

# Disability Awareness Sunday 2012

Virginia Conference of The  
United Methodist Church

Commission on  
Disabilities

**“I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some.  
I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.”**

**I Corinthians 9:22b—23**

**(Epistle Reading for Epiphany 5B—Sunday, February 5, 2012)**

## What is Disability Awareness Sunday?



The 1996 General Conference of The United Methodist Church voted to create **DISABILITY AWARENESS SUNDAY**. Paragraph 265.4 of the **2008 Book of Discipline** states :

*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.*

In the Virginia Conference, Disability Awareness Sunday is the **first Sunday in February** – without a special offering. 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 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.

The worship material included in this packet is designed so that you can incorporate pieces into your Order of Worship or fellowship times. The materials have been developed by members of our Conference Commission on Disabilities. References are noted for sources outside our Conference.

As a part of your disability awareness activities, you can also help 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. February is Heart Havens Month. Heart Havens empowers adults with intellectual disabilities to live and thrive in a safe and nurturing environment. Representatives from Heart Havens are available to speak at your church. Heart Havens residents may also be able to join your services and share their own personal stories. For more information about Heart Havens or to schedule a speaker, contact Heart Havens at 804-237-6097 or visit their website at: [www.hearthavens.org](http://www.hearthavens.org)

## Worship Service Ideas



### Call to Worship:

(L: Leader; P: People)

L: As Christ has made a place for ALL in the Kingdom,

**P: So let us make a place for ALL in our congregation.**

L: As the welcome of God is unending,

**P: So let our welcome be unfailing!**

L: As God has called us family, and made us heirs to eternity,

**P: So let us call one another brother and sister,**

L: As we are children of a Heavenly Parent, loved and cherished,

**P: So let us love and cherish all those whom God calls children,**

**All: And share with everyone God's precious gift of salvation!**

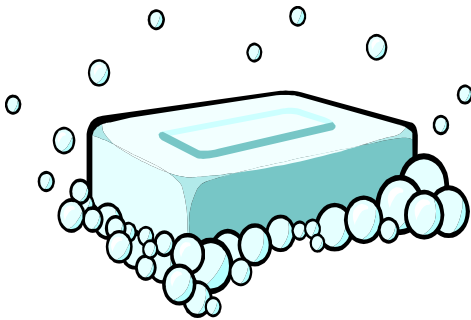
*Rev. Lisa Sykes, Richmond District*



### Prayer of Confession:

Dear Lord and Creator of us all. We come to you with thankful hearts for all that you have given us – our life, our health, our abilities and most of all – Jesus Christ. We recognize that some of us are given different abilities and some limiting abilities, but through the windows of those challenges we still see your great love for us. We confess that we make quick judgments upon others based on their appearances or disabilities. We confess that we separate others from our circles based on our fear, prejudice, and ignorance. Help us to accept everyone into our midst and community regardless of their appearances, their ability to ambulate, their level of sight and hearing, intellectual capacities or any other disability and to love and befriend them with the love that you have shown to each of us. Help us to take better care of this temple in which you have created us, so we can serve you and your created ones with the love of Jesus Christ. AMEN

*Rev. Randall Williams, Farmville District*

**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....

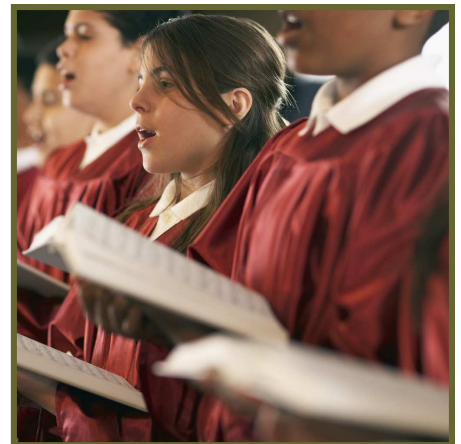
*Barbara Mason, Eastern Shore District*

**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

**From The Faith We Sing:**

- #2172—We are Called
- #2184—Sent Out in Jesus' name
- #2181—We Need a Faith
- #2175—Together We Serve



*Sylvia Massie, Fredericksburg District*



In I Corinthians 9:16-23, Paul describes his obligation to bring the gospel message of Jesus Christ to all people. We have the same obligation, the same mission to make disciples. Are we truly doing that when it comes to persons with disabilities?

- Do you provide learning and study opportunities for children and adults with all types of learning needs?
- Does your worship space allow full access for all persons?
- Does your church consider those who use alternative formats to communicate when you develop your worship services, bulletins, newsletters, and other communications?

The following sermon starters are based upon the Epistle lesson for February 5, 2012, from the Revised Common Lectionary (NSRV). This passage, I Corinthians 9:16-23, is rich in meaning for Disability Awareness Sunday, no matter when your church celebrates the day. Consider the following as you plan the message for the day.

