



LIVING INTO THE **BODY OF  
CHRIST**

TOWARDS FULL INCLUSION OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES



Approved by the 217th General Assembly  
of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

INCLUDES STUDY GUIDE



**2006**

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TOWARDS FULL INCLUSION OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**

Approved by the 217th General Assembly (2006)  
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Developed by  
**The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy  
of the General Assembly Council**

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# Contents

Recommendations .....	1
Rationale .....	6
Introduction .....	6
A. From Exclusion to Accommodation—Stories on the Road to Full Inclusion .....	7
B. Where the Church Has Been and Where It Needs to Go .....	8
C. Theological and Historical Reflections: Being the Body of Christ .....	9
1. Imago Dei: All Persons Created in the Image of God.....	9
2. The Old Testament: God Calls Israel to Be Inclusive of People with Disabilities .....	10
3. Being the Body of Christ with One Another.....	10
4. The Great Banquet Feast: On Earth as It Is in Heaven .....	12
5. The Body of Christ: Many Members, One Body.....	12
a. Being the Body of Christ .....	12
b. Sharing Roles, Gifts, Services, and Talents in the Body of Christ.....	13
c. Being the Body of Christ with People with Disabilities: In Unity and Solidarity .....	13
d. Striving for “A More Excellent Way” .....	14
e. The Body of Christ: Growth for All .....	14
6. Reconciliation in the Body of Christ: The Confession of 1967.....	14
D. Historical Context.....	15
1. A Brief History of People with Disabilities in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) .....	15
2. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Today: We’ve Come a Long Way, But Still Have Far to Go ..	18
E. Stories of Growing Hope and Continuing Despair.....	19
Conclusion: The Body of Christ Moves Forward .....	20
Appendix A: Bibliography.....	20
Appendix B: The Journey of the Task Force on “Harvesting Seeds of Justice: Ministering in Church and Society with Persons Who Have Disabilities.....	22
Appendix C: People First Language.....	22
A Study Guide for Living Into the Body of Christ: Towards Full Inclusion of People with Disabilities .....	25
Introduction to the Guide .....	25
Session 1: The Body of Christ.....	27
Session 2: Old Testament Caregiving, New Testament Giving .....	29
Session 3: Towards Full Inclusion .....	31
Session 4: Creative Management and Prophetic Witness .....	35
Appendix 1: Selected Resources.....	37
Appendix 2: Disability Rights in the 20th Century United States .....	39

# ***Living into the Body of Christ: Towards Full Inclusion of People with Disabilities***

## ***Recommendations***

The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) recommends that the 217th General Assembly (2006) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.):

### **1. Approve the Introduction and “A Vision of Living into the Body of Christ”:**

#### **I. Introduction**

This report with recommendations is in response to the following referral from the 211th General Assembly (1999): “Direct the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy, in consultation with appropriate entities, to develop a comprehensive disabilities policy, including learning disabilities, disabilities prevention, and all other disabilities identified by the Resolution on ‘Disabilities Concerns,’” and report to the 217th General Assembly (2005) [2006]” (*Minutes*, 1999, Part I, pp. 41, 308–309). The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy received further instructions from the 213th General Assembly (2001): “Direct the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy to instruct its task forces on disabilities and serious mental illness to include the dimension of domestic violence and its impact in their respective work” (*Minutes*, 2001, Part I, pp. 61, 239). The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) subsequently appointed two task forces to address these matters given their wide scope. This report and recommendations focus specifically on the issues explored by the task force on disabilities, while another team focuses on Christian faith in relation to serious mental illness.

The General Assembly is invited to begin where its advisory committee began, by affirming that the church include children, youth, and adults with disabilities, while acknowledging that not every Christian community recognizes its potential for ministry. Hence, a task force of volunteers was asked to develop policy and recommendations for the church to work for justice with persons who have disabilities, both within the church itself and the wider social order. A consultation with informed Presbyterians drawn from the synods enriched the work. This policy of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) confirms that the church—the Body of Christ—is to be a fully inclusive body in all dimensions of its life. To that end, the policy begins with a necessarily comprehensive set of recommendations.

Please note that “people” or “persons” are always spoken of first, before mention of “with disabilities,” or a similar phrase, throughout the opening “vision,” the recommendations section, and the background study rationale on which the recommendations are based. This “people first” language expresses the priority of our shared humanity. And for us as Christians, it underlines that our primary identity is found in Christ, not in social labels or medical designations.

#### **II. “A Vision of Living into the Body of Christ”**

As the body of Christ, we are to welcome everyone to the banquet Feast of God’s love in this world. The Feast of God’s love is open to all and fully inclusive of people from all pathways of life.

We envision a church in which the designation or naming of a person’s disability is less important than who that person is as one of God’s people.

We envision a church in which everyone welcomes and reflects diversity and inclusiveness in worship, education, fellowship, service, justice, leadership, and evangelism.

We envision a church in which all the members of the body of Christ honor, respect, nurture, and support the gifts, talents, and services of every other member.

We envision a church in which every child of God can realize her/his full potential, and through which society is consistently engaged and challenged to become more inclusive.

We envision a church that embodies the creative movement from awareness, through accessibility and integration, to full inclusion, and thus bears healing witness to the world.

We envision the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as a leader in promoting and manifesting this vision of a just world, serving with and empowering people with disabilities to engage in this ongoing work.

**This vision of living into a fuller experience of the Body of Christ illuminates the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)’s commitment to the full inclusion of people with disabilities in every aspect of life; living into this vision draws us closer to the fulfillment of God’s redemptive will “on earth as in heaven.”**

## **2. Approve the recommendations**

**The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) makes the following recommendations to the 217th General Assembly (2006), to the General Assembly Council (GAC) and its entities, to the Office of the General Assembly (OGA) and its entities, to the middle governing bodies, to sessions, to local leaders and members, to the Board of Pensions (BOP), to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Investment and Loan Program, Inc. (PILP), to the Presbyterian Publishing Corporation (PPC), and to the Presbyterian Theological Institutions and those related to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) by covenant agreement:**

- a. The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) recommends that the 217th General Assembly (2006):**
  - (1) Affirm the witness of “That All May Enter” (1977), especially in light of its advocacy for greater access to churches and church-related institutions for people with disabilities.**
  - (2) Approve the following recommendations related to “Living into the Body of Christ: Towards Full Inclusion of People with Disabilities”:**
    - (a) approve the policy statement and recommendations;**
    - (b) receive the background sections and appendixes;**
    - (c) approve the report as a whole for churchwide study and use;**
    - (d) direct the Stated Clerk to publish the entire report “Living into the Body of Christ: Towards Full Inclusion of People with Disabilities” with appendixes and a related study/action guide; distribute it to the middle governing bodies, resource centers, sessions, libraries of the theological seminaries; and make additional copies available for sale to aid study and implementation efforts in the church; and**
    - (e) commend the members of the Task Force on “Harvesting Seeds of Justice: Ministering in Church and Society with Persons Who Have Disabilities,” the Synod Consultation on Living into the Body of Christ: Towards Full Inclusion of People with Disabilities, the staff of the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP), and the many individuals and groups who offered comments and suggestions in the development of this report on behalf of the whole church.**
- b. The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) recommends that the 217th General Assembly (2006) urge the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and its membership to do the following:**
  - (1) Give prophetic witness regarding issues related to people with disabilities, recognizing that disability concerns are a matter of social justice.**
  - (2) Be an advocate with and on behalf of people with disabilities at all levels of church and society, locally, nationally, and internationally.**
- c. The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) recommends that the 217th General Assembly (2006) direct the General Assembly Council (GAC) to do the following:**
  - (1) Facilitate, with the middle governing bodies, a strategy to educate, train, research, and provide advocacy for people living with disabilities and their families in church and society by assisting them in developing guidelines and training procedures for use by church leaders in local congregations.**

