quickly for all the singers. Rehearsal movement could include rhythmic clapping, marching in tempo, stretching, and deep breathing exercises followed by a yawn and sigh. Providing a schedule (written or visual) of the choir rehearsal may be a necessary accommodation; however, once a schedule is provided, altering the order can contribute to anxiety issues. Offering fidget devices may also prove helpful in minimizing distractions during the choir rehearsal by allowing discreet personal movement.

Learning choir music may take more time for some individuals. One solution is to make a part recording available and accessible through Planning Center.[28] Playing or singing a specific choir part (soprano, alto, tenor, or bass) and recording it provides a

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[28] Planning Center is an online subscription service designed to serve as a communications and resource hub for worship ministry. Worship services can be written and shared with all members of the worship team. Sheet music and digital recordings of songs can be made accessible through Planning Center to encourage personal practice outside of the group rehearsal time.

useful tool for all singers. Part recordings can also enable the singer with limited reading abilities to learn the music and participate in the choir. UDL is displayed in part recordings as not all volunteer choir members will read music and therefore can benefit from this accommodation. Many people with cognitive disabilities also have deficits in social skills, which can be overcome in the choir setting.[29] Singing in a choir can be an ideal place to build community and friendships, which may be a significant need for the person with a disability.

A person with a disability who sings well and is comfortable being in front of people may be able to sing on the worship team. The worship team at Calvary Baptist Church may consist of two or three singers plus a worship leader serving together to direct the worship liturgy. Necessary accommodations could include a graphic organizer displaying the exact order of the music to be sung as well as when to stand or sit. Depending upon the disability, the graphic organizer may be very detailed.

Figure 8 is a graphic organizer mapping the order of the music and how it will be sung. Details for each song include the key signature, metronome marking, and order of the verses and choruses. Table 1 is a more detailed graphic organizer designed for a singer who does not easily recognize the entrance of each section of a song. The number of measures between singing is noted so the singer can count during instrumental sections.

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[29] Smith and Tyler, *Introduction to Special Education,* 410.

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Model Worship Service
Song Map

All Creatures (C-D Click = 78)
Intro
Verse 1
Verse 2
Verse 3 **PLAY IN D**
Verse 4
Tag

Grace Greater Than Our Sin (G Click = 104)
Intro
Chorus
Verse 1
Chorus
Verse 3
Chorus
Verse 4
Chorus
Chorus **A cappella**

Worthy Is The Lamb (A Click = 80)
Intro
Verse
Chorus
Verse
Chorus
Chorus
Tag
Tag

There Is A Fountain (A Click = 79)
Intro
Verse 1
Verse 2
Verse 3
Verse 4
Verse 5
Tag

O Church Arise (D Click = 68)
Intro
Verse 1
Verse 2
Verse 3
Verse 4
Outro

Figure 8. Graphic organizer song map

Table 1. Graphic organizer song detail

All Creatures of Our God and King	C/D Tempo = 78
Intro	8 measures
Verse 1	
Turnaround	4 measures
Verse 2	
Turnaround	2 measures
Verse 3	
Turnaround	2 measures
Verse 4	
Tag	
Outro	8 measures

Sensory breaks, fidget devices, peer mentoring, and written schedules are all potential accommodations for the individual with a disability on the worship team. Sensory

breaks may be necessary both in rehearsal and within the actual worship service. My son, Andrew, has participated on the worship team and makes valuable contributions. However, he does not wish to be in front of the congregation for the entire musical portion of the worship service. Therefore, when Andrew sings, I designate the specific song or songs where he will participate in leading and allow him to sit in the congregation for the rest of the service.

Fidget devices should be subtle, so they are not distracting to the congregation in worship. For example, if the device could fit into a pocket, it can be utilized without drawing attention. A peer mentor can give subtle reminders such as when to pick up a microphone and sing, when to step back for someone else to pray, read, or make an announcement, or when to make a musical entrance. A written schedule of both the rehearsal and service will allow the singer to know how to prepare and potentially remove anxiety over unknown or potentially forgotten events in the schedule. Recordings of all songs are posted in Planning Center so singers and instrumentalists alike can learn through listening. Like part recordings provided for the choir, recordings can be individualized for the worship team singer as well to assist in learning and memorizing the desired harmony to be sung. In addition to audio recording, video recording of both the rehearsal and worship service can serve as supports and instructional tools. The evidence-based practice of video modeling provides opportunity for the person with a disability to view themselves appropriately engaging in worship leading and then replicate the desired behavior.

Participation with the orchestra or worship band can be an ideal place for the person with special needs who plays an instrument. The accommodations necessary for the instrumentalist are similar to those needed for the singer. Graphic organizers, which may include a written or visual rehearsal schedule, along with sensory breaks, fidget devices, and peer mentoring are adaptations which may prove helpful for successful

participation. A detailed graphic organizer with specific cues indicating where to play or tacit may also be helpful (see table 2).

Table 2. Graphic organizer instrumental chart

Electric Guitar Song Details		
All Creatures of Our God and King	Key of C and D	Tempo = 78
Intro	Light Strum	8 measures
Verse 1	Light Strum	
Turnaround	Heavy Strum	4 measures
Verse 2	Light Strum	
Turnaround	Hammering 8th Notes	2 measures
Verse 3	Light Strum	Play in D
Turnaround	Hammering 8th Notes	2 measures
Verse 4	Tacit for 6 measures then return to Light Strum	
Tag	Tacit	4 measures
Outro	Light Strum	8 measures

An instrumentalist may need a fidget device to occupy his hands during the portions of rehearsal or the service where he should be listening instead of playing. Often the instrument itself can become a fidget device tempting the instrumentalist to play at inappropriate times. Disruptions and frustration among other musicians who are trying to listen can be minimized by the giving the person with special needs a fidget device to occupy his hands when he should not be playing. Peer mentors for instrumentalists serve in same the capacities as they would for vocalists. In addition, a peer mentor may assist the instrumentalist in deciding how to play a particular section of a song or what musical riff would be appropriate for a given song. Peer mentor relationships occur among musicians regardless of the presence of any disability as the desire to play well together in a manner supporting corporate worship naturally creates mentoring relationships.

