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FAITH4ALL

Inclusive Times

Latest Edition:

This issue will address
the simple problem of
doors to faith
communities.

Issue No. 15

January 2024

Steps towards full inclusion: An Open Door

When approaching a new faith community, nothing is more frustrating and off-putting than finding that the entrance can't be found, or the entryway door can't be opened. Indeed, very few qualities of a community say more clearly that "you aren't welcome here" than an entryway door which can't be found or opened! This means that the landscaping and architecture of a welcoming faith community should clearly indicate where the entrances are and, thankfully, this is almost always true.

However, difficulties occasionally arise if the main entryway doors to the sanctuary or the main entrance are usually kept locked and, frequently, guides indicating the entrances of faithful community buildings are hidden, or non-existent. **This is not welcoming!**

- Clear signage indicating the locations of various entrances to a sanctuary or meeting place need be placed obviously on the exterior or the building(s).

Occasionally, certain entrances are not accessible to a certain class of people, e.g. those using wheelchairs to ambulate, those with children in strollers, those burdened with packages, or those who have difficulty climbing stairs. For all these worshippers,

- Entrance paths and entryway doors should be modified to allow **unaided** entry to the place of worship.

You might wonder why I suggest that entrance paths and doors allow **unaided** entry. This is because, try as we might, it is hard to keep these locations staffed by people who can aid those who might require help. In addition, no one likes to feel that they are requiring or burdening anyone else just to gain access to a place of worship. **We all should have access to places of worship just as we are!**

Automatic door openers are widely available and relatively inexpensive, though the cost largely depends on the existing type of door and door frame. However, information regarding accessibility assistance devices is quite widespread. A productive place to begin searching for information for any sort of assistive device might be to contact the appropriate [Statewide Independent Living Council](#) which will probably have a list of local [Centers for Independent Living](#) that can be consulted for information regarding the needed assistive device or modification to a physical structure.

This raises the first somewhat contentious issue at many houses of worship which have entries that are up a few or several stairs. This design choice was often, and continues to be, made in hopes that having to climb a few or several stairs would indicate to the worshiper that they are entering a space which is set apart from everyday activities and the humdrum of the routine.

Yet, this design choice makes many worshipful spaces inaccessible for a significant fraction of our society! An excellent [Sojourners article](#) written by [Amy Kenny](#) states that a survey in [The Journal of Disability and Religion](#) “revealed only **10 percent** of U.S. churches offered **any** tangible support to disabled people”. This is indeed a terrible indictment of most all worshipping communities!

- **All** important and commonly used routes of access to your house of worship must be fitted with wheelchair accessible ramps and doors allowing everyone, not just the temporarily able-bodied, to enter a place of worship that wishes to welcome everyone!

I note that sometimes the historic nature of some places of worship mean that there are ecclesiastical or even local historic preservation limitations on changes like this.

Yet, I have found that an appeal to the administrators of such regulations is frequently successful if it is pointed out that such changes are required if the organization wants to follow the guidelines described in the [ADA Standards for Accessible Design](#).

For example, the sanctuary built in 1907 of the [First Congregational UCC Church of Boulder](#) is historic and, due to the rather restrictive [Boulder Landmarks Preservation Ordinance](#), the historic building containing the sanctuary was deemed “untouchable”.

This meant that because the structure was unable to fit the installation of an elevator or lift between the sanctuary upstairs and the fellowship hall in the basement, traversing between the sanctuary and the fellowship hall

in a wheelchair was almost impossible and required use of a **very steep** ramp, which did not comply with the [ADA ramp requirements](#) and which was installed to allow coffins to be wheel out of the church, not to allow visitors or members using a wheelchair to get into the church! Moving in a wheelchair from the sanctuary after a service had ended, down in the basement for the community gatherings was virtually impossible and certainly quite dangerous!