- (2) Facilitate, with the middle governing bodies, a strategy to invite and encourage people living with disabilities to seek leadership and employment positions throughout the church.**
- (3) Encourage the committees on representation and nominating committees at all levels of the church to consult with the Social Welfare Organizations office of the National Ministries Division (NMD) in engaging people living with disabilities into active governing body service.**
- (4) Encourage support of the efforts of the PC(USA)'s ecumenical partners' work (e.g., the World Council of Churches (WCC)'s Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network (EDAN) formed during the 8th Assembly of the WCC at Harare, Zimbabwe, in December 1998) to provide for the place, presence, and full inclusion of persons with disabilities in the Church Universal.**
- (5) Encourage the entities of the General Assembly (GA), the middle governing bodies, and congregations to assure that their meetings and meeting venues are accessible to and welcoming of people with disabilities.**
- (6) Encourage the Congregational Ministries Division (CMD) to support inclusive education throughout the church, supporting adaptations of current educational practices and materials as well as intentionally designing inclusive curricula.**
- (7) Encourage the Worldwide Ministries Division (WMD) to continue its support of the efforts of the PC(USA)'s partner churches and other appropriate organizations regarding persons with disabilities.**
- (8) Direct the offices of the Racial Ethnic Congregational Enhancement, Middle Eastern Ministries, Immigrant Group Ministries, and Evangelism and Racial Cultural Diversity, in partnership with the racial ethnic caucuses, the coordinating councils and networks of these offices, in partnership with the Social Welfare Organizations office of the National Ministries Division (NMD), and with all governing bodies of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), to develop strategies for the full and faithful implementation of this policy.**
- (9) Direct the Social Welfare Organizations office of the National Ministries Division (NMD) to continue to support existing programs and congregations seeking to cultivate inclusive ministries with people living with disabilities.**
- (10) Direct the Presbyterian Washington Office (PWO) of the National Ministries Division (NMD) (and other appropriate General Assembly entities) to**
  - (a) convey disability policy concerns to political leaders and church members;**
  - (b) monitor legislation addressing these concerns at the federal level, and to notify Presbyterians when they have an opportunity to influence such legislation;**
  - (c) affirm the historical strides made through the following federal legislation: the Architectural Barriers Act (1968), the Rehabilitation Act (1973), the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975, amended 1977), the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990), the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA), and the Work Incentives Improvement Act (1999); and**
  - (d) support new legislative initiatives that affirm the full humanity and advance the full inclusion of people with disabilities working whenever possible with other churches and organizations with similar goals.**

- (11) Direct the Presbyterian United Nations Office (PUNO) of the Congregational Ministries Division (CMD) (and other appropriate General Assembly entities) to convey disability policy concerns to the appropriate leaders in the United Nations.**
- d. The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) recommends that the 217th General Assembly (2006) urge the synods, and presbyteries to continue to explore ways to make their campgrounds, lodges, and retreat centers physically and programmatically accessible to people with disabilities, and commends those who have already invested heavily in these improvements.**
- e. The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) recommends that the 217th General Assembly (2006) urge pastors, sessions, and congregations do the following with and on behalf of people with disabilities:**
  - (1) Work to foster and maintain positive attitudes towards people with disabilities.**
  - (2) Encourage the self-advocacy and self-determination and full participation of people with disabilities in congregational life, spiritually, physically and programmatically.**
  - (3) Seek ways to advocate for prevention of disabling conditions, including but not limited to those caused by violence, accidents, or addictions.**
  - (4) Seek ways to advocate for improved quality of life for people with disabilities.**
  - (5) Encourage congregations to engage people with disabilities and their families in developing strategies for implementing this policy and to resist the temptation to make such individuals and families solely responsible for administering such strategies for their congregations.**
  - (6) Become aware of, and work with local organizations outside the church that can assist efforts on behalf of people with disabilities.**
  - (7) Support the effort of caregivers within their congregations.**
  - (8) Encourage congregations to monitor the items above using an annual audit form designed by the Presbyterians for Disabilities Concerns (PDC) network of the Presbyterian Health, Education and Welfare Association (PHEWA).**
  - (9) Encourage churches, though they are exempt from many of the provisions of the American Disabilities Act (ADA), to seek to satisfy the requirements of the law.**
  - (10) Commends those who have already engaged in advocacy and invested heavily in these improvements.**
- f. The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) recommends that the 217th General Assembly (2006) encourage the National Ministries Division (NMD) to disseminate this report to colleges and universities through the offices that serve the various areas of higher education: collegiate ministries/student ministries; racial ethnic schools and colleges; the National Network of Presbyterian College Women; and the Association of Presbyterian Colleges and Universities, and encourage institutions to become more intentional in developing curricula, teaching methods, admission and recruitment policies, hiring practices, and policies affecting students that create a more welcoming and supportive climate for persons living with disabilities.**
- g. The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ASCWP) recommends that the 217th General Assembly (2006):**

- (1) Gratefully recognize the faithful efforts and accomplishments that the theological institutions related to and in covenant agreement with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) through the General Assembly's Committee on Theological Education (COTE) have made in regard to people living with disabilities.**
  - (2) Urge these institutions, through COTE, to identify and include people living with disabilities in theological education, giving consideration to, and facilitating strategies for implementing more inclusive continuing education, chapel worship, spiritual formation programs, academic practices, and reasonable accommodations all in terms of people living with disabilities by encouraging seminaries to consult with Presbyterians for Disabilities Concerns (PDC) and/or the PC(USA)'s disabilities consultants.**
- h. The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) recommends that the 217th General Assembly (2006) urge the Leadership and Vocation area of the National Ministries Division (NMD) to include resources for committees on preparation for ministry and committees on ministry that assist people living with disabilities as they go through the call process.**
- i. The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) recommends that the 217th General Assembly (2006) encourage the Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations to provide reasonable accommodations for the ordination exams for people living with disabilities.**
- j. The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) recommends that the 217th General Assembly (2006) do the following:**
  - (1) Affirm the importance of the ministry of the Board of Pensions (BOP) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in serving Plan members living with disabilities, as well as Plan members charged with care for spouses or children with disabilities, through the design and administration of its Benefits Plan and Assistance Program.**
  - (2) Urge the BOP to continue to be**
    - (a) sensitive to and thoughtful about the time demands that compliance with Benefits Plan requirements for documentation of medical status and medical needs place on families already strained by a disabling condition;**
    - (b) reasonable in its requests for medical documentation and proactive in assisting families with compliance;**
    - (c) timely in its actions and communications, so that Plan members and their families are well-informed about their participation status with the Board of Pensions;**
    - (d) in direct communication with Plan members living with disabilities, so that the Board of Pensions may have a full appreciation of their particular circumstances and needs, leading to holistic care for the person and the family; and**
    - (e) in partnership with employing organizations and national and local church leadership in coordinating the scope of the Medical Plan and the Assistance Program in order to offer appropriate care for all Plan members.**
- k. The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) recommends that the 217th General Assembly (2006) require the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Investment and Loan Program, Inc. (PILP) to do the following:**
  - (1) Encourage congregations to explore "Special Incentive Loans" for accessibility and new technology projects.**

- (2) Continue the regular review and improvement of processes by which congregations may pursue loans to make their facilities and resources more accessible and inclusive of people living with disabilities.**
- I. The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) recommends that the 217th General Assembly (2006) urge the Presbyterian Publishing Corporation (PPC) to do the following:**
  - (1) Encourage its authors to use language such as “People First” that is sensitive to the needs of people living with disabilities in new publications.**
  - (2) Encourage its authors to include examples of the contributions of people with disabilities in their manuscripts.**
  - (3) Encourage its authors to promote inclusion throughout the life of the church, at all levels of worship, education, and mission, and seek to promote justice with people living with disabilities in society and the world.**
- m. The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) recommends that the 217th General Assembly (2006) instruct the General Assembly Nominating Committee (GANC) to encourage the middle governing bodies to increase the percentage of qualified people living with disabilities serving on General Assembly level committees by 1 percent per year through 2016.**

### ***Rationale***

This report with recommendations is in response to the following referral: *1999 Referral: 25.038 Response to Recommendation Directing the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy, in Consultation with Appropriate Entities, to Develop a Comprehensive Disabilities Policy, Including Hearing Disabilities, Disabilities Prevention, and Other Disabilities Identified by the Resolution on “Disability Concerns” and Report to the 217th General Assembly (2005)—From the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (Minutes, 1999, Part I, pp. 41, 308–309).*

The recommendation read as follows:

Direct the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy, in consultation with appropriate entities, to develop a comprehensive disabilities policy, including learning disabilities, disabilities prevention, and all other disabilities identified by the Resolution on “Disabilities Concerns,” and report to the 217th General Assembly (2005) [2006]” (*Minutes*, 1999, Part I, pp. 41, 308–309).