Another potential accommodation for instrumentalists is noise-cancelling headphones. The music may be loudest in the midst of the instrumentalists, and a person who is hypersensitive to sound could function better with the noise cancelling-headphones, even though he is producing the sound on his own instrument. Sound isolating headphones

or ear buds utilizing an in-ear monitor system such as an AVIOM personal mixer can allow the instrumentalist to hear their instrument and balance the rest of the music as needed.[30] Sound isolation allows the musician to remove potentially distracting sounds, which could also trigger sensory issues. An in-ear monitor system may also be beneficial for vocalists. Recording the rehearsal and making the rehearsal recording available through Planning Center is another helpful accommodation for musicians with or without disabilities. Musicians can practice with their own recording to remember how to play a particular song. The repetition provided can help cement the desired musical arrangement.

A person who is deaf but knows American Sign Language (ASL) may participate in leading worship by signing the songs as they are sung. Accommodations may include giving the person access to the lyrics a few days prior to the service. While he may not be able to hear the music as it is being sung, he may be able to read the lyrics and then sign in time based upon the display on a confidence monitor, which is also being used by the singers.[31]

Technical Production

The technical aspects of the worship ministry offer numerous areas where persons with disabilities can serve. The ability to utilize a computer is generally a prerequisite but, particularly for younger persons, experience with a computer is a normal part of education.[32] Technical production often requires minimal social interaction and allows the volunteer to focus attention on a computer or other type of machine.

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[30] AVIOM, "Video Library," accessed June 9, 2018, http://www.aviom.com/AviomSupport/Videos.php.

[31] A confidence monitor is simply a screen displaying lyrics for the people leading worship. It may be a television monitor on the front row or a larger screen in the back of the auditorium. Worship projection software can be manipulated to reveal the opening text of the next slide to the worship leaders before the congregation sees it on their screen.

[32] Stone Group, "Computers in the Classroom: Desktop vs. Laptop vs. Tablet," last modified September 22, 2017, accessed June 9, 2018, https://www.stonegroup.co.uk/computers-in-the-classroom/.

A person with an interest in technology and the ability to discriminate aurally may find a place to serve operating the audio mixer for the worship service.[33] Operating the audio mixer requires an ear for sound quality and layers of sound along with an understanding of how the mixer operates and the ability to manipulate mixer. Peer mentoring, graphic organizers, and written or visual maps of the liturgy or of the sound mixer are all accommodations that could be necessary.

Operating a worship space lighting system is another ministry role where a person with a disability may serve. Accommodations such as graphic organizers, fidget devices, and peer mentors may be necessary for the individual to learn programming and operation of the lighting software. Graphic organizers with a detailed guide for setting up lighting cues, a peer mentor who assists in the learning process and serves as a coach, and a fidget device to help the individual refrain from pushing buttons at inappropriate times can empower an individual with special needs to serve well. A detailed graphic organizer highlighting desired lighting cues for the liturgy is an illustration of UDL as the graphic organizer will serve all volunteers regardless of ability.

Video projection includes song lyrics, preaching slides, and any responsive readings or Scriptures on the screen. As with other technical areas, having a peer mentor in place and providing a graphic organizer can open this role to a person with a disability. The ability to focus without distraction for an hour at a time or more is necessary to serve in this position. The role could be divided into two with one person operating slides for song lyrics and another person operating slides for sermon notes thus shortening the necessary attention span to fulfill this task.

Many sound mixers, projection software, and lighting systems may be operated remotely using a tablet device, such as the iPad. This feature allows the operator to sit anywhere in the worship space. A person may need to sit in a location other than the

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[33] Aural discrimination is the ability to distinguish layers of sounds and identify which singer or instrument is producing a specific sounds.

audio/video area for numerous reasons. A person with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) may be used to sitting in a particular seat and moving to a different location could cause anxiety.[34] Sensitivity to smells or lighting could cause a person to need to be seated in a different location. If the audio/video area is not accessible, an iPad or other tablet device allows a person with mobility needs to serve.

A person with a disability may be skilled in operating a video camera or producing the video recording of the worship service. A detailed graphic organizer can be used to teach basic instructions and to reinforce operational skills. A peer mentor can assist in determining the best angles or camera feeds to use.

Creating video content for the worship service or for social media or post-producing the worship service recording are further opportunities to serve in worship ministry for someone who has technical and artistic skills. These roles provide the environments to serve without the pressure of a live worship service. Creating video content does not occur within the worship service itself; therefore, the content creator may take as many breaks as necessary. He also does not have to be concerned about personal volume or noisy outbursts as there are no worshippers present to distract. Completing these tasks in a dark room may accommodate a person with sensitivity to bright lights. Graphic organizers, peer mentors, and sensory breaks are all potential accommodations.

Preparing individuals with disabilities to serve in audio or video ministry may necessitate utilizing online training modules, which exist for most newer audio, video, and lighting systems. YouTube instructional videos may be available for older systems. These resources can help the person with disabilities by teaching and re-teaching the manipulation of the equipment as many times as necessary for mastery. Repetition can increase

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[34]American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic And Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5* (Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Publishing, 2013), 235, accessed June 9, 2018, https://www.sciencetheearth.com/uploads/2/4/6/5/24658156/dsm-v-manual_pg490.pdf.

comprehension for both the person with a disability and for his typical peer, yet another example of UDL. One additional training accommodation for audio, lighting, and projection operators would be to digitally record the Sunday service on a multi-track recording device. This recording would then allow the operator to practice audio mixing, lighting, or lyric projection multiple times during the week without the pressure of a live service.