Although this church was able to build a new building for office, classroom, and nursery space, any connection between the new Faith Center and the historic sanctuary was disallowed by Boulder Landmarks Preservation Ordinance. However, it was pointed out that this requirement left the church out of compliance with the [ADA requirements](#), which churches **are** required to follow **if** their facilities are used for non-religious activities to which the entire community is invited, or if space is used by any non-religious business. When notified that their Landmarks Preservation Ordinance and the ADA had conflicting regulations, the team at [Historic Boulder](#) relented, allowing for the construction of a beautiful two-story link between the historic sanctuary and the new Faith Center, making both buildings much more functional and accessible!

We hope that you can appreciate this story and see how changes that might be thought to be “only for disabled people” can benefit all! Remember we **all** enjoy and are helped by sidewalk curb cuts that used to be non-standard, but are now required by the ADA. That which benefits one group of us, frequently helps us all!

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**We hope that you are welcoming this New Year
which is always accompanied by new opportunities!**

Future Inclusive Times Topics:

- **Steps towards full inclusion: Including Young Ones with a Disability**
- **Steps towards full inclusion: Audio and Visual Systems Used By All**



*Any questions or comments regarding this e-journal or this organization can be directed to kevin@Faith4All.org.

*Please pardon the late production of this edition of the **Inclusive Times**. Its writer contracted COVID on Christmas and this held him up from meeting the intended publication date of January 5th!*

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FAITH4ALL

Inclusive Times

Latest Edition:
We describe how to
best include young
ones with a disability
in faith communities.

Issue No. 16

April 2024

Steps Towards Full Inclusion Of Young Ones With Disabilities

This month's **Inclusive Times** article will consider the main steps needed to insure the full inclusion of young people with disabilities in their development of active lives of faith in your congregation. Because this article will be rather general, its recommendations will apply to all disabilities, be they physical, mental, emotional or developmental limitations. The two main points of this article include:

1. Parents (or primary caregivers) know best when it comes to how to include children with special needs in a congregational setting.
2. The inclusion of all who are interested in participating in congregational gatherings is important because it demonstrates the ethics the congregation values.

The first point should be obvious since guardians provide almost all of the care of and responsibility for their child or children. This means that the guidance and care given to children and youth at any house of faith should always try to follow the guidance of the primary caregivers.

To help accomplish this, parents/caregivers should meet with the leaders of faithful care groups to communicate their child's needs and challenges. In addition, the administrators need to share the expectations and efforts of the program with the parents of every child so everyone has had an opportunity to voice their concerns and knowledge.

While the inclusion of all people hasn't always been understood as an important quality of congregational programs, studies of the educational, social, and emotional development of children in group settings show the importance and benefit to **every child** when they are acknowledged as being an attendee of the gathering and, simultaneously, being invited to serve as an equal partaker in the activities of the group. It's especially true that exposure to and interaction with others usually leads to greater stimulation, compassion, sensitivity and enjoyment!

It is helpful to recall that the best practices guiding the care, education, and socialization of children with any sort of disabilities are the same as the best practices for **any** group of children or youth:

- welcoming acceptance,
- concern for community building,
- the inclusion of all.

It is very important to ensure that every young person in a faithful community is encouraged and supported as they develop a cohort of friends with whom they might worship, interact, and learn through their personal journey of growing sensitivity to and engagement with sacred scripture. Remember: the primary concern of faithful education should be learning how to love others!

You may have noticed already that these qualities or aspects of a good congregational setting for children and youth are exactly the same for any age group of people. The importance of acceptance, community, and the

inclusion of all are values and universal needs shared by all humans. It's of great importance that we recognize these needs we all share and reach out a loving hand as we all work together to navigate this world in a fruitful way.

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Note: Kelly Tobin, a former Executive Assistant for [Faith4All](#), recently notified me of this interesting article found in the [Practical Theology Hub](#) titled “[Growing closer to God through stained-glass windows: A dyslexic autistic perspective](#)”.

Check it out! I'm sure that you'll learn something from reading this article.



“Salvator Mundi” by William Wilson

We hope you are enjoying our Spring weather and praying for more rain!

Future Inclusive Times Topics:

- **Steps Towards Full Inclusion: Welcoming People with Mental Health issues**
- **The Importance of Assessment**



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Inclusive Times

Latest Edition:

We describe what you
can do to welcome
comfortably people living
with brain disorders.