The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy received further instructions from the 213th General Assembly (2001): “Direct the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy to instruct its task forces on disabilities and serious mental illness to include the dimension of domestic violence and its impact in their respective work” (*Minutes*, 2001, Part I, pp. 61, 239). This report and recommendations focus specifically on the issues explored by the task force on disabilities, while another team focuses on Christian faith in relation to serious mental illness.

### Introduction

#### *Access Your Heart*

Please include us.  
It hurts to be excluded.  
A quick hi and a hug are not enough.  
We need real inclusion.  
When will you understand?

We are all members of the body of Christ.  
Some of us communicate in different ways.  
Some of us see differently.  
Some of us behave in ways we can't control.  
Some of us learn at different speeds.  
Some of us need wheelchairs.

Some of us walk differently.  
Some of us hear less.  
Some of us never get to come to church.  
Some of us are just left out.

We are all members of Christ's family.  
Why can't you be more welcoming?  
We are all in need of a church which welcomes and accepts us for who we are.  
We are made in God's image.  
When you forget to include us you are forgetting to include God.

Access is more than ramps and accessible bathrooms.  
The hearts of everyone need to be open and welcoming.  
When hearts are open we can really be a family in Christ.  
Open your heart.  
And let us in.

Sarah Nettleton (© 11/08/00)

The purpose of the recommendations above and the background to follow is to enable churches to welcome people with disabilities and to advocate with them for justice both within the church and in society. Justice in the Reformed perspective is marked by the exhibition of social righteousness in conduct, covenant, and relationships. It takes form in social structures that permit the flourishing of all of God's people. Therefore, full inclusion for people living with disabilities requires compassion and the establishment of a just social reality. The church exhibits its love for neighbor in the full participation of people living with disabilities, giving integrity to our advocacy for justice in the world. Seeking always the fullest life of the church, we further encourage our church to explore with other denominations new ways to embrace persons living with disabilities.

In this report, the following areas are covered:

First, having shared some stories that frame the need for the report, we outline a biblical and theological argument for total inclusion of people with disabilities into the very body of Christ, framing this argument within the historical commitment of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to justice within local communities, nations and the world.

Second, we briefly review the history of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in terms of how this denomination has approached issues facing persons with disabilities in the past.

Third, we close with additional stories of hope and despair to highlight the challenge facing the denomination in being the fully inclusive body of Christ in the world today.

#### *A. From Exclusion to Accommodation—Stories on the Road to Full Inclusion*

The need for these recommendations is best revealed in stories of those who feel excluded from the church, marginalized not by their disabling conditions, but by community. In the interest of privacy, and in an effort to make their stories more universal, the names of individuals have been changed or removed.

- A young family celebrated the birth of their premature son, "Bill." As he grew, Bill was diagnosed with a variety of disabilities and remained medically fragile. Except for a sloping, gravel sidewalk to the educational wing, the church was inaccessible. The boy's mother's hopes for an accessible church were completely dashed when the church landscaped the lawn, removed the sidewalk, and replaced it with a garden and a flight of stairs. One day, the mother was struck by a startling reality: If her son died, the church could not welcome his friends, his wheeling buddies. In that moment, she knew the church could not meet the basic ministry need of a funeral for her son. She and her family began to look for another church home, but fortunately remained Presbyterian. They found a church that was not only physically accessible, but whose church family had open hearts as well. Bill was embraced as a full participant in all the ministry programs of the church, was mentored by a teenager, and even sang in the choir. Now able to attend Sunday school, he was no longer relegated to the nursery. At last he was able to be a typical nine-year old boy, nurtured in the love of Christ.

- "Karen" was admitted to and enrolled in a seminary, sometime in the 1980s. Her mobility was such that she couldn't access the classroom on the third floor, so a separate classroom was arranged, just for her. A closed-circuit television was placed in a room on the first floor, with hookup so she could see her classmates and professor upstairs; and a direct phone line was installed, so she could communicate. That was the best accommodation the seminary could provide. Her peers found a way to do better: After a

few days, other students joined her in her first floor classroom—and thus were, despite the building, in community with her.

- “Elizabeth,” an extremely expressive twenty-eight-year-old, full-of-life woman, was in a group of a dozen young adults with developmental disorders; members of the church had been meeting with them frequently for more than four years. With the exception of just a few, most of the group were primarily unchurched, but still had some sense of a spiritual belief or need. After a period of time, several of the young adults, including Elizabeth, expressed a desire to join in Sunday worship. On the day they all came to join in the service, communion was being celebrated. One of the older women in the group passed the bread to Elizabeth saying, “this is the body of Christ, broken for you.” Elizabeth, breaking the quiet reverence of the moment, joyfully exclaimed, “For ME?!!!” Joyfully indeed.

- Two men with visual impairments, one of whom completely blind, regularly stood with rigid posture during the singing of most hymns. Mary could see them from the balcony. Soon she and the “special” bell choir director—special because it was a chime choir for adults with disabilities—included the two men. The women learned how to cue the two men through a third person, rather than directly cueing the other ringers, most of whom had developmental disorders. In a short time, the blind ringer was able to anticipate his part in the rehearsed music, and assist in keeping the rhythm intact. What a blessed outcome—to be able to participate fully in the music of the church. At a birthday party several days later, the blind man had said, “It was the most fun I’d ever had!” How sad when a bystander said, “Can you imagine how barren their lives are?”

- A mother asked the church to purchase a pediatric high-rise for the commode for her son, at a cost of \$29.99. Meanwhile, the church was already involved with an extensive renovation project, at a cost of more than \$185,000. But when the renovation was complete, nothing had been done to make the commode accessible for her son. The mother spoke up for her son; the church failed to listen.

## B. *Where the Church Has Been and Where It Needs to Go*

Disabilities vary in terms of cause, effect, and proportion; and perspectives among individuals living with a disability are similarly diverse. Just as not all so-called “able-bodied” persons think alike, persons with disabilities do not speak with one voice. In order to explore the complexities of experience, gifts, needs, and insight, it is essential to engage voices of diverse individuals at every level of conversation: theological and practical, congregational and national.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has defined persons with disabilities as follows:

Persons with disabilities are a diverse group of individuals who have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, such as relating, caring for one’s self, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, and working. (*Minutes*, 1991, Part I, p. 630)

As stated in the prospectus for this policy:

The church cannot stand in judgment of persons with disabilities, regardless of the origins of their disabling conditions. The church, following the example of Jesus Christ, must recognize that all persons—those with and without disabilities—have spiritual gifts and natural abilities that contribute to the work and the glory of God. Moreover, the church is a sent community. We are sent forth from our communities of worship to help in the transformation of our whole world. We are called to work for a just society. Our ministry in the world is to help overcome injustices by bringing about change in the attitudes and structures of society that are barriers to full participation in our common life by all the people of God. (ACSWP, “Prospectus for a Task Force of the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy on ‘Harvesting Seeds of Justice: Ministering in Church and Society with Persons Who Have Disabilities,’” 2000, p. 2.)