Liturgical Presentation

For many roles in worship ministry service a specific skill is required. The ability to sing, play an instrument, or operate computer-based equipment is essential to serving on the musical or technical teams. However, to serve in other roles presenting the liturgy may require no unique skills whatsoever. To offer public prayer, one need only to read, spontaneously articulate a prayer, or to be able to use an adaptive communication device already programmed with a pre-recorded prayer. Adaptive communication devices can range from an iPad with a recorded message, to iPad apps intended for adaptive communication, to BIGmack switches, which can be used for automated response.[35] Responses can be prerecorded or spontaneously delivered at the appropriate time through device manipulation. To publicly read or recite Scripture requires the ability to read or use an adaptive device. Leading the congregation in a responsive reading requires the same skills as a Scripture reading with the ability to take turns. The accommodations needed could be a peer mentor, fidget device, graphic organizer, or adaptive communication device.

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[35] A BIGmack switch is a single button device on which a recording may be left to be played whenever the button is pushed. The recording can be changed on the device to accommodate any necessary scripted communication. This adaptive communication device can be used for prayer or Scripture reading. More information about the BIGmack switch is available at Ablenet, "BIGmack," accessed June 9, 2018, https://www.ablenetinc.com/bigmack.

Often in church, the pursuit of excellence enables a performance mentality to exist. The most gifted people are asked to take roles perceived to require the most talent. The church then is able to make a good impression upon visitors and members alike. Russell Moore calls for the church to take a step back from the pursuit of excellence by including persons with disabilities to read a Scripture or pray, even if they are not able to read well or speak clearly.[36] This means the church might need to lower its expectations of a smoothly produced program and consider the gathering of the church as an act of worship instead of a performance. By regularly scheduling congregants to pray, read, or lead responsively, regardless of any disability, the church communicates a welcome to all and informs everyone in the congregation that service is not dependent upon skill or talent, but on willingness and faithfulness.

Hospitality

Serving on a hospitality team can be an area where a person with a disability truly will display their strengths. Certain disabilities can hinder communication skills; however, the skills needed in hospitality are often repetitive and therefore easy to train and model. Hospitality can also be an area where the person with a communication deficiency can practice basic skills, such as shaking hands, making eye contact, and asking someone's name. Advanced communication skills, such as the ability to read body language or hold a lengthy discussion, are not necessarily needed to serve in hospitality.

A greeter meets people at the door of the church, offering a guest's initial welcome, and passes out the bulletin or other information for the day. He may recognize a first-time guest and direct them to a guest services center, children's check-in, or worship space. Having a good memory, specifically remembering names and faces, is a useful skill for greeters and will help them recognize a first-time guest. A person with a disability

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[36] ERLC, Twitter Post, April 26, 2017, 7:05 PM, https://twitter.com/ERLC/status/857369961794125824.

may be unusually gifted with a strong memory and therefore may excel in greeting. My son never forgets a person he has met and can be helpful in identifying and greeting someone who is visiting our church for the first time. Accommodations would include graphic organizers and peer mentoring. A peer mentor can assist by helping the individual know the appropriate length of the interaction or if the conversation is becoming too personal. Practicing with a peer mentor can give the individual with a disability the confidence to serve effectively. A graphic organizer detailing protocol for guest interaction or outlining a map of the facilities and where certain classes or programs occur would be a good accommodation. These graphic organizers would be helpful for greeters without disabilities too in another example of UDL.

Ushers serve to seat people in the auditorium, pass the collection plates, pass Communion elements, and count attendance in the auditorium. A peer mentor is perhaps the best accommodation for this role. A graphic organizer giving a task analysis of each responsibility would also serve to open these roles to a person with a disability. Practicing each step with a mentor while referring to the graphic organizer could be necessary for training, but these roles require minimal communication skills and are generally repetitive.

Administrative Support

Each week someone completes numerous administrative tasks to enable the gathered church to worship without distraction. Someone prepares music folders for a choir, orchestra, or worship band, checks battery levels on microphones and replaces batteries as needed, and copies and folds bulletins. A church may have a worship coordinator who connects with everyone scheduled to serve in the coming week to make sure schedule conflicts have not arisen. A person removes old bulletins and any trash from the worship space and someone prepares the elements for Communion. People with disabilities given the appropriate accommodations can perform each of the roles listed.

Peer mentoring and graphic organizers, including visual schedules or first-then strips may be helpful to enable people with a wide range of disabilities to serve in these

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administrative roles. Items needed in the pew rack, such as offering envelopes, guest cards, Bibles, hymnals, and pencils can be identified in a graphic organizer. A detailed graphic could include information on filing and storing music after the service and visual charts can be used to give instructions for preparation of Communion elements including reminding people to wash their hands and wear gloves.

In my ministry, individuals with disabilities serve each Sunday. One individual places welcome signs by the street before others arrive and removes them when the service is over. One gentleman serves the church by turning on each monitor and projector in the facility. These vital tasks may seem small, but they demonstrate how people with disabilities can engage in worship ministry in meaningful and supportive ways.

Full Inclusion

The key to engaging the individual with special needs in a serving or leading capacity is to build a relationship with the individual and develop an understanding of his interests and abilities. Looking beyond the disability to see the ability takes a personal investment of time and is just as important as seeking a relationship with someone who is abled. Practically living out James 2:1-9 in the context of ministry means no distinction or favoritism is shown.

A church committed to full inclusion will look and feel different from any other church. Social norms and expectations may be unconventional, but a church committed to full inclusion is committed to biblical hospitality and fellowship. Welcoming the stranger and giving him a place to belong will open doors for the gospel and create new avenues for discipleship. The church committed to full inclusion will also be committed to finding and utilizing new resources to accomplish this task. Research has indicated most church staff members feel their training in working with people with disabilities has been

inadequate.[37] Finding appropriate resources and training in and out of the church is necessary to accomplish full inclusion.

