

# Disability Awareness Sunday 2017

Virginia Conference of  
The United Methodist  
Church

Disability Awareness  
Sunday 2017

## Give Thanks for the Works of the Lord

Psalm 112: 1-10

(Psalm Reading for Sunday, February 5, 2017)

**Let us rejoice!** The writer of Psalm 112 is sincere and genuinely excited to lift up the name of the Lord. The psalmist declares the power of the Lord and the many ways in which the Lord interacts with humanity. We are God’s wonderful creations, created out of God’s love and with grand care. The psalmist gives his praise because it was apparent to the ancient Israelites that the Lord’s blessing was upon them and that God was guiding them out of slavery to a free life. It is the praise of the Israelite people that is expressed in this psalm, a thanksgiving of God’s work on behalf of God’s beloved people.

As we think about our efforts to be welcoming and transformative to individuals with disabilities and their families, consider these questions:

- Do we transmit to those in our local church and



surrounding communities that God crafted all people out of love and with grand care?

- Does our community give praise for the ways in which God interacts with us, and utilizes the gifts of all members?
- How can we share with our neighbors that their gifts and abilities are treasures to be valued by the community?

The psalmist writes that the “fear of the Lord is the begin-

ning of wisdom” (verse 10). In a message entitled, “Wisdom: A Gift or a Task?”, Joan Chittister, Executive Director of Benetvision in Erie, Pennsylvania, a national resource center for contemporary spirituality, notes that wisdom calls each of us to be everything we have the capacity to be. That should be our goal as faith communities when we think about disability awareness. We should seek to the greatest extent possible to allow every individual to participate fully in the Body of Christ - with all our unique gifts, abilities, circumstances, or situations.

For 2017, the Virginia Conference Commission on Disabilities challenges you to look at your evangelism and discipleship efforts through the lens of disability awareness. Let us be churches committed to welcoming all people into buildings and ministries that allow them to truly be transformed.

***The choice is ours.***

## What is Disability Awareness Sunday?

The 1996 General Conference of The United Methodist Church voted to create **DISABILITY AWARENESS SUNDAY**, as stated in the **Book of Discipline** in ¶265.4.

“Disability Awareness Sunday shall be observed annually on a date to be determined by the annual conference. Disability Awareness Sunday calls the Church to celebrate the gifts and graces of persons with disabilities and calls the Church and society to full inclusion of persons with disabilities in the community.”

## How Should We Celebrate Disability Awareness Sunday?

This special Sunday gives every congregation the opportunity to challenge our hospitality and our inclusion of all persons into the full life of the church. This can be a time when persons with disabilities can offer their gifts and graces to the congregation and to God as participants, liturgists and leaders in this celebration. As you celebrate this special Sunday, let it be an opportunity for the congregation to launch or extend its hospitality to persons with disabilities. The trustees and other groups should involve members of the congregation including their sisters and brothers with disabilities in identifying and offering solutions to physical, architectural, communication and attitudinal barriers. Develop specific plans and strategies to eliminate those barriers so that your congregation might be fully hospitable to all of God’s people.

## Call to Worship

Leader: Let us lift up our many voices and praise the Lord with all our heart.

People: **Though we come together with differing gifts, talents, and abilities, we all sing of God’s glory.**

Leader: The Psalms tell us of God’s compassion to those who believe.

People: **Likewise, we seek to be as compassionate and gracious in our community as our Lord is to us.**

Leader: Show compassion and love to your neighbors and enemies.

People: **With the Lord’s guidance, there will be distinction in our love and kindness towards others.**

Leader: As a community, we can rejoice in the works of the Lord.

People: **For the works of the Lord are many, and we recognize that we are part of God’s wonderful Creation.**

All: **Amen.**

**Please see page 6 for additional Worship suggestions.**



## CAMP RAINBOW CONNECTION

Sponsored by the Commission on Disabilities of the Virginia Conference of The United Methodist Church, Camp Rainbow Connection is held for 2 one-week sessions each summer. Camp Rainbow is a continuation of Christ's ministry where staff and campers of all races and religions experience Christian love and where campers find, at the end of the rainbow, their treasure of love and acceptance.

- Campers are individuals with an intellectual disability as their primary disability although other disabilities may exist, ages 16 and older.
- Campers participate in ecumenical activities with opportunities to experience music, Bible study, arts and crafts, games, evening activities, and more.
- Many of the campers and their families or caregivers cannot afford the entire cost of camp. Donations from local churches and individuals provide financial assistance for campers who may otherwise not be able to attend.

All of the staff members who work with camp are volunteers. The Camp Coordinator is paid by the Virginia Conference.

Donations of materials and supplies help to keep the cost of camp at a very reasonable level. At \$525 per week for campers, Camp Rainbow is one of the most affordable summer opportunities for individuals with intellectual and cognitive disabilities in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Please visit the conference website: [www.vaumc.org](http://www.vaumc.org) click on Inclusivity & Lay Leadership, then click Disabilities.

## HEART HAVENS

As a part of your disability awareness activities, you may choose to educate Virginia United Methodists on the opportunity to get involved with Heart Havens, our conference-related agency which provides residential services for adults with intellectual disabilities. Heart Havens empowers adults with intellectual disabilities. February is Heart Havens Month, where special conference offerings for Heart Havens are collected and their ministry is highlighted, (For more information contact Heart Havens at 804-237-6097 or visit their website at: [www.hearthavens.org](http://www.hearthavens.org))



If a new family starts attending church and has a child with a disability...

