

Invite.
Embrace.
Include.
Empower.



FAITH4ALL

Inclusive Times

Latest Edition:
We'll consider the
importance of
assessment for
keeping your
institution welcoming
and inclusive.

Issue No. 19

January 2025

The Importance of Assessment

For the first quarter of this new year, we're going to look at the importance of regular assessment of ensuring the welcoming and inclusive nature of your organization. While some of the important efforts to make your community of faith one that maximizes the attendance and enhances the values of members and others interested, many essential efforts are benefitted by regular "check ups". Such efforts include: educating everyone in the congregation; checking on the progress of extended efforts; training ushers; and, lastly, ensuring that your organization is well connected to external institutions.

One helpful way to execute this "check up" is by ensuring that several people associated with your organization complete an Accessibility Test. A helpful and very extensive [Accessibility Checklist](#) has been produced by the [ADA National Network](#). (I've attached a PDF extraction of this checklist to the email that contained this issue of the *IT*).

Every congregation is encouraged to complete the entire checklist upon first assessment of the welcome-ability and inclusivity of your organization. Additionally, it is important to re-evaluate your organization's accessibility every couple of years to ensure that you've completed and have maintained your facility to ensure a wide welcome and inclusion of all people.

Perhaps the most important quality of a welcoming religious organization that's keen on including all, is the impression people with a disability have when visiting or serving at a religious organization. Many people -- particularly those of your local community with evidently presented disabilities -- have likely experienced some degree of insensitive treatment when attempting to worship or join into a local religious community.

The primary reason why some local religious institutions include only trivial participation of the members of the disabled community is *not* due to a lack of faith of those who live with

disabilities, but is related to the fractured relationship a religious organization can display toward those people living with a disability. Two important steps to repair this relationship include:

1. Religious communities need to become **aware** of their failure to truly include those in their congregation living with a disability;
2. Religious communities need to feel that *it is a religious obligation* that they include all people, independent of their ability status.

Both of these points can be easily addressed by the community's leadership in a sermon, homily, *d'var torah*, or *khutbah*, and, assisting this transformation is the entire point of [Faith4All](#) organization! Please contact myself at kevin@Faith4All.org if you need guidance with this transformation.

Additional helpful websites for congregational inclusion include:

- The [Activities & Resources](#) page of the [Religion and Spirituality Interest Network](#) of the [American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities](#);
- The section of [Disability Resources](#) webpage concerning [universal design](#);
- Notes from the presentation titled "[The Call and Opportunity for Faith Communities to Transform the Lives of People with Disabilities and their Communities](#)" produced with help from the [Putting Faith to Work Project](#);
- The website [That Every Ability May Belong](#) has a helpful "getting started" page.

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**We hope you are enjoying the winter weather
and staying safe this holiday season!**



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Inclusive Times

Latest Edition:

In this issue, we will explore the best ways to include people who are hard of hearing or mute in your community.

Issue No. 20

April 2025

Including People Who Are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or Mute in Your Community

Making an effort to include the community of people who are deaf or mute is very commonly overlooked in almost all religious institutions these days. This hobbles the spiritual development of both the temporarily-able-bodied participants as well as those people who already face these challenges. The US CDC has determined that “[i]n 2019, 13.0% of adults aged 18 and over had some difficulty hearing even when using a hearing aid and 1.6% either had a lot of difficulty hearing or could not hear at all, even when using a hearing aid”¹.

The percentage of our population that is mute or unable to speak with clarity is harder (for me at least) to determine; however, perhaps the most common cause of speech difficulty in adults is from aphasia. Aphasia is an acquired communication disorder that impairs a person’s ability to process language, but does **not** affect intelligence. (Note that the diagnosis of

aphasia does NOT imply a person has a mental illness.) The [National Aphasia Association](#) has determined that “the most common cause of aphasia is stroke (about 25 - 40% of stroke survivors acquire aphasia)”², although brain injury can also cause aphasia.

These two very different challenges both affect an individual’s ability to communicate with others and, both of these general impairments have broadly similar approaches to overcoming their challenges. While dealing with the challenges that any individual faces are particularly varied and unique, the easiest and most general way to approach communication challenges is pretty obvious, even if practiced infrequently: **always have available and remember to use many different ways of communicating with anyone – auditorily, via written text or using pictures and gestures.**

The specific ways of overcoming challenges for people who are hard of hearing or deaf are many:

- Always have a good system for audio amplification in a sanctuary or common area.
- Have on hand a personal amplification system which might be used by those congregants who are hard of hearing. Such systems with headphones are pretty commonly available and cheap enough for most institutions to have one or two devices on hand for temporary use by congregants.
- Establish a small collection of seats that have especially good sightlines to the areas commonly used by ministers or rabbis where congregation members who read lips might sit.
- Most religious services include a reflection or sermon which have been previously prepared and, in addition to broadcasting these reflections aurally, these reflections should be made available *at the time of delivery* in printed form for those who learn best from reading printed material.

The National Aphasia Association has produced a list of [dos and don'ts](#) for communicating with a person with aphasia. This list is so useful I will quote the entire list here:

1. Make sure you have the person's attention before you start.
2. Minimize or eliminate background noise (TV, radio, other people).
3. Keep your own voice at a normal level, unless the person has indicated otherwise.
4. Keep communication simple, but adult. Simplify your own sentence structure and reduce your rate of speech. Emphasize key words. Don't "talk down" to the person with aphasia.
5. Give them time to speak. Resist the urge to finish sentences or offer words.
6. Communicate with drawings, gestures, writing and facial expressions in addition to speech.
7. Confirm that you are communicating successfully with "yes" and "no" questions.
8. Praise all attempts to speak and downplay any errors. Avoid insisting that each word be produced perfectly.
9. Engage in normal activities whenever possible. Do not shield people with aphasia from family or ignore them in a group conversation. Rather, try to involve them in family decision-making as much as possible. Keep them informed of events but avoid burdening them with day to day details.
10. Encourage independence and avoid being overprotective.