New Normal

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation (2 Cor 5:17). For a Christian, life transformation is supposed to be normal as Scripture identifies him as a new creation. The church is a collection of new creations; thus, corporate transformation should be expected. As the church moves toward full inclusion, worship services may be a bit noisier. A person with a disability may often speak out or make unintelligible noises when everyone else is being quiet. My son, Andrew, struggled with understanding he was not supposed to respond to rhetorical questions. Often during the sermon, Andrew would give the correct answer to a question posed by the pastor during a sermon. The congregation soon learned to be patient, accepting, and not be distracted by Andrew's response. My church learned a new normal in welcoming individuals with disabilities as part of the family. A fully inclusive congregation will see leaders with disabilities serving the church and not be disturbed by the disability, as it will become normal. A fully inclusive church will be characterized by patience and love for one another. A fully inclusive community will more concerned about being *with* one another than *fixing* or *curing* one another.[38] Jesus said his disciples would be known by their love for one another (John 13:35).

True Hospitality for the Gospel

What does it mean for a congregation to accept and welcome individuals who may have disabilities? Some congregations plan ministry models of segregation where individuals with special needs have separate classes and worship services. These programs

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[37] Naomi H. Annandale and Erik W. Carter, "Disability and Theological Education: A North American Study," *Theological Education* 48, no. 2 (2014): 83-102.

[38] Bill Gaventa, "Lessons in Community Building from Including the 'Other': Caring for One An-other," *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 16, no. 3 (August 2012): 235.

may be well intentioned but they will not serve to build community. Erik Carter cautions, "Missing from these specialized models, however, are opportunities for others in the congregation to meet, get to know, and receive the gifts of people with disabilities who are part of their community."[39] Persons with disabilities must be fully integrated into the life of the church, not segregated like a community in the Jim Crow era.[40]

Community and true fellowship are expressed when congregational gatherings are accessible and inclusive of individuals with disabilities. A class of people who have historically and systemically been disenfranchised can find a place of belonging in the church. As persons with disabilities become equipped for ministry, they too can be mobilized to make disciples. Inclusiveness in the church becomes a gospel issue when people with disabilities begin to answer the call of the Great Commission.

When the inclusive church gathers to worship, true fellowship can occur. Believers are communing with God and with one another. The late Howard Vanderwell, who pastored in the Christian Reformed Church for over forty years, describes the joy many believers feel when anticipating worship:

> Many worshippers think of their church as a family. They look at each other as brothers and sisters, and they believe they possess a deep spiritual oneness with each other. They sing together, confess their sins together, pray together, and make their professions of faith together. A large part of worship for them is the interaction they have with others.[41]

This togetherness is reminiscent of the church in Acts who met together daily and had all things in common (Acts 2:42-47). Community happens in worship and it should not be denied to people because they have a disability. Whether through seasons of joy and

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[39] Erik W. Carter, "A Place of Belonging: Research at the Intersection of Faith and Disability," *Review and Expositor* 113, no. 2 (2016), 179.

[40] From the end of Reconstruction in around 1877, until the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s, local and state laws were passed in the southern United States to enforce racial segregation. This time frame became known as the Jim Crow era and Jim Crow became a derogatory term for African-Americans.

[41] Howard Vanderwell, *Caring Worship: Helping Worship Leaders Provide Pastoral Care through the Liturgy* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017), 26.

celebration or tragedy and lament, the inclusive church will have more resources to build one another up as all gifts in the community are utilized.

Resources

Most pastors are ill-prepared to make the necessary accommodations for the church to become fully inclusive.[42] Pastors generally have not been trained to work with individuals with disabilities, therefore they do not often possess the expertise to accomplish this goal. Ministry leaders need to be equipped to serve as peer mentors and may require special training to appropriately deal with disruptive behaviors. Social narratives and graphic organizers should be developed with skill and clarity. Training will be essential for the congregation to respond appropriately to outbursts or needs displayed by persons with disabilities.

In most churches, resources may already exist to begin the process of moving toward inclusion. The first resource to be tapped is family members of people with disabilities. Family members live with the disability on a daily basis and understand the unique needs of the individual. Interviewing family to comprehend what the individual can do and how best to serve him should be the protocol in every church serving people with disabilities. A questionnaire can be developed to gather necessary information or a standard entrance interview with families can be utilized.

The next resource to employ will be educators in the church, especially those who teach in special education. These teachers may become new ministry leaders as the church moves toward inclusion. Connecting with local school districts including special education teachers, social workers, speech therapists, occupational therapists, physical therapists and board-certified behavior analysts can provide a wealth of information and potential volunteers passionate about making the community more accessible for their students. Barb Newman offers ten helpful suggestions for the church in the beginning

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[42] Annandale and Carter, "Disability and Theological Education," 83-102.

stages of inclusion, including equipping small group leaders to include people of all abilities.[43] Every level of church leadership must be prepared to minister to and with people with disabilities.

Discovering community resources and advocacy groups that provide help and training is vital for the development of ministry to and with individuals with a disability. Organizations such as the Advocacy Resource Center, Autism Speaks, Easter Seals, the ERLC, and Joni and Friends, or websites such as faithanddisability.org or clcnetwork.org, provide resources and promote understanding for congregations. The church committed to becoming fully inclusive will need to utilize all available resources to accomplish this goal.