1. Greet family members and be welcoming. Be truly happy to see the child and call him or her by name.
2. Include the child in church activities.
3. Do not judge the child for his or her behavior when the behavior is the result of his or her disability.
4. Pray for the family.
5. Do not be afraid to interact with the child, even if the child doesn't speak.
6. Do observe the personal space of a child, especially a child with autism (i.e., some autistic children do not like to be hugged or touched—talk to the parents first).
7. Do talk to the parents about their child and ask what you can do to help.
8. It is NOT helpful to talk to parents by telling them that God chose them to have this child because they were such strong people! It is better to say, “I do not understand why your child was born with this disability, but I do know that God will give you the strength and wisdom that you need as parents to raise her or him. We, as your church family, are here for you. We are praying for you. Please lean on us and tell us how we can help.”
9. A simple, “How is your child doing?” can go a long way to helping parents feel that you really care.
10. Never say to parents, “It could be worse,” when discussing their child's being born with disabilities!
11. Observe an annual Disability Awareness Sunday.
12. Provide training for staff and volunteers.
13. Check with the conference office for available training for your pastor. Pastors are to receive training in disability awareness as outlined in the *Book of Discipline*.
14. If there are other children in the family, give them extra attention.
15. Remove barriers that make worship difficult for a child with disabilities.
16. Talk to the parents about the needs of the child so that everyone at the church who works with the child knows how best to teach the child or what to do in case of an emergency.
17. If needed, find a responsible older youth to be a “buddy” for the child with disabilities.
18. Educate the children in the church about different disabilities (children's moments; Sunday school, etc.)
19. If the disability is severe and the family has to miss church for an extended period of time, offer respite care (offer to baby-sit; offer to cook a meal; etc.)
20. Complete an annual Accessibility Audit as required by the *Book of Discipline*.



## Etiquette When Interacting with People with Disabilities

**Kelly Hickok, Community Advocate with Resources for Independent Living in Richmond, shares the following etiquette tips with us.**

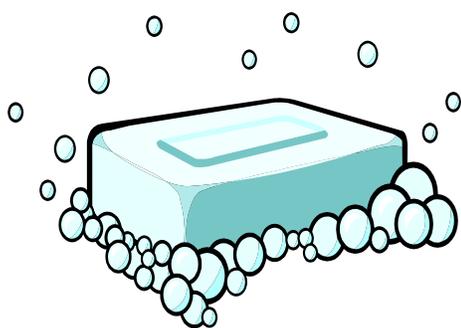
Do you use proper etiquette when interacting with people who have disabilities?

What feels like common sense, suddenly, is not as we sometimes question what to say or do when we are communicating with someone with a disability. Although there are no hard and fast “Emily Post” rules for every person and every situation, there are some general “etiquette” rules that may challenge you to re-think how you might be more sensitive to people with disabilities. Consider the following:

- People with disabilities are **people** first – try to focus on the person rather than the disability.
- People with physical and/or sensory disabilities know they have a disability – no need to “pretend” that they don’t.
- Adults with disabilities don’t want to be treated like children. Don’t make decisions or answer questions **for** the person.
- Mobility aids (wheelchairs, walkers, crutches, etc.) are not confining. In fact, the provision of these devices allows for independence. Try to avoid phrases like “confined to”, “afflicted with” and other terms that communicate that the person is “restricted” or “suffering”.
- Respect personal space. Always ask if and what kind of assistance the person wants before you act.
- Don’t be condescending. (No one likes a pat on the head whether physically or a “proverbially” by what you say.) **Example:** A person using a wheelchair should not be referred to as a patient unless they are in a hospital setting.
- People with disabilities have unique and different personalities like everyone else. Our comfort level and awareness is communicated, not only by **what** we say, but, **how** we say it, through our verbal as well as our non-verbal communication.
- **Everyone** appreciates kindness, dignity and respect. Continuing to strive for physical and emotional acceptance creates **welcoming environments** for all of us!!!

**Children's Message Idea:**

Bring a bar of soap



Look what I have to show you today. Yes, it is a bar of soap. What do we use soap for? Yes, to wash our hands and our bodies. Do any of you ever get dirty? That's a silly question, isn't it? We all get dirty!

Do you think that the dirt could be washed off as easily if we just looked at the soap, but did not use it? You mean I have to use the soap and make bubbles and then wash off all the dirt? You are right! Just looking at it won't work!

Our faith is the same way. We learn many things at church during Sunday School and worship, but just hearing these things doesn't make much difference in our lives or in the lives of the people around us. If it is going to make a difference, we must apply it to our lives.

What does that mean---applying it to our lives? It means being a friend to someone who has no friends, it means sharing what we have with others, it means living our lives for others, it means loving and caring for those who are different from us. We could read to someone who can't see, or assist someone in a wheelchair, or help someone in school who doesn't learn as fast as we do. Jesus wants us to love and serve **everyone we can!**

God wants us to know that God loves us. God also wants us to love other people and to tell them that God loves them. For us to do that, we must plan to love other people. We can't just wait for this to happen. We must make it happen!

Let's pray together....

*Barbara Mason, Eastern Shore District*

**Hymn Suggestions from The United Methodist Hymnal:**

#592—When the Church of Jesus

#560—Help Us Accept Each Other

#581—Lord, Whose Love Through Humble Service

#562—Jesus, Lord, We Look to Thee

#257-We Meet You, O Christ

#558—We Are the Church

#62— All Creatures of Our God and King

#620-One Bread, One Body

#114-Many Gifts, One Spirit

#441-What Does the Lord Require

**From The Faith We Sing:**

#2172—We are Called

#2184—Sent Out in Jesus' name

#2181—We Need a Faith

#2175—Together We Serve