Further,

God calls the church to do justice, and new policy and recommendations should address the need to help individual Christians and congregations work for justice through effective advocacy independently or with organizations or faith groups having related goals. (*Ibid.*, p. 4)

The Apostle Paul’s declaration that the Church is the body of Christ is central to the way people with disabilities and people without disabilities may perceive, understand, and learn to live more fully, personally, and communally, in and as Christ’s community with one another. As members, “one of another,” Paul tells us that we are integrally related, members with one another in this mysterious, wondrous, yet very true and real body of Christ (see Rom. 12:5, 1 Cor. 12:14, and Eph. 4:11, NRSV). (Note: The issue of language and “disability” will be covered throughout this policy, using different and current

ways of talking and writing about a disability. Because all disabilities are political, decided upon by the body politic—in this case, the United States—that has authority over the lives of all people, determining the naming, classification categories, and treatments, we understood the fluidity of all labels and categories. This document will use both “persons first” language, and in some cases “deaf persons,” “deaf people,” “blind people,” or “blind persons,” which are commonly used among people who are deaf or who are blind.)

Paul states that the social divisions of his day and age—the division between Jews and Greeks, slaves and masters, women and men—are not applicable in this body, in which “. . . we were all made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:13, NRSV). The ways that all societies have labeled, categorized, classified, described, and thus divided people—be it along ethnic and racial lines, economic class, or gender (male and female; see Gal. 3:28, NRSV)—are contrary to the Kingdom of God. God’s visionary hope for this body transcends our human-constructed divisions within the church and within the world. Our work for justice within the church is never limited to the church itself. As such, the church is called to confront the barriers that deny all people—people with disabilities as well as people without—full participation in life.

In describing the roles and functions within the body of Christ, Paul declares that God does not exclude anyone from any of the gifts, services, or activities within the life of the church. There is no mention that one had to have certain intellectual gifts, physical abilities, social adaptation abilities, or sensory systems (e.g., what the body does to accommodate itself in space) for any part, place, role, or function to be members of the body of Christ. All that matters is that the Spirit of God is present in our collective life together, having drawn us together by a Holy tether “so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another” (Rom.12:5, NRSV).

Finally, we are all called, regardless of our abilities or limitations, to grow and live into the body of Christ, with Christ as the head of the body of which we are members. No one is excused from this gladsome task of discipleship, being and becoming a disciple of Christ. We must all, individually and communally, “. . . grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ ... [promoting] the body’s growth in building itself up in love” (Eph. 4:15–16, NRSV). As the body of Christ, it is our responsibility to remove all barriers and share the Gospel. In so doing, we reveal to the world a glimpse of God’s Kingdom, challenging all social systems and constructs that deny the full humanity of any person. Equally, the Gospel is a challenge to those of us with disabilities ourselves to grow in discipleship and service of others.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) rightly understands, openly acknowledges, and publicly confesses that it is not yet fully inclusive with and of people with disabilities as the body of Christ. “Living Into the Body of Christ: Towards Full Inclusion of People living with Disabilities” challenges the church to be not more inclusive, but to be a fully inclusive body of believers, united in Christ, and a living witness to the entire world.

### *C. Theological and Historical Reflections: Being the Body of Christ*

As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are committed to working towards full integration of our worship, education, fellowship, counseling, and all other activities. Further, we are called to fulfill the Great Ends of the Church that call Presbyterians to “the promotion of social righteousness; and the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world” (*Book of Order*, G-1.0200). In order to do this important work of the Gospel where we worship, work, learn, and live, it is essential to be rooted in the biblical imperative for us to be a fully inclusive church. To that end, we are guided by the following theological truths.

#### *1. Imago Dei: All Persons Created in the Image of God*

We believe that all people—regardless of our abilities or limitations, or what any society labels as an ability or disability—are created in the image of the Creator God, created to be in relationship with God and one another.

In Genesis 1:1–2:4a (NRSV), (this is understood to be the Priestly or “P” account of the creation story) the story of creation, it is written that “. . . God created humankind in [God’s] image, in the image of God [God] created them; male and female [God] created them. . . . God saw everything that [God] had made, and indeed, it was very good” (Gen. 1:27, 31, NRSV).

To be created in the image of God means that humankind is created with the potential of relationships, of creative use of power, and of freedom of choice within limits, which are all necessary for

humankind to do all God wants and desires us to do. God delights in the relationship of Creator and creation, Creator and creatures, wanting all people to live as fully as possible in a relationship that is based upon a free, loving, gracious commitment, and invitation [Brett Webb-Mitchell, *Unexpected Guests at God's Banquet: Welcoming People with Disabilities into the Church* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1994), p. 53]. All people are created in the image of God is the basis for human equality.

## 2. *The Old Testament: God Calls Israel to Be Inclusive of People with Disabilities*

In the history of ancient Israel there are at least two different perspectives on treatment of people with disabilities. Overall, we have the scriptural heritage of our current knowledge of the complex lives of people with disabilities, lacking in scientific understanding, and sometimes prone to attribute disabilities to sin.

For example, there are holiness laws that were strict about what would be offered on the sacrificial altar in worship of God. An animal with a blemish of any kind might not be offered to God (Lev. 22:22, NRSV). Like animals, people with disabilities are also unable to present an offering to God in the Temple: "... No one of your offspring throughout their generations who has a blemish may approach to offer the food of his God. For no one who has a blemish shall draw near, one who is blind or lame, or one who has a mutilated face or a limb too long, or one who has a broken foot or a broken hand, or a hunchback, or a dwarf, or a man with a blemish in his eyes or an itching disease or scabs or crushed testicles" (Lev. 21:17-20, NRSV). While such passages as this from Leviticus describe a social order based on degrees of separation and purity many in the church today would find normal daily living skills highly restricted by such cultic laws.

Yet there are passages that call the people of Israel to be kind and care for people with disabilities. For example, among the pilgrims who were moving for forty years in the wilderness, we read that "Cursed be anyone who misleads a person who is blind on the road. All the people shall say, 'Amen.'" (Deut. 27:18, NRSV), or the passage from Leviticus: "You shall not revile the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind; you shall fear your God: I am the Lord" (Lev. 19:14, NRSV) (Ibid., pp. 53-55).

Furthermore, in Isaiah God says,

... I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you; I will say to the north, "Give them up," and to the south, "Do not withhold; ... everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made." Bring forth the people who are blind, yet have eyes, who are deaf, yet have ears! Let all the nations gather together, and let the peoples assemble. ... You are my witnesses, says the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. (Is. 43:5-6a, 7-10, NRSV).

The Old Testament witness in these passages is clear: the people who are considered disabled are to be included among the throng of followers who are under the covenant of God's love, promise, and hope. Note that various leaders of the people of Israel throughout the Old Testament have lived with a disability: Jacob with his physical limitations; Moses with his language problem; Naaman with leprosy; Mephibosheth with his physical disability, et al. In choosing these most-unlikely people to be leaders of the Israelites, our attention is on the ways that God uses those the rest of us would not necessarily choose to be vessels of God's message of love for all creation. God is the premier advocate and defender of the place and presence of people with disabilities among the chosen people of Israel, reaching out to those who seek justice from any prejudice against them (Ibid., p. 56).

## 3. *Being the Body of Christ with One Another*

While the Old Testament provides laws, commandments, blessings, and words encouraging the people of Israel to take care of people with disabilities among them, these words come alive, gain flesh, muscle, and bone, in the living Good News, Jesus Christ, especially among people whom the world calls disabled. Indeed, it is through Jesus' explicit ministry with people with disabilities that justice becomes a reality.

According to all Gospel accounts, Jesus continually kept company and surrounded himself with the outcasts of Jewish society, including people with disabilities. The Gospels are full of parables and situations where Jesus is living among those whom, even today, we would categorize as persons with disability. For example, in stories of humility and hospitality, Jesus tells the story of a wedding banquet, in which the host is to be sure not to invite just one's friends or kin, especially the rich neighbor, "... in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor,

[people with disabilities, especially people with physical disabilities], and blind [persons]" (Luke 14:13, NRSV). [Please note that the text in the NRSV reads "those who are crippled, the lame, and the blind" (Luke 14:13).] The image of the wedding banquet upends the community's expectation, offering a glimpse of the heavenly table where those who were once at the margins are fully included and enjoy places of great esteem.