The utilization of individuals with disabilities in any public ministry role communicates a view of life and human flourishing quite different from the performance -driven mentality of worship and life held by some. The appearance of anyone with a disability on the platform serving in any capacity is a strong rebuke to the eugenics movement still extant in the world today. In recent news articles, the removal of Down's syndrome in Iceland was celebrated.[44] The report cited apparently takes the view that aborting babies with Down's syndrome is better than allowing them to live. The benefits described are pragmatic, related to ease of life and lack of financial burden. The arguments are not dissimilar to the eugenics proponents in Nazi Germany and in the United States that, in the early part of the twentieth century, sought to erase entire populations of people with disabilities. In upholding a Virginia eugenic law in 1927, Supreme Court Justice

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[43] Barb Newman, "Ten Ways to Be More Inclusive and Welcoming in Worship and Church Life," Calvin Institute of Christian Worship for the Study and Renewal of Worship, last modified August 3, 2017, accessed June 19, 2018, https://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/ten-ways-to-be-more-inclusive-and-welcoming-in-worship-and-church-life/.

[44] Alexandra Desanctis, "Iceland Eliminates People with Downs Syndrome," National Review, last modified August 16, 2017, accessed June 6, 2018, https://www.nationalreview.com/2017/08/down-syndrome-iceland-cbs-news-disturbing-report/.

Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote, "Three generations of imbeciles are enough."[45] This type of discrimination which has yet to be overturned must end, and the church can take the lead. Bill Gaventa laments, "The tragedy is not the disability per se: it is the isolation, shunning, stereotyping, discrimination, and exclusion that so often come with it."[46] When the church uses the gifts of those with disabilities, it brings the marginalized of society into community. The church is taking a stand for life and is living out the gospel.

Conclusion

The Gospel of Luke has the inclusion of the outcast as a central theme. Numerous parables, including the Good Samaritan, the rich fool, the great banquet, the rich man and Lazarus, and the Pharisee and the tax collector, reveal a theme of reversal where the outcast or outsider receives the blessing while the insider suffers loss.[47] The implication of this theme of reversal is the gospel is for all. There is a level ground between those considered powerful and important and those considered weak and unimportant. The gospel, which levels the ground between the rich and poor, people of all races and ethnicities, men and women, and children and adults, also levels the ground between the abled and the disabled. The gospel does not discriminate. Therefore, the church must welcome and include persons with disabilities alongside those who come to church with no barriers because they are abled. Paul Davis, former pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Holland, Michigan, and current president of the Association of Baptists for World Evangelism, insists, "We welcome strangers and treat with honor those with no social capital. We reveal our newness (in Christ) through hospitality to others."[48] As the church

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[45] Kim E. Nielsen, *A Disability History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012), 117.

[46] Gaventa, "Preaching Disability," 231.

[47] Mark L. Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus: A Survey of Jesus and the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 273-75.

[48] Paul L. Davis, "The Church Called Out as a New Creation Community" (sermon, Calvary Baptist Church, Holland, MI, July 23, 2017).

welcomes and includes persons with disabilities, the church will find that God has placed these individuals into the local church and given them gifts to edify the church. By utilizing various strategies and making accommodations where necessary, the church will equip these saints for the work of the ministry. The church will benefit, and the world will see a picture of biblical hospitality and the preciousness of every human life.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The time for inclusion in the church has come. Government agencies, employers, and community organizations have led the way for far too long. The church needs to follow a trend she should have been leading in the first place. Hopeful signs of change are beginning to occur.[1] The purpose of this thesis is to promote biblical inclusion and contribute to the discussion of disability and faith which will lead to opening opportunities for people with disabilities to serve and lead in the church.

Chapter Summaries

The thesis in this research asserts that the church has overlooked and often discriminated against people with disabilities. The church has also ignored key theological concepts regarding personhood, spiritual gifts, and the Great Commission. Furthermore, the goal of presenting the research contained with this study is to propose a reversal of this discrimination through new goals of hospitality and inclusion. Through the implementation of the included recommendations, the church will dramatically shift the way she engages people with disabilities.

Chapter 1 outlined the need for this study through an overview of the literature, which determined a void existed. Chapter 2 examined the history of disability in the United States and articulated an ugly narrative of discrimination and a long fight toward equality and inclusion. Inequities in education and employment practices were explored

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[1] The Calvin Institute for Christian Worship (https://worship.calvin.edu/) has been leading the way exploring disability issues in both research articles and the annual Calvin Symposium on Worship. Western Seminary (https://www.westernsem.edu/) now offers a graduate certificate in disability studies and ministry. Organizations like the Collaborative on Faith and Disability (http://faithanddisability.org/) are providing resources and encouraging scholarship in faith and disability issues.

along with the legal reforms that currently provide protections for those with disabilities. The topic of educational strategies comes under examination next, including approaches of educators, spurred by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Educational Act (IDEA), designed to develop a fully inclusive community.

Chapter 3 explored the church's response to disability. The church has not been remarkably different from the culture in discriminating against those with disabilities. The church, armed with a gospel reconciling man to God, has been slow to open her doors in hospitality to those with disabilities and even slower to engage them in discipleship. Thus, a significant demographic of people are not using their gifts for ministry in the church. Next, the chapter highlighted the key biblical concepts of *imago Dei*, spiritual gifts, and the Great Commission. Based on these biblical imperatives, individuals with disabilities are created in the image of God, those who are regenerate have spiritual gifts to use in edifying the church, and people with disabilities should be pursued as disciples.

The focus of chapter 4 was to increase the understanding of existing barriers preventing people with disabilities from engaging with the gathered church in worship. A model worship service is developed and used as a standard from which accommodations can be made. Practical solutions to increase accessibility and therefore hospitality are suggested. Specific accommodations for persons with various disabilities are voiced, and the principle of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is advocated. All of the solutions and accommodations offered are based on the application of best practices in special education.

After reviewing the rationale for inclusivity in ministry leadership, chapter 5 explored multiple worship ministry responsibilities and offered suggestions for appropriate accommodations allowing individuals with disabilities to serve in worship ministry. The methodologies and best practices in special education are promoted as tools

to create accessibility to ministry leadership. The philosophy and methodology of full inclusion in worship ministry is advocated as an issue of gospel significance. The conclusion of the chapter offered resources to equip ministry leaders to move their churches toward full inclusion.