Issue No. 17

July 2024

Steps Toward Full Inclusion: Welcoming People with Mental Health Issues

In the Torah, Genesis 1:26, God says, “Let us make mankind in our image, after our likeness” ([NCV](#)). Jesus encouraged us to “love our neighbor as you love yourself”. However, when we think of those with mental illness especially those with serious mental illness whose behavior makes us uncomfortable and at times even scares us, we often shy away from these important and often-stated quotes from sacred scripture.

The stigma and misunderstanding surrounding mental illness create real barriers to the inclusion of those living with mental illness and substance abuse in our congregations. We often fail to recognize the commonality of mental illness. It is everywhere: it is estimated that more than one in five U.S. adults live with a mental illness ([National Institute of Mental Health](#)). Yet, mental illness is one of the least understood of all illnesses, and despite a campaign by the National Alliance for Mental Illness ([NAMI](#)), which called “mental illness an illness like any other.” Old stereotypes continue to exist.

Most individuals even those with serious mental illness are not violent: they are much more likely to be victims of violence. They are not the mass murders that society wants to paint as the cause of the horrific mass murders we experience in this country.

While many of the unhoused we see on our streets and parks live with mental illness, there are thousands more individuals who are part of the over fifty million Americans who suffer from some sort of mental illness. For many of those with mental illness, recovery is possible and the mechanisms by which it is accomplished are many: therapy, medications, employment, and perhaps most importantly a sense of belonging and community support. Spiritual communities are a vital conduit for such support; yet we often fail to offer such support.

There are simple things we can do to support those who live with mental health challenges or who are going through a difficult time.

- **Be a friend!** Listen without judgment, shame, and guilt. Respect their privacy. It is their story to tell. Bring a meal; give a ride; or offer to help with household chores.
- **Remember that words can hurt!** The adage, “sticks and stones can break my bones, but words can never hurt me” is blatantly false. Words matter. Calling someone crazy, loco, psycho, or junky only reinforces stereotypes. None of those of us who live with a serious mental illness are I their illness, i.e., an individual is not bipolar; they have or live

with a bipolar disorder. We'd never say "I'm cancer." so regardless of the severity of the disease, no one living with a serious mental illness is fully described by that illness.

- **Stop perpetuating the stigma around mental illness!** Mental illness is one of the most stigmatized conditions/experiences we confront. Challenge those who assume the person sitting next to them who is talking to themselves is dangerous and violent. If possible, tell your story of living with a serious mental illness.
- **Educate yourself!** Learn the facts about mental illness so you can challenge your own beliefs and those of others around you. Such knowledge is crucial if we are to break the stigma surrounding mental illness.

As faith communities, we can do even more to extend an extravagant welcome to those with mental health challenges and their families. In 2015, the UCC adopted the [WISE Covenant for Mental Illness](#). It challenges us to be welcoming to those touched by mental health. We are called to be inclusive, supportive, and engaged with all those living with mental health challenges. We encourage every faith community to consider becoming a [WISE](#) congregation. Motivated inclusion teams of faithful institutions are given tools and guidance to help the community put the elements of the [WISE](#) covenant into practice.

When we welcome those with mental health issues into our communities, we need to ensure that they are included in **all** aspects of the life and work of the institution. Remember what Mother Theresa said, "I can do things you cannot, you can do things I cannot. Together, we can do great things."



For more information about including those in your congregation with mental health and substance abuse issues see the [UCC Mental Health Network](#) (www.mhn-ucc.com) or [National Alliance on Metal Illness \(NAMI\) Faithnet](#) (<https://my.nami.org/naminet/Outreach-Partnerships/NAMI-FaithNet>).

We hope you can find comfort and relaxation in this heat!