Jesus constantly surrounded himself with and moved among people with either obvious or hidden disabilities as evidenced in the following stories: the man with leprosy (Mark 1:40–45, NRSV), the woman hemorrhaging (Mark 5:34, NRSV), two men who are blind (Matt. 9:27–32, NRSV), the calling of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1–10, NRSV), sitting with people who are blind (John 9, NRSV), or the healing of the "one who was mute" (Matt. 9:32–34, NRSV). Jesus practiced a ministry of being with others, not a ministry of always doing to or for others, even in his healings.

Alongside these narratives, Jesus himself challenges what some have called "victim theology," in which the "person with a disability is blamed for their lack of faith, which accounts for their disabilities not being healed; accuse the person of possessing demons, which must be exorcized; say that through the sufferings of persons with disability God shows forth God's glory and power; or blame disability on either the sins of parents or of a [person with a disability]" (Arne Frison and Samuel Kabue, *Interpreting Disability: A Church for All and for All* [Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches, 2004], pp. 21–22). In such a theological move, the "burden for healing is on the person with a disability, causing further suffering and continued alienation from faith communities" (John 9:2, NRSV), (Ibid., p. 22).

We understand that, for each person with any kind of disability, the relationship between healing and a person's limitation is "both ambivalent and ambiguous." The biblical witness regarding healing is tentative, relative, ambivalent, ambiguous, and ongoing. Healing can bring joy and relief. "It can also bring pain, frustration, and serious theological questions" (Ibid.).

Yet within the scope of salvation history, it is important to remember that God in Christ is the self-revelation of God throughout all eternity. The God who is love became the living embodiment of that love in becoming human, in the person of Jesus Christ. In his healing of others, Jesus directs our attention to the liberating, reconciling, empowering love of God. We focus on a portion of a person's life, like a disabling condition, while Jesus brings wholeness to the individual, serving as a unique sign of God's salvation in that healing moment, and always in the context of relationship: God the Creator with humankind, God's creation. [Note: What is interesting about these healing narratives is that we do not read what Jesus cleansed or healed anyone so thoroughly that they never got sick again or did not die from some other cause. It was just in that moment, at that time, in certain circumstances, that God in Christ chooses to reveal the healing nature of God's unequivocal love.]

Theologian Dorothee Soelle writes about the extraordinary ability that Jesus models for us in being able to identify with people who are sick or have disabilities, being there for the sufferer's sake, because Jesus also suffered. God in Christ heals us all of our brokenness and limitations by taking on our wounds, tears, and aches of humanity. Jesus thus fulfills the Old Testament Scriptures, taking on our infirmities and bearing our diseases (Isa. 53:4, Matt. 8:17, NRSV). Jesus willingly takes upon himself the burdens of humanity, transforming the dross of life by the hope of a new creation and a new world, imbuing in each person dignity, worth, self-respect, and love.

In his ministry of being with others, Christ took upon himself the wounds and sorrows of the human race. God in Christ is present in the person who is ill, has a disability, or lives with chronic pain. In the act of caring with and for one another, we know, in a deep and significant way, the living God, who is our hope and future.

We stress that the love of God, and the God who is love, are known through such acts of humility, generosity, and care; it is in relationships with others that we also know God in deep and significant ways. It is important to point out that Scripture does not say that the one with a disability cannot be the caregiver, or that the person who is considered "sick" is not able to reciprocate.

Throughout the Gospels, God shapes a people to live in community, as the Church, in full inclusion of people with disabilities. Through the ministry of Jesus, we witness a new day, a new approach towards and with people living with disabilities. We are to be a people who live with each other's strengths and weaknesses, abilities and limitations, living in solidarity with one another. We come to understand that the "weakest" brother or sister is sometimes the strongest. As the hymn goes, "Bind us together Lord, with

ords that cannot be broken...Bind us together in love. There is only one God, there is only one King; there is only one body, that is why we sing.” (Bob Gillman, “Bind Us Together,” *Sing the Faith* (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 2003), Hymn 2226.)

#### 4. *The Great Banquet Feast: On Earth as It Is in Heaven*

Along with Jesus’ ministry of presence with people with disabilities, Jesus offered a “sneak peek” into the ways of God’s reign, with various parables. One of the most significant parables of God’s realm, displaying full inclusion of people with disabilities among God’s people, is the parable of the Great Banquet Feast (Luke 14: 15–24, Matt. 22:1–14, NRSV). The importance of such parables such as the “Kingdom of God parable” is that we are reminded, as we pray the Lord’s Prayer, that we should be living on earth as it is in heaven (Matt. 6:10, NRSV). [Scholars understand that the Kingdom of God may also be understood to be “Dominion of God,” “God’s realm,” or “the reign of God.”]

This parable turns on its head the way in which we perceive persons with disabilities. It describes in detail and points out to all followers of Christ that in the Realm of God, those whom society sees as the outcasts—the “disabled ones”—are truly the wisest who kindly and graciously accept the invitation to be part of God’s realm (Webb-Mitchell, op.cit., p. 91).

This powerful parable may truly influence our ecclesiological imagination, encouraging us to find ways to welcome people with disabilities in light of the Host’s invitation that unlabeled the disabled. Because we live in communities sustained by the stories we find within Holy Scripture, and because the Scriptures are anew in the presence of people living with disabilities, we all discover anew what is revealed in these Scriptures. Being part of God’s kingdom on earth, determines how we are to live with one another on earth: as welcomed “banquet guests” of God’s Realm. This is our call and our witness to the world.

#### 5. *The Body of Christ: Many Members, One Body*

Theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer believed that the visible church is the body of Christ today:

The body of Christ can only be a visible body, or else it is not a body at all. This is a result of the incarnation: God in Christ came into his own as a baby in Bethlehem. Christ’s body is both the ground of our faith and continual assurance of that faith as we are caught up into eternity by the act of God as members of the body of Christ. [Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, (New York: Macmillan Press, 1975), pp. 263, 277.]

Being members, one of another, given the parable of the Banquet, we are given a basis for common action so that our Christian community of life more closely reflects our shared vision of God’s Realm (Webb-Mitchell, op. cit., pp. 91–92). In Paul’s letter to the Romans, even though we are children of Adam (collectively), because of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we read that “... our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For whoever has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him” (Rom. 6:6–8, NRSV). All have died with Christ and now find ourselves in Christ. “While the image of God in Adam (the old humanity) was marred ... we are [now] in God’s image because we are in Christ” (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* [Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1991], p. 454).

In *Interpreting Disability: A Church of All and for All*, we read that if Christ is the true image of God, then being in Christ is being in the body of Christ, in which we become part of the true image of God. This is essentially a corporate image; a body is made up of many members, all of whom bring different contributions to the whole (1 Cor. 12, NRSV, Rom. 12, NRSV) (Fritzon and Kabue, op. cit., p. 17).

Given that we are members of the body of Christ, what does it mean to be fully inclusive of people with disabilities in the modern world?

##### a. *Being the Body of Christ*

In Paul’s references to the body of Christ—whether it is his letter to the Romans, Corinthians, Colossians, or reportedly the Ephesians—there are no remarks regarding who can or cannot be part of this body. People are not relegated to any one body “part” because of a person’s ability or visible limitation. The Holy Spirit alone chooses which role or function, gift or service, each person contributes within this united body.

This body has no division or hierarchy based upon one’s gender, economic class, or ethnic or national heritage (Gal. 3:28, NRSV). These divisions existed in the time that Paul was writing to the Corinthian

Church. We could quickly add contemporary divisions which have kept people apart (Ibid., p. 25). Our unity, our common ground, is our being baptized into the one body, where "... we are all made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:13, NRSV).

b. *Sharing Roles, Gifts, Services, and Talents in the Body of Christ*

It should be no surprise that the person living with a disability brings to the body of Christ his or her God-given gifts. In a congregation where one is shown acceptance and love, in loving relationship with one's family, friends, and members of Christ's body, each person's potential gift, talent, or service may be realized, and in doing so, God will be glorified.