Implications of the Study

The primary purpose of this research has been to establish that regenerate people with disabilities have spiritual gifts which must be utilized in the service of the church, specifically worship ministry. Churches can and should make accommodations to appropriately disciple and engage individuals with disabilities in ministry. By involving those with special needs, the church (which seems to perpetually need more ministry volunteers), will find a significant pool of untapped volunteers ready to fill the void.

Second, the Great Commission, which is a call to the church to make disciples, is inclusive. When Jesus said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you," he was making an inclusive statement (Matt 28:19-20). There is no culture or group of people where the church is not called to make disciples. To avoid making disciples of those with disabilities is to choose to ignore the Great Commission.

The third implication of this study reveals a history of systemic discrimination in the culture and in the church against people with disabilities. The noticeable absence of persons with disabilities among the pastorate and among denominational leadership speaks to a lack of desire by the church to be fully inclusive. Churches minister *to* but seldom *with* people with disabilities. Church ministry leaders who have a disability are rare. In an era where diversity is more valued, women and racial minorities are finding their voice

welcomed in the public discourse of the church.[2] People with disabilities have yet to find their voice wanted. There is a significant lack of training available for pastors and ministry leaders to minister to and with persons with disabilities. Church planting movements target many demographics, but not people with disabilities.[3]

The final implication mandates change in the culture and attitude of the church toward disability. The church has to move from pity, caring, and ignorance to friendship and co-laboring.[4] Persons with disabilities should be viewed as either disciples or potential disciples. The idea that everyone in church is normal and no one has a need ought to be rejected and replaced with the idea that all are broken and in need of Christ. People with disabilities have to be included as part of the church body, not simply a ministry of the church. The church is compelled to consider the mission field of disability and answer the call to go and make disciples.

The Fully Inclusive Church

The fully inclusive church is a local body of Christ where individuals of all levels of ability are welcome. The entryway to the church building is handicap accessible and likely contains signage indicating the presence of a hearing loop for the hearing impaired. A warm greeting and welcome is delivered by the hospitality team of the church consisting of people with all levels of ability. The hospitality team engages every guest and seeks to identify if any special needs can be accommodated by the church during the worship gathering. Guests are seated according to their need. Families with small children or a child with a disability are seated on the end of an aisle to allow for minimal disruption

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[2] While the influence of women is important and needed in the church, I hold a complementarian view of Scripture and believe that the role of pastor or elder is reserved specifically for men.

[3] Malcolm Gill, "Missing in Action: Theological Reflection on the Absence of the Aged, Poor, and Disenfranchised in Contemporary Church Planting Movements," *Journal of Disability and Religion* 21, no. 1 (2017): 84-97.

[4] Dan Vander Plaats, *There Is No Asterisk: Changing Attitudes about Differences Using the 5 Stages* (Palo Heights, IL: Elim Christian Services and Disability Matters, 2016), 21.

should the child need to exit the auditorium or take a sensory break. Peer buddies are available for any person with a disability to sit with them during the service and attend to any needs that may arise.

Sermon manuscripts and worship guides are available to all who enter the worship space. Signs or slides point the congregation to the YouVersion site where digital copies of the manuscript and worship guide may be found. Near the entryway of the worship space, a basket of fidget devices is located for use by anyone who may struggle sitting still. Noise cancelling headphones and sunglasses are available so the congregant with aural or visual sensory perception issues can worship freely. Social narratives have been written for any portion of the worship service that could be difficult for a person with autism to understand and are also available for any parent to use with their child.

The choir, praise band, and worship leaders are in place as the service begins and each group consists of members with and without disabilities. The volunteers in the technical booth include people with cognitive or physical disabilities. The congregation is asked to rise in body or in spirit with language designed for inclusion. The Scripture may be read by a person in a wheelchair, or by someone using an adaptive communication device. Prayers or testimonies are offered by people with all levels of ability. When communion is offered, a gluten free option is available for any member who asks. Ushers who pass the offering plates or distribute communion elements consist of congregants who have a disability and those with no disabilities. No area of ministry is reserved for the abled alone.

People serving throughout the church look like the body of Christ. All are using their gifts to serve the body of Christ regardless of any disability. The church has chosen to focus on the abilities of her members rather than disabilities, thus the leadership strives to mobilize every member for ministry, including those with disabilities. The fully inclusive church communicates a high value for all life and the image of God in all persons.

The gospel is advanced for the glory of God as the church seeks to make disciples of all peoples, even those with disabilities.

Suggestions for Further Research

The specific nature of this study was delimited to engaging individuals with disabilities in the worship ministry. However, numerous areas exist that have heretofore been untouched. The areas for further research will be considered under four categories: (1) areas of study created by expanding the focus to consider service in the church other that worship ministry or to consider ministry service in churches outside the United States, (2) areas of study created by considering training and preparation for ministry to and with those with disabilities, (3) areas of study created by changing the focus to consider engaging as co-laborers those suffering from mental illness, and (4) areas of study centering on the content and language of worship as it relates to disabilities.

Serving across the Church

Expanding the scope of this thesis would allow for future research. One expansion would be to consider how regenerate individuals with disabilities can serve in other ministries in the local church.[5] The principles advanced in this thesis may be transferrable to every other ministry of the church. American disability history and worship contexts have been the exclusive focus of this study. Therefore, another extension in the scope of this study would be to expand the focus to explore engaging people with disabilities in worship in contexts outside of the United States. The ADA and IDEA exist exclusively in the United States. While some countries have laws protecting the rights of the disabled, the church could take the lead in ministering to and with those with disabilities in many countries.