- In verse 16, we read: *"If I proclaim the gospel, this gives me no ground for boasting, for an obligation is laid on me, and woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel!"*

**Reflections:** We are compelled to preach the Good News. In the Virginia United Methodist Conference, we claim that all are welcomed at table. Are our houses of worship, liturgy, and access such that all are truly welcome? Are we being disobedient to this passage in I Corinthians, when those with physical disabilities cannot enter our sanctuaries, when those who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing cannot hear the liturgy, and those who are blind face barriers to their access to the common Table?

- Verses 17b and 18 read: *"...but if not of my own will, I am entrusted with a commission. What then is my reward? Just this: that in my proclamation I may make the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my rights in the gospel."*

**Reflections:** As preachers of the Gospel, what then is our pay? It is the satisfaction we get from preaching the Good News without expense to anyone, never demanding our rights as preachers. Those who are Deaf (and others who speak a language other than our own) are all too often expected to provide their own interpreters, or yet the interpreters are expected to donate their services gratis. Those who use wheelchairs must make sure they have able bodied and strong persons to bounce them up and down stairs. God forbid if they should need to use the bathroom facilities while they are in the church. Those with limited vision are dependent on finding their own transportation and guides to get them to church. Most if not all of those with physical challenges—due to disability or age - are required to make their own arrangements to get into church and once there, must continue to provide for their own needs. What is the responsibility of the church and pastors who claim to live by these words of I Corinthians?

- ▶ In verse 19, we read: *“For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them.”*

**Reflections:** Do we feel, like Paul, that we are called to become a servant of everyone so that we can bring them to Christ? Are we, as pastor and leaders of the church, setting the example for our people? Are we going out of our way to make our church's accessible for all? Do we model these behaviors for the congregation?

- Verse 20 (*“To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews...”*) begins a section of the passage which beautifully lends itself for the congregation to experience first hand their church as those with physical challenges see it. As he describes each group in the passage, Paul repeats the phrase *“...so that I might win...”* people to Christ. Verse 22 reads: *“I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some.”*

**Reflections:** This passage is rich in meaning for Disability Awareness Sunday and provides a spring-board for providing the opportunity during the worship service for persons to “walk” in the shoes of persons with disabilities. Experiencing a disability for an hour is nothing like experiencing it for a lifetime, but it is a good way to raise awareness. You can do something like the following:

- ▶ Have able bodied, pre-selected individuals be met with wheelchairs at the foot of the stairs into the front entrance of the church. Have them experience the challenge of either finding the wheelchair access to the church, or worse, be helped into churches that have no wheelchair access.
- ▶ Have persons blindfolded, then find their way to their seats and experience the singing of hymns without reading the words.
- ▶ Hand out earplugs to hearing persons or hand them a set of head phones or ear buds that will play “white noise” to mimic persons who suffer with tinnitus. Hand people crutches, hand some special bulletins with 8 point font or blurred print making it very difficult for them to read.
- ▶ Loosely tie a person’s hands in front of them with a lightweight ribbon so that the arms cannot be used. During worship, some creativity must be put into place to use the Bible or hymnal.
- ▶ Ask all those wearing glasses to remove them. The same could be done with hearing aids. People could place them in purses or pockets for the duration of service and exiting the building.

End worship on a positive note that we all should give thanks for the gifts and abilities that we have, and use them to assist others to use their own gifts to their greatest potential possible. Emphasis should be placed on ability and the nurturing of one another, disabilities notwithstanding.

## Discussion Starters, Questions, and Disability Awareness Experiences for Sunday School Classes, Bible Study, Small Groups, and Fellowship Opportunities:



- Raise questions such as these and follow-up with a discussion of our United Methodist beliefs, Social Principles, doctrinal standards, and scriptural references relating to health and wholeness.
  - ▶ How does your congregation celebrate the unique gifts of people face life with various disabilities and their families? How does your church family continue to nurture and support these individuals? Does that support and time wane over the years?
  - ▶ How have you personally and your church entered into relationship with others who experience disabilities or chronic illness? Consider a mailing or phone call to church members asking if there is anything the church could provide which would make participation possible or easier.
  - ▶ What are the obstacles that prevent your congregation from celebrating the diversity, gifts, and graces of ALL people within your congregation?
  - ▶ What would you do if...? - A new member of your congregation who has cerebral palsy and involuntary muscle spasms has asked to be a greeter or usher. - The church is voting today whether to spend \$50,000 to make the church accessible for those who use wheelchairs for mobility and no one in a wheelchair attends. - The parents of a youth with autism have asked that the teenager participate in the confirmation class and become a member of your congregation. - The new pastor appointed to your church is blind, or hearing impaired, or has another type of disability. Encourage personal witnesses from those with disabilities as to exactly how the church has given support, offered encouragement and allowed them to serve to their fullest capacity.
- Experience your group time, fellowship, or worship so as to learn more about both the challenges faced and gifts to be offered by those with disabilities:
  - ▶ Have the scripture readings signed and not voice interpreted and provide Braille copies that can be followed, but remove the regular Bibles.
  - ▶ Have the choir wear earplugs while they sing, and perhaps they—and the rest of the congregation—will not be as ready to make negative comments of persons who have difficulty singing on key because of their hearing.
  - ▶ Teach the group or congregation a song in sign language and sing it without using your voices.
  - ▶ Make your study or worship as sensory experienced as possible. Act out the Gospel message using props and bright colors. Make sure there is more than just visual and auditory stimuli, such as touch, smell, and hearing to name just a few.