Moreover, against our culture's inflated individualism of this day and age we are confronted by the Spirit of God who calls us into community. We are to share our gifts, talents, and services with one another, as Christ shared his life, his love, with us. The sense of one being the "lone pioneer" and buying into the need to be self-sufficient, the "pull yourself up by your own bootstraps" model of living, is not present in this model of ministry or living together in the body of Christ.

Rather, the life we live is one in which we refer and defer to the gifts, talents, and services of the body of Christ. It is a life of dependence upon God and interdependence with one another. The church is called to embrace the gifts, talents, and services of all people and to free individuals and communities to live as agents of God's justice in the world.

c. *Being the Body of Christ with People with Disabilities: In Unity and Solidarity*

This is our future: in the body of Christ, with the elimination of all barriers, boundaries, divisions, categories, and classifications, there is no longer "us" versus "them" in the body of Christ. The goal of this policy is to eliminate classifications and embrace our true unity in Christ. Further, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is called to confront systems and structures throughout society that perpetuate all such forms of injustice.

For example, as the surrounding society created special schools for persons with disabilities, or segregated classrooms in public schools for people with disabilities, so too did the church: we created special classrooms for people with disabilities, and special churches and chapels on state institution grounds. To this day, there are still special worship services for people with developmental disorders throughout the country, held at different times and places than Sunday morning worship. Likewise, there are still segregated Sunday school classes with special curricular that mirror the material written and the approach taken in 1950s and 1960s America.

In the 1970s, many school districts dealt with special education through a "mainstreaming" approach. Mainstreaming involved the following practice: placing a child with a disability into a public classroom with his or her peers throughout most of the day, making no special adaptations per se in the classroom itself, and offering remedial courses in another corner of the classroom or a special education classroom in another part of the building. Again, the church in many ways followed this approach, merely placing a person with a disability in Sunday worship, Sunday school, adult Bible studies, and youth groups, with no adaptations on behalf of the person with a disability or the congregation per se. This approach still did not erase the "us" versus "them" mentality. It is worth noting that not all parents of children with special needs are in favor of mainstreaming. Some feel their children receive more focused attention when schooled separately, while others prefer to have their children fully integrated into the larger classroom; it is important to recognize this difference and wherever possible offer both options.

From the late 1980s until today, "inclusion" is the central strategy of special educators and social activists in the "disability community." [Note: We use this term with quotations because we recognize there is not a homogeneous community of "the disabled," but a collective or network of many groups of people with disabling conditions, who do not necessarily agree with one another about many issues regarding the place, presence, treatment, education, health care, or language about and of people with disabilities.] Inclusion involved rearranging not only the classroom's physical layout, but the entire curriculum and class of students as well. A classroom that is inclusive will function as a community, a model of the larger society. The goal is to see that people with disabilities and those without disabilities will relate to one another not as "us" versus "them," but as "we," as a community of learners that recognizes the contributions, gifts, and abilities of every member.

Among many advocates on behalf of people with disabilities, including people with disabilities, the motto in regards to civil rights is "nothing about us without us," arguing that the very person with a

disability is to be included in all discussions regarding the overall life of persons with a disability. We are proposing that we go further: bringing the future into today, by proposing that there be no more “us” and “them,” but that we live in the “we-ness” of the body of Christ. That is the solidarity, the unity that we aim for in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Indeed, it is the solidarity we seek throughout the world.

d. *Striving for “A More Excellent Way”*

So how do we become a fully inclusive body of Christ? We do so by striving for “the greater gift...the more excellent way” (1 Cor. 12:31, NRSV), e.g., agape love. Agape love is an act of the will. As Frederick Buechner reminds us, “When Jesus tells us to love our neighbors, he is not telling us to love them in the sense of responding to them with a cozy emotional feeling. ... On the contrary, he is telling us to love our neighbors in the sense of being willing to work for their well-being even if it means sacrificing our own well-being to that end, even if it means sometimes just leaving them alone” (Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking* [New York: Harper Row, 1973], p. 54).

The need to be in community with people with disabilities, who have often times been excluded from the church, must be addressed, confessed, righted, and affirmed by congregations in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). In so doing, we gain credibility and deepen our integrity in our prophetic witness to the larger world. Paul himself knew of his own “strengths and weaknesses,” acknowledged his own “thorn in the flesh,” and thanked God for the conversion and call experience that temporarily disabled him.

e. *The Body of Christ: Growth for All*

In Ephesians 4:15–16 (NRSV), the writer states that “... we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ ... [promoting] the body’s growth in building itself up in love.” Growth is an integral part of being the body of Christ, of which all the members are to partake. No one is excused from the growth of the awareness of the Spirit’s indwelling within this body, and how that awareness enables the body itself to grow more deeply, expanding into the horizon of God’s love.

The title of this policy, “Living into the Body of Christ,” was written with the emphasis of the dynamic, innate sense of growth and aliveness that being a member of the body of Christ is all about. We honor and expect that we are all on the road, on a pilgrimage, of being and becoming members, one of another, in the body of Christ, itself growing and building up in the love of God. This love is made palpable in the relationships we have with one another.

Growing in the body of Christ lifts up the question: how do we teach and learn? In the past two hundred years, growing in faith has often been equated with the acquisition of knowledge or information. Such practices as rote memorization of Bible verses, the recitation of creeds and confessions, and theological learning in a structured classroom setting with rows of students listening to a lecturer, while appropriate for some, are not achievable for others. Because of this academic focus (a blessing and curse for some Presbyterians), many times people with emotional disorders, behavioral disorders, learning disabilities, developmental disorders (such as autism and mental retardation), sensory and hearing impairments, and speech and language problems, have been excluded from Christian education, exiled in nursery classrooms or in other activities that fail to stimulate or nurture their spiritual lives.

The education, nurture, and growth of Christians are more than individual acquisitions of facts or information. For example, in recent years the focus of much education in the life of the church for people of all ages has been Christian practices. This renewed focus on Christian practices not only embraces the communal or congregational aspects of education but may also be a way forward for a Christian formation that fully includes people with all kinds of abilities and limitations.

6. *Reconciliation in the Body of Christ: The Confession of 1967* [The Confession of 1967—Inclusive Language Text, (Louisville, Ky.: Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Office of Theology and Worship, 2002), 9.01–.56]

Even though we read that the body of Christ consists of many members (1 Cor. 12:14, NRSV), in which all members should honor and respect one another, there are some members with disabilities who have been dishonored, considered dispensable, and treated with disrespect and open disregard within the church. Such experiences have led to dissension, protest, anger, frustration, sadness, unbelief, hurt, indignation, and a sense of haunting despair among many people with disabilities, their friends, family, and advocates, towards the church.

This is not the first time that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (and its predecessors) found such tension and dissension between people with disabilities and those who are able-bodied. During the 1960s, during the height of racial tension in the United States, the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (UPCUSA) created and affirmed The Confession of 1967. In Part II, “The Ministry of Reconciliation,” Section A. The Mission of the Church, 4.”Reconciliation in Society,” the following is written:

In each time and place there are particular problems and crises through which God calls the church to act. The church, guided by the Spirit, humbled by its own complicity and instructed by all attainable knowledge, seeks to discern the will of God and learn how to obey in these concrete situations. The following are particularly urgent at the present time.

a. God has created the peoples of the earth to be one universal family. In his reconciling love God overcomes the barriers between sisters and brothers and breaks down every form of discrimination based on racial or ethnic difference, real or imaginary. The church is called to bring all people to receive and uphold one another as persons in all relationships of life: in employment, housing, education, leisure, marriage, family, church, and the exercise of political rights. (Ibid., 9.44 a.)

As Presbyterians, we believe that along with overcoming the barriers between sisters and brothers based upon racial or ethnic differences, “real or imaginary,” that there has been a barrier separating people who are considered by the world to be disabled and those who are not disabled. This wall was torn down by Jesus Christ. “For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us” (Eph. 2:14, NRSV). As the body of Christ, the Church is called to tear down the dividing walls that exist in society as well.