When communicating with a person who is hard of deaf, hard of hearing, or who has difficulty speaking, I believe that the most important thing to remember is to **have patience!** These people have every right to participate as fully as they might be able to in the life of your community.

Please assist them however they would like so that they can participate in the life of your faith community as fully as they desire.



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

Future Inclusive Times Topics:

- ???



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Endnotes:

¹MADANS JH, WEEKS JD, ELGADDAL N. HEARING DIFFICULTIES AMONG ADULTS: UNITED STATES, 2019. [NCHS DATA BRIEF, NO. 414](#). HYATTSVILLE, MD: NATIONAL CENTER FOR HEALTH STATISTICS. 2021

²[HTTPS://APHASIA.ORG/WHAT-IS-APHASIA/](https://aphasia.org/what-is-aphasia/)

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Inclusive Times

Latest Edition:

This edition of the **Inclusive Times** will explore concepts of freedom and interdependence.

July, 2025

Issue No. 21

Freedom and Interdependence in the USA Today

We try to publish the quarterly e-zine on the first Friday of each quarter. The publication date for this third quarter of 2025 will fall on Independence Day which means that I feel obligated to reflect on and write about the concept of freedom in this country, and how I feel that many citizens of this country take the implications of our freedom to an extreme that causes them to devalue the role of communities in our society. For this reason, this article will reflect on the individual freedom and interdependence of the people in the USA.

Francis Scott Key penned his poem "[The Star-Spangled Banner](#)" in 1814, after the British bombed Baltimore during the war which began in 1812, and this poem was set to music and later adopted as the national anthem in 1931. Today, many people in the USA echo this poem and claim to be residents of "the land of the free and the home of the brave". While many citizens of the USA mistakenly think that these words refer to the founding of this country after the Revolutionary War, and despite the fact that the harsh imposition of slavery was legal in our country for 89 years after its founding and the Voting Rights Act wasn't signed into law until 1965, 189 years after our founding, I think it reasonable that most citizens of this country understand themselves as having more freedom and independence than citizens of almost any other country on earth today.

Despite individual freedom being a long sought after goal in this country, an independence largely obtained by only *certain* people, the individual freedom from this society's conventions and expectations have often stood in contrast to the impositions of restraint by our government through laws and other regulations designed with hopes that their implementation would help lead to us all living peaceably with each other. However, at times, we citizens haven't played too well with each other in the sandbox of this country. To prove this point, we needn't mention the harsh treatment given native tribes, which were here first and which we massacred, a treatment which is now properly termed "genocide"; or the racist treatment African people as they were forced to relocate here as slaves, the legacy of which is still felt and operates even today!

I think, however, it is fair to say that a great many citizens of these United States consider themselves largely independent and free, distinct individuals that aren't especially reliant on others to subsist; however, this attitude stands in stark contrast to the fact that we humans are a communal species! No one reading this article has raised **all** of the food they will eat today; I seriously doubt that anyone reading this article was born outside of a hospital; in fact, we humans live as outgrowths of our local society as much as, or more than, we live as isolated, independent individuals. The fact of our existence as beings in a collective we call society should imply to us both **rights** we have as individuals and **responsibilities** we have as a member of a group!

While adult citizens of the USA should have the right to marry whoever with whom they are in committed partnership, they should also feel the responsibility to allow all others to do the same. While we all should have the right to eat a sandwich of our own choosing as we walk on the sidewalk to work, we also should all feel the responsibility of depositing our waste in a trash can when we've completed our meal. Let's take this idea further: while we presently have the right to pollute our air by driving individual cars; we **all** should collectively pay for the cleansing of our air so we don't require those who come after us to live in the waste of our own excesses! While we all have a right to work and trade for our own profit in a society of consumers, we should also be concerned for and feel obligated to improve our multifaceted society!

The positive feedback of the economy in the USA, a largely free market economy where investing wealth leads to further wealth, has allowed the income and wealth distribution of our society to be **exceedingly** unjust. The mathematical instability of a truly free market economy (if allowed to) will lead to the breakdown and collapse of society, demonstrates the shortsightedness of the architects of and major participants in today's economy. Sociologists have shown us that **EVERY** society with such drastic economic disparities as great as those in the USA today have collapsed. I believe that it is likely that we are in the midst of such a collapse now!

On this Independence Day and the celebration of a portion of the history of our nation, we all should be mindful that as human beings we have certain rights of our own; however, as humans and members of communities, we also have responsibilities to our community, others around us now, and to those who come after us.

We all need to learn to embrace the responsibilities afforded us in this nation!

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We hope you're enjoying our summer weather!

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Inclusive Times

Latest Edition:

This edition is blank because Dr. Pettit forgot to write one, this evidencing his disability!

October, 2025

Issue No. unassigned!

The Forgotten Issue

This fall, particularly the month of October, has been rather busy for Dr. Pettit because he was responsible for preparing for and leading the wedding of his son Andrew Joseph Pettit to Andrea Louise Roche! The ceremony occurred on October 4th, 2025, at the [Waterville Valley Ski Resort](#) in New Hampshire. (Though not where they met, this is the place they fell in love while both working there undergraduates as safety ski patrol officers.) It was a very beautiful event for them both as they were both able to take simultaneous time off from their positions as residents in the Emergency Room at the University of Vermont Medical Center!

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We hope you are enjoying our dangerously warm and dry Fall weather and praying for more rain and snow!

Future Inclusive Times Topics:

- [Cosmogenesis and its relation to process theology.](#)



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