- For Sunday school openings, UMM, UMW, or other group activities, place the focus of a program on Heart Havens, Camp Rainbow Connection, or disability awareness, and designate one of these programs as the beneficiary of a separate offering to be taken during that time.
- Conduct a disability awareness simulation exercise for church groups. The following activities can be conducted within the church building. They can be adapted for church members of all ages and are most successful with existing groups where relationships of trust already exist (i.e. youth group, Trustees, missions committee, Church Council). Conclude all the sessions with opportunities for participants to vent their feelings concerning the activity and the church's accessibility to ALL persons. Examples of simple, but effective activities include:
  - ▶ Borrow a wheelchair, crutches, and walker and use masking tape to keep knees and ankles together. Be careful to prevent injury by using tape that can be easily broken if balance is lost. Assign participants to visit selected areas of the church (i.e. restrooms, balcony, drinking fountains, chancel area, or enter the building from the parking lot). Follow-up by completing an accessibility audit of your church building.
  - ▶ Place slings on dominant arms, tight socks on writing hands, or tie rolled up newspapers around a limb so bending is impossible. Ask participants to eat snacks, tie shoes, put on a coat, complete a puzzle, or carry things to another room.
  - ▶ Play "Simon Says" using ear plugs or silently mouthing directions to simulate hearing challenges or conduct a "Reverse Simon Says" to simulate learning challenges. In "Reverse Simon Says," tell participants that they are to reverse the directions that are given (i.e. When I say, "Stand on your left foot," you should stand on your right foot).
  - ▶ Put cotton balls or earplugs in both ears. Assign participants to attend worship, Bible Study, or other activities and ask them to write down what the speaker is saying.
  - ▶ Wrap several layers of plastic wrap or sandwich bags to old sunglasses or rub Vaseline over existing glasses. Ask participants to read from their Sunday school materials, hymnal, or Bible.
- Invite individuals representing various types of disabilities to help educate the church. Extend invitations to individuals with disabilities to teach a special Sunday school class, sing or play an instrument during the worship service, serve as worship leader, or provide a program for a church group.
- Watch and discuss a movie or video where the main characters are people with disabilities, such as "Simon Burch," "My Left Foot," "Rainman," "Children of a Lesser God," "I am Sam," "Forrest Gump," "The Ringer," and many others. Watch a classic movie that has been closed captioned and cut the sound off or watch a movie with audio descriptions for those with limited sight.
- Each week, put a different piece of information about disabilities in the church bulletin to help awareness. Use your congregation's newsletter to increase awareness about disability-related issues.

## UM Task Force on Disability Ministries

The United Methodist Task Force on Disability Ministries is sponsored by General Board of Global Ministries and operates through the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) as part of its Health Concerns office. The vision of the Task Force is to lead The UMC, through advocacy, education, and empowerment, in creating a culture where people with disabilities are fully included in all aspects of worship, leadership and ministry. The *VOICE of the United Methodist Disability Connection* is the newsletter of the Task Force and the Disability Connection Network. The Task Force also has a presence on Facebook and LinkedIn. You can learn more about their work and subscribe to the newsletter at

[www.umdisabilityministries.org](http://www.umdisabilityministries.org) or at  
<http://new.gbgm-umc.org/umcor/work/health/disc/>

The Task Force on Disability Ministries has submitted five petitions to the 2012 General Conference for consideration. The petitions express the desire to help make all the people of The United Methodist Church more aware of those with disabilities and the desire that such persons be welcomed into all levels of our church. The petitions address the following:

1. Designating at least one program during each Conference's yearly Annual Conference in the 2013-2016 quadrennium to focus on disability awareness.
2. Establishing the "Task Force" as a permanent committee with appropriate financial resources and a broadened focus on all disabilities.
3. Moving Disability Awareness Sunday into the category of a "Special Sunday with Offering" to provide more adequate funding of existing and newly emerging ministries.
4. Changing terminology regarding "Incapacity Leave" for clergy.
5. Replacing "persons with handicapping conditions" with "persons with disabilities" in the last sentence of ¶651.2 of the **2008 Book of Discipline** which would make it consistent with other sections.



**For more information about programs of the  
Commission on Disabilities or specific church needs, contact:**

Office of Inclusivity and Lay Leadership Excellence  
Virginia Conference of The United Methodist Church  
PO Box 5606, Glen Allen, VA 23058  
(800) 768-6040 or (804) 521-1100 ext. 153 or 154  
[www.vaumc.org/disabilities](http://www.vaumc.org/disabilities)