The Confession of 1967 continues:

b. The reconciliation of humankind through Jesus Christ makes it plain that enslaving poverty in a world of abundance is an intolerable violation of God’s good creation. Because Jesus identified himself with the needy and exploited, the cause of the world’s poor is the cause of his disciples...A church that is indifferent to poverty, or evades responsibility in economic affairs, or is open to one social class only, or expects gratitude for its beneficence makes a mockery of reconciliation and offers no acceptable worship to God. (Ibid., 9.46 c.)

This paragraph is instructive in that it echoes the passages from Scripture already highlighted in this policy: “Because Jesus identified himself with the needy and exploited, the cause of the world’s poor is the cause of his disciples” (Ibid.). For us to remain indifferent to those who are needy, in this case those with disabilities who have been marginalized and disenfranchised from various parts of society, is to make a “mockery of reconciliation and offers no acceptable worship of God” (Ibid.). If the chief end, chief purpose of our creation, is to glorify God, (The Shorter Catechism, *The Book of Confessions* [Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 2004], 7.001), then we must, as Christians shaped by the theological heritage of the Reformed tradition, work towards justice, committing to and working with people with disabilities in every part of the life of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), in every part of society, and indeed, in every part of the world.

We are thus called to be advocates in the wider society, working with others with disabilities, their family, friends, associates, and advocates, for the full-inclusion of people in all parts of social life. In doing so, the church looks “beyond all partial achievement ... to the final triumph of God”—full participation in life abundant.

#### D. *Historical Context*

##### 1. *A Brief History of People with Disabilities in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*

A sense of widespread injustice emerged in the 1960s within society. Driven largely by parents of children with disabilities, advocates drew attention to major needs: for special educational programs; targeted health care programs; and increased economic opportunities, including for adult-children. Institutions with people with certain disabling conditions were experimenting with “group homes,” and supervised living arrangements, and more people with disabilities were finding their voices and demanding justice. The “Special Olympics” and “Paralympics” were being organized for the first time. Along with the civil rights movements of African Americans and women’s groups in the 1960s, other designated “minority groups” were gaining political muscle and presence, be it in the surrounding society or in the church.

In 1970 and 1973 the General Assemblies of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (UPCUSA) made two brief references regarding the needs and concerns “for the mentally retarded.” In those days, there was not much in the way of any organization that met or addressed the

needs of persons with disabilities in the denomination. The same was true in the Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS). Furthermore, no curriculum by any of the major denominational publishing houses addressed the Christian educational, pastoral care, fellowship, or worship needs of persons with disabilities. Accessibility issues were largely unaddressed in a uniform manner by all denominations. The place and presence of people with disabilities in our culture and society, however, started to shift, and, in due time, changed drastically in the latter part of the 1970s. As a result, in 1977 the 189th General Assembly of the UPCUSA adopted (as revised) *Overture 16. On Responding to the Concerns of the Handicapped* ["That All May Enter" (TAME)]. This report was meant to be "a resource for congregations looking for ways to address the issue of disabled persons in our community" (From *That All May Enter* document's inside cover page [Louisville, Ky.: Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 1989]). [This report was adopted by the 189th General Assembly (1977), United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (*Minutes*, UPCUSA, 1977, Part I, pp. 99–102).]

When this document was written, approved, and published, very few churches of any denomination had published a policy paper on disability. The document itself was, in part, a response to the meeting of the World Council of Churches (Nairobi, Kenya, 1975), which adopted the first general statement of purpose related to the "role of the church and the <sup>33</sup>handicapped" (Ibid., p. 15). Harold Wilke's *Creating the Caring Congregations* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1980) remains a milestone in the literature on persons with disabilities in the Church. The Reverend Harold Wilke of the United Church of Christ (UCC) created the Healing Community Project in 1973 as a national interfaith and interdenominational ministry to the religious community. Its purpose was to create new models of ministry "with the disabled, as well as with others in our society who are alienated from the mainstream of life for whatever the reasons" (Ibid., p. 15). With "That All May Enter," the UPCUSA shared leadership in thinking theologically and acting prophetically to welcome people living with disabilities into congregational life, and in advocating for greater justice for people with disabilities in the larger society. Throughout the years since then, many other Protestant denominations, including the United Church of Christ, the United Methodist Church, the Episcopal Church (USA), the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) (and its predecessors), plus the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches have used this document in crafting their own policies.

Since the adoption of "That All May Enter" in 1977, many congregations have responded to its challenge to ensure that all may physically enter into the life of a Presbyterian congregation. And the church as a whole was continually challenged to advocate for the full civil rights of persons with disabilities in the surrounding society.

Since Presbyterian reunion in 1983, General Assemblies of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) have adopted a new confession, a new catechism, and a number of policies and resolutions that influenced the lives of people living with disabilities in the church. Issues from domestic violence to restorative justice have been examined theologically, analyzed through social policies, and become more visible in the whole church's social witness. Indeed, many of these policies, from peacemaking to environmental issues, abortion to persons living with HIV/AIDS, are issues that also concern people with disabilities in the church and in the world.

While people with disabilities have been recognized within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and have had the case made for their being welcomed into the lives of congregations, there has been a more significant proactive movement by and with persons with disabilities in the United States. With the passage of various federal, state, and county laws in the United States, as well as new funding, medical and educational research, and the civil rights movement among persons with disabilities, people living with disabilities no longer are fighting simply for more than physical access. People with disabilities demand nothing less than to be fully included into the lives of their neighborhoods, communities, health care centers, workplaces, schools, stores, restaurants, places of governmental services, and religious institutions.

For example, building on Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, prohibiting discrimination against people with disabilities in all federally funded services including transportation, the "Education for All Handicapped Children Act" was passed in 1978. This federal law provided moneys to establish free and appropriate education for all children. And in 1990, the "Americans with Disabilities Act" (ADA), heralded by many as the "civil rights bill" for people with disabilities, became law. We encourage churches, though they are exempt from many of the provisions of the ADA, to seek to satisfy the requirements of the law in providing accessible facilities and reasonable accommodations to all persons living with disabilities.

Along with various federally mandated public laws and pending bills that address the housing, employment, health, retirement, and educational rights of persons with disabilities, there has also been a social movement among many people with disabilities and their families, friends, and advocates towards securing equal justice and equal rights for all people. The politics of disability rights has taken form in various social movements: the self-advocacy movement, e.g., “People First” (See Appendix C, “People First Language”, p. 22); the self-determination movement; the planned or ad-hoc deinstitutionalization program of large state-run institutions; the euthanasia or “right to die,” “right to live,” and “Not Dead Yet” debates; concern about domestic abuse of people with disabilities; the abortion debate; and the rights of those people who have been affected by the persistent spread of HIV/AIDS. All of these issues and social movements raised concerns among people with disabilities and allies who are rightfully demanding nothing less than full-inclusion in all areas of society, including religious institutions of all faiths.

The emergence of computer technology since 1977 has given many (but not all) people a new means of communicating with one another. Most important, advanced computer technology has been a breakthrough innovation for many people with disabilities, who were once silent and silenced because of their inability to express themselves, letting their voices and opinions be heard and known.

In the fields of medicine and various therapies, there have been great advances. Issues about “quality of life” have become more prominent in all health care discussions. Amid new therapies, inventions of new drugs, the rise of Eastern medicines and therapies, and the possibility of living longer, there are not only more people living with disabilities, but there are therapeutic regimens that may enable people to live longer, fuller lives, regardless of ability. New prosthetics and redesigned wheel chairs, often with sophisticated electronics, are giving people new freedoms in the areas of mobility and movement.

Deinstitutionalization has also had a large effect upon the life of communities. Whereas many children and adults with disabilities were once placed in private or state-run institutions, deinstitutionalization has become a widespread movement in many states. [People like Wolf Wolfensberger and others have written extensively on this movement, whose roots are in the Scandinavian countries. Burton Blatt’s *Christmas in Purgatory: A Photographic Essay on Mental Retardation* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Human Policy Press, 1974) depicts the demeaning living situations in such state-run facilities. Providing homes for persons with disabilities remains a basic and critical need in this country, although much progress has been made in supporting individuals in living in the community, rather than in institutions. The proportion of individuals with developmental disorders living in homes for one to six persons has increased to 65 percent; settings for seven to fifteen persons comprise 12 percent, and 23 percent live in institutional settings of more than sixteen persons. There is wide variation by state in the use of institutional settings, which severely limits choices for many individuals. In Mississippi, for example, 49 percent of the persons with developmental disorders receiving residential settings live in large institutions. Residential services across the country are funded almost entirely with Medicaid funds, allowing states to leverage matching state and local funds effectively. If Medicaid funding continues to be threatened on the state and federal levels, however, the effects on these supports for persons with disabilities would be devastating.] Deinstitutionalization promoted the presence of persons with disabilities in our neighborhoods and communities, closing down enormous warehouse-like institutional facilities. New group homes sprung up in urban and suburban neighborhoods, often facing fights from their neighbors without disabilities who feared that the presence of people with disabilities would bring down house values. New group homes still face resistance and zoning challenges in various neighborhoods, but not as often as years ago. Some communities welcome people with disabilities with open houses and welcome mats rolled out for one and all. Yet many churches around these group homes have not welcomed people with disabilities. In response to this neglect and, in some cases actual inhospitable acts, some people with disabilities have remained unaffiliated with any local church.

Marriage among people with disabilities, including people living with mental retardation, is no longer seen as unusual. Couples are moving into neighborhoods and into supervised independent living apartments, houses, and townhouses. With improvements in availability and accessibility, people with disabilities have access to a variety of options: jobs and housing, places of worship, theaters, restaurants, parks, self-advocacy, and political gatherings. Most important, by moving into neighborhoods, people with disabilities are moving next door to our churches and parishioners. Yet mass transportation on Sunday mornings is often a major problem for people with disabilities who live on their own, where public transportation schedules may be restrictive or where such transportation may not exist at all.

Architecturally, there are more buildings, including churches, mosques, and synagogues, which are adapted or designed with the hope that people with disabilities will be part of the worshipping community. There have been advances not only in architectural design and technology, but also in attitudes or transformed perceptions of people’s worth and the importance of diversity, such that many

are more welcoming of people living with disabilities who once faced many barriers. There is increased attention in the field of architecture generally towards so-called universal design, which improves access for all people, e.g., curb cuts, ramps, and electric doors are beneficial to mothers with strollers, workers with heavy equipment, etc.

Some deaf people regard themselves as members of a cultural and language minority, more similar to an ethnic minority, rather than individuals with a disability. Some deaf see their deafness, language, and their culture as a gift from God. In Washington, D.C., there is a statue of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who had polio, now portrayed as seated in his wheelchair. There have been innovative theater productions of Broadway musicals, along with countless television series, that focus on the place and presence of people with disabilities in this world. Very Special Arts, Art “Brut,” and art by people with disabilities have been seized upon by the art world, with new exhibitions drawing art critics’ praises. [Gerry Hendershop, a consultant on disability statistics and Senior Research Advisor to the National Organization on Disabilities, does an excellent job in pulling together art exhibits with artwork by people with disabilities.]

Colleges and universities created special education majors in departments and schools of education where none existed in the 1950s. Alongside special education and remedial education programs in private and public education, there has been a rise in the number of occupational, physical, speech, music, art, dance, and drama therapies in the United States. Ongoing research on families with children with disabilities has mushroomed, and there are more parent-to-parent gatherings and parent support groups. Meanwhile, educational programming happens earlier and earlier in the life of a child with a disability, with early intervention programs and other identifying programs, often as soon as the baby with a disabling condition is born.

There has been an explosion of new diagnoses and re-drawn definitions of what constitutes a disability. In the 1950s, less than one hundred disabilities or diagnostic-labels were designated in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual: Mental Disorder (DSM) (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual: Mental Disorders*, First Edition [DSM]. Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Association, Mental Hospital Service, 1952). Today, the fourth revision of the DSM includes over three hundred diagnostic-labels (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Fourth Edition, Text Revision [DSM-IV-TR®]. Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Association, 2000). An even more expansive list of disabling conditions may be found in: *The International Classification of Diseases*, Ninth Revision, Clinical Modification (ICD-9-CM). Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics, 2005. The labels themselves have changed: in the 1960s someone with a low I.Q. was mentally retarded, with various subgroups under that; today the label is “developmentally delayed,” with mental retardation and autism as subgroups. Furthermore, countries differently label and name the same condition (e.g., what is “mental retardation” in the United States is a “learning disability or difficulty” in England).

## 2. *The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Today: We’ve Come a Long Way, But Still Have Far to Go*

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has not responded consistently to the rapidly developing opportunities and issues facing people living with disabilities in the current context. Many of the national meetings of the various groups of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) are difficult for people with disabilities to attend, let alone participate or be major presenters. Many of our retreat centers and presbytery-owned campgrounds are physically inaccessible to people with disabilities. Our curricula in our Sunday schools, seminaries, and colleges are often not inclusive.

However, there are signs of hope emerging in the denomination. For example, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)’s Social Welfare Organizations office of the National Ministries Division (NMD) contracts with disability consultants who advise the whole church in areas regarding mobility, hearing, visual, and developmental disabilities. The Presbyterians for Disability Concerns (PDC), a network of the Presbyterian Health, Education and Welfare Association (PHEWA), reaches out to include people living with disabilities in leadership roles in church and society. The PDC produces newsletters, an annual Access Sunday Packet, and other disability resources.

Some Presbyterian churches are architecturally accessible to people with primarily physical disabilities, with more ramps and elevators in existing structures, along with spaces for wheelchairs among the rows of church pews. Some are welcoming to people with visual impairments with large print materials and to the blind with signs in Braille. Some are accessible to people with hearing impairments or who are deaf with sign-language interpreters available at worship. And some congregations have programs that are inclusive of people with developmental, emotional, and behavioral disorders in worship, fellowship events, youth groups, and Sunday school. But the numbers of our churches that have

met these needs is still radically in need of expansion. We need to embrace accessibility as an arm of evangelism, in order to reach out and embrace those who are still being excluded by existing barriers.

Some of our national retreat centers have ramps for people using wheelchairs, smoother walkways, more accessible rooms, bathrooms, and other amenities, with accessibility studies having been completed at some of these centers. Similarly, the theological institutions related to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) are making efforts to become more accessible for people with disabilities, especially people with physical or sensory impairments, and for some students with learning disabilities. And some colleges related to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) are increasingly accessible to people with particular disabilities. But again, more needs to be done.

#### *E. Stories of Growing Hope and Continuing Despair*

Having covered the general history of the church and society in which persons with disabilities have a growing presence and place, it is important to understand what it means to live life with a disability in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). For example, 14 to 20 percent of the memberships of our churches are people who self-identify as persons with disabilities, and the number of people with disabilities in the country at large is rising.

But these statistics fail to show the ups and downs of the lives of people with disabilities, along with their families and friends, advocates, and health service professionals. Since 1977, when the denomination approved the statement “That All May Enter,” we have been a denomination enriched and shaped by stories like the following. May these stories of hope and despair give rise to action.

- “Tommy,” a young person with autistic behaviors, was welcomed into the church’s confirmation class by the young associate pastor of the church where he attended, leading to Tommy’s confirmation into the fuller life of the church. But this was prompted by his mother’s advocacy to include Tommy in Sunday school and worship.

- “Julie” belonged to a church that was unable to meet the special needs of her deaf eight-year-old triplets, who felt unwelcomed and left out of Sunday school. But Julie is among the more fortunate parents, privileged to be in a church with a member who has a background in education of the deaf, and is willing to teach the triplets. As a result, not only are the children participating in Sunday School and worship, but the entire family feels embraced by the church community (Evan H. Silverstein, “Hearing the Deaf,” *Presbyterians Today*, vol. 91, no. 5 [June 2001], p.19).

- A church fellowship hall in any-town America had been built on a split level. As a result, the members with mobility disabilities could not join with their brothers and sisters in fellowship. Recognizing not only the physical barrier, but the emotional separation, the church decided to lower the floor, making one level floor throughout the building. Now the congregation is one people, worshipping side