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[5] Ministries considered are specifically ministries of Calvary Baptist Church in Holland, Michigan. This list is not exhaustive of possible ministry areas.

Discipleship is a large area of ministry crossing all ages in the church. Whether pre-school, elementary, youth, or adult, numerous opportunities exist for ministry service. Teaching a Sunday school class, leading a small group, or helping with children's ministry are just a few examples of the existing opportunities for those with disabilities. Creating accessible education space and making accommodations in curriculum content and delivery are areas to be addressed in this research.

Accessible worship space has been addressed in this study, but future research could focus on accessible educational spaces. Church buildings in existence prior to the ADA have not been required to be handicap accessible. It is possible the worship space is the only accessible space in the ministry of the church and therefore people with disabilities can be denied access to further discipleship and in opportunities to lead.

The content of church discipleship materials and curriculum is designed for those who can read, communicate verbally, and attend to a lesson for at least thirty minutes if not more. Standard curriculum from major Christian publishing companies is not written with the expectation of inclusive Sunday school classes and small groups. Research into inclusive curriculum design and delivery could offer a pathway to inclusive discipleship. Mobilizing persons with disabilities to lead discipleship ministries could also give the researcher the opportunity to delve into the question of the correlation of mental and reasoning capacity with the ability to communicate faith issues.

Global and local outreach ministries offer unique opportunities for persons with disabilities. Mission trips may seem too burdensome for a person with a disability as traveling and acclimating quickly to cross cultural experiences could provide significant challenges. However, persons with disabilities may have unusual access for gospel ministry, especially in cultures where people with disabilities are shunned or discriminated against. A person serving in a wheelchair may easily gain an audience in a culture not used to seeing people with disabilities in public life. A young man with Muscular Dystrophy from the local congregation where I serve went on a mission trip to Hong

Kong. He was dependent upon a wheelchair for mobility. A person in a wheelchair was not a common sight in Hong Kong, therefore, this young man had multiple opportunities for gospel conversations as complete strangers were interested in meeting him.

Those with social and communicative deficiencies may lack a fear of spiritual conversations, which can paralyze their typical peers in evangelism, and thus be more effective gospel witnesses. Not only can persons with disabilities serve directly in mission and evangelistic endeavors, they may serve on committees and help raise awareness for missions utilizing many of the same accommodations employed to make worship accessible. Research in the area of inclusion in local and global outreach could spawn a new wave of missionaries and mission movements as a significant segment of the population who has long been ignored could become engaged in missions and evangelism.

Compassionate care and physical stewardship are ministries of the church where people with disabilities can carry out simple tasks. Ministry such as providing a meal for another family or giving someone a ride to an appointment is within the possibilities for a person with a disability who can cook or drive. Care of the building and grounds of the church, including yard work, cleaning, and building projects would be other opportunities in this ministry. Basic life skills, which are often the educational focus for individuals with disabilities, can be used for service in the ministry of the church. Research into utilizing basic skills for ministry and potentially partnering with local agencies and group homes to provide meaningful daytime activities could enhance the quality of life for individuals with disabilities and could serve the church.

Could a person with a disability pastor a church or serve as an elder or deacon? Modern American leadership models would seem to say no, but following the same theological reasoning in this thesis, the answer should be yes. Exploring how people with special needs can serve in the leadership of the church and how their leadership would impact the culture could prove insightful. Issues such as accessibility to the church auditorium platform or pulpit could be addressed. A common phrase among disability

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communities is, "nothing for us, without us." The idea presented in this phrase is people with disabilities need to be involved in any discussion regarding serving or engaging people with disabilities. Regenerate persons with disabilities may be gifted for church leadership. Research into appropriate accommodations for inclusive leadership could serve the church and grow the kingdom.

Life for persons with special needs is remarkably better for persons living in the United States as opposed to many countries in the world. Laws such as the ADA and the IDEA mandate accommodations in numerous facets of life. These accommodations are not necessarily available outside the United States. Special education teachers, who can serve as a valuable resource to the church, are not at one's disposal in every community worldwide. Studying the unique challenges of inclusion in the church where inclusion is not the norm in society could serve the church well. Ethnographical studies of a culture's response to disability could be useful to a missionary and could spur needed change. The church is called to engage in justice issues. The Lord through the prophet Micah calls the church "to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Mic 6:8).

Ministry Training

While resources to assist churches in their quest to promote inclusion are referenced in this thesis, the topic of the regular training of volunteers and seminary training of pastors remains unaddressed. Research shows a void in preparing clergy for ministry to people with disabilities and their families.[6] This study could survey seminaries and graduates, examining curriculum and perceptions of preparedness to include people with a disability in ministry. A case study of the Graduate Certificate in Disability and Ministry as well as the Friendship House, which houses seminary students together with

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[6] Naomi H. Annandale and Erik W. Carter, "Disability and Theological Education: A North American Study," *Theological Education* 48, no. 2 (2014): 83-102.

local adults with autism at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan, could provide a model for other theological institutions to follow. Denominational training modules for preparing lay people to minister could be also examined. Where these resources do not exist, seminaries, denominations, and churches could be encouraged to begin preparing for ministry to people with disabilities.

Mental Illness in the Church

Mental illness has been highlighted in recent news events from celebrity suicides to mass shootings. A research project could advocate for inclusion as a church response to mental illness and explore discrimination and accessibility issues in the church related to mental illness. Mental illness seems to have a stigma attached to it which could be addressed in future research. This potential study could address the sufficiency of Scripture and the church as a place of healing as it relates to mental illness. Cindy Holtrop, author and pastor in the Reformed Church of America, advocates full inclusion of people struggling with mental illness in the church in numerous articles and books.[7] Clinical psychologist and professor of psychology at Hope College, Charlotte vanOyen Witvliet, stresses appropriate language in church relating to mental illness.[8] The study of inclusion of mental illness, which has similarities to this thesis, could be valuable.