Future Inclusive Times Topics:

- **The Importance of Assessment**
- **Including People Who Are Deaf or Mute**



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Inclusive Times

Latest Edition:
Process Theology
Principles Parallel
Life with a Disability

Issue No. 18

October 2024

How Process Theology Principles Parallel Life with a Disability

Process Theology is an outgrowth of a philosophy originally developed by [Alfred North Whitehead](#), a mathematics, logic, and philosophy professor who taught at Trinity College of Cambridge University and Harvard University. The basis of this philosophy is that events - not objects - form the fundamental elements of reality. Whitehead's process philosophy argues that "there is urgency in coming to see the world as a web of interrelated processes of which we are integral parts, so that all of our choices and actions have consequences for the world around us."¹ For this reason, this sort of philosophy is considered relational, as opposed to the more traditional philosophy which takes objects as fundamental elements of reality.

The parallels that I see between process theology and living with a disability stem from the problem of [theodicy](#), which I believe may trouble other people living with a disability. I consider that the only logical and satisfying solution to the

"problem" of theodicy is through an understanding of God that is grounded in process thinking.

Process theology can be understood to "solve" the problem of theodicy by relieving God of responsibility for evil actions of people and unfortunate natural occurrences as it rejects the concept of divine omnipotence. For process theologians, God can't do everything and, in fact, God's actions are not through the unilateral control of anything!

According to many process theologians, "actuality as such is partially self-creative, future events are not yet determinate, so that even perfect knowledge cannot know the future and God does not control the world"². Instead, the God of process theology functions as a lure or divine *Eros*, directing, guiding, or goading, all actuality toward novelty: "[t]he Primordial Nature of God is the goad toward novelty in the universe"³.

¹ [C. Robert Mesle](#), *Process-Relational Philosophy: An Introduction to Alfred North Whitehead* (West Conshohocken: Templeton Foundation Press, 2009), 9.

² John B. Cobb and David R. Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition*. (Westminster Press, 1976), 52-53.

³ Alfred N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (The Macmillan Company, 1929), 135.

Aside from relieving God of the responsibility for the many destructive occurrences in this universe, the parallel between this 'goad toward novelty' and recovery from or living with a disability is what cements the connection between process theology and disability for me.

A fundamental supposition of process theology is that every interaction in the universe can have a variety of outcomes and the existence of life-affirming and life-extending outcomes is allowed for and can be chosen because of God. The divine goad toward novelty and life-affirming choices - as posited by process theology - can be understood as paralleling living with a disability because frequently considerable novelty and inventiveness is required when attempting to simply live a life in a world that is largely designed for and built by many people without consideration of those people who are differently-abled.

Although in the United States the advent of the Americans with Disabilities Act has gone a long way of relieving these problems, the acquisition of a disability often guarantees the survivor a lifetime of learning to do things differently and in

unexpected ways. It is because of the novelty used when one adapts to a disability and the life-affirming choices available to and chosen by people living with disabilities that I understand the possibility of the God of process theology to be a part of every life-affirming action taken by or for people with disabilities, whether or not this fact is acknowledged.

In addition, process theology is inherently [panentheistic](#) -- a theology which understands God or the divine *Eros* as intersecting every part of the universe and also extending beyond space and time. Thus, I understand process thinking to transcend particular religions as Alfred North Whitehead developed and understood this philosophy as an aspect of reality purely on the grounds of logic, not religion.

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Our thoughts at this time are for the survivors of hurricane Helene, many of whom have been newly disabled by this disaster !

Future Inclusive Times Topics:

- **The Importance of Assessment**
- **Including People Who Are Deaf or Mute**



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Helpful Links for More Information on [Process theology](#):

- The [Cobb Institute](#) is an important institution devoted to evangelizing process thinking.
- As part of my recent completion of a [Certificate in Process Thinking and Practice](#) with the Cobb Institute, I have written a 14-page research paper titled "[Process Thinking and Living with Disability](#)".
- My religious understanding has also been influenced considerably by online studies from [Tripp Fuller](#) and his organization [Homebrewed Christianity](#)
- My **new** book titled "[Still Rambling Down Life's Road... with a brain injury](#)" traces the development of my spiritual and religious understanding from before acquiring my disabilities to my present embrace of process theology.