Worship Content and Disability

Another area for further study is the content or language of worship as it relates to disability. Words used in prayers, songs, and preaching can serve to unite or divide. Debra Reinstra, assistant professor of English at Calvin College, and Ron Reinstra,

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[7] Cindy Holtrop, "Practical Insights for Leading Worship: How to Be Inclusive of Persons with Mental Illness," *Reformed Worship* 128 (June 2018), accessed June 13, 2018, https://www.reformedworship.org/article/june-2018/practical-insights-leading-worship.

[8] Charlotte vanOyen Witvliet, "Speaking Well in Worship about Mental Illness: A Beginner's Guide to Language and Resources," *Reformed Worship* 128 (June 218), accessed June 13, 2018, https://www.reformedworship.org/article/june-2018/practical-insights-leading-worship.

assistant professor of preaching and worship at Western Theological Seminary, write about the importance of words in the context of liturgy.[9] Historic liturgies could be explored seeking to discover how disability language may be employed. The manner in which prayers are offered for those with disabilities and the descriptive terms used is an area where care is needed. Bill Gaventa challenges the common usage of disability language in preaching to describe spiritual issues.[10] Gaventa's concern is that while Scripture has illustrations of people with disabilities, preachers and songwriters may take the illustrations further than what serves to unify to the church and thus create barriers for people with disabilities.

A study on the use of inclusive language in all mediums of communication of the liturgy could be quite extensive. Anja Vogelzang, chaplain at De Hartenberg in The Netherlands, describes a liturgical service where the language is simplified, and an emphasis is placed on touch and symbols. This liturgy could be appropriate for someone with a severe cognitive disability.[11] Exploring alternate liturgical presentations and language, which remain faithful to the Bible, could benefit the church by increasing accessibility to worship.

Conclusion

Engaging regenerate persons with disabilities as co-laborers in worship ministry is not merely a theoretical, but noble idea; it is practical, possible, and necessary for gospel faithfulness. The church cannot exclude an entire people group from ministry simply because inclusion is hard. People with disabilities can serve the church and can lead in

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[9] Debra Rienstra and Ron Rienstra, *Worship Words: Discipling Language for Faithful Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009). 115-41.

[10] William C. Gaventa, "Preaching Disability: The Whole of Christ's Body in Word and Practice," *Review and Expositor* 113, no. 2 (2016): 225-42.

[11] Anja Vogelzang, "Liturgical Celebration with People with a Severe Mental Disability," *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 5, no. 2/3 (2001): 141-46.

worship ministry when they are given the opportunity with the appropriate accommodations. Resources are available in most communities to help churches move toward inclusivity. The church ought to be gathering and utilizing these community resources to effectively disciple and mobilize persons with disability.

Biblical fellowship and community are established and pictured when the church gathers to worship. A congregation that is accessible to people with disabilities and a liturgy that includes people with disabilities as leaders offers a glimpse of future heavenly worship, when every tribe and tongue worship Christ around His throne. To truly belong to a community of believers, people with disabilities must be somehow integral to that community. Their gifts must be needed in order for them to belong.

People with disabilities have suffered discrimination throughout history and in some cultures still struggle for basic human dignity. The church can no longer lag behind the culture. The church should be the leader in ministry *to* and *with* persons with disabilities. The first place of refuge, safety, and welcome ought to be the church, not public institutions. In eternity, those believers whose gifts have been unwanted by the church will find their place in Christ secure alongside their typical brothers and sisters in Christ. The church should not wait until eternity to gather and serve as the true community of Christ.

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ABSTRACT

INCORPORATING PERSONS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS
INTO THE WORSHIP MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018
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This thesis argues for and provides a model for the full inclusion of individuals with special needs as co-laborers in the worship ministry of churches. Full inclusion means moving beyond simply accommodating ministries and facilities to minister to individuals with special needs. Full inclusion is encouraging each regenerate individual to use their own giftedness to minister to the body of Christ. As the church and world see individuals with varying abilities, both the outcast and the privileged serving Christ along side one another, the church will be edified, God will be glorified, and gospel of Jesus Christ will be proclaimed.

Chapter 2 traces the history of disability in America. Discrimination is found in early immigration laws as well as in citizenship and voting rights. The cultural response vacillated between a desire to care for and protect those with disabilities and a movement to protect society from people with disabilities. Eugenics in America was a movement to prohibit reproduction and ultimately remove people with disabilities from society. Eventually, legal reforms were enacted which slowly created opportunities and granted civil rights to people with disabilities. The ADA and IDEA mandated equal access in public and in education. These laws were the catalyst of a seismic cultural shift in public education which itself transformed from an institution of exclusion and segregation to a place of full inclusion and acceptance.

Chapter 3 examines the church's response to disability and outlines a biblical support for inclusion. Multiple surveys are cited which reveal a participation gap in church involvement between those with disabilities and those who have no disability. A lack of hospitality and a lack of theological understanding of disability are recognized as continuing issues in the church. Biblical warrant for inclusion is established through the doctrines of *imago Dei* and spiritual gifts as well as the Great Commission. People with disabilities are made in the image of God and those who are regenerate are given gifts for ministry to edify the church. The call to go and make disciples is a call inclusive of those with disabilities.

Chapter 4 offers practical suggestions for engaging people with disabilities in the corporate worship gathering of the church. A model worship is designed, and appropriate accommodations based upon best practices from public education are suggested. Specific accommodations for both physical and cognitive disabilities are offered. Chapter 5 expands the scope of accessibility in worship to include worship leadership. Similar accommodations employed for accessibility in worship participation are proposed for accessibility in worship leadership. Chapter 5 concludes with a call for full inclusion in worship ministry. Chapter 6 summarizes the previous chapters, draws implications, and suggests areas for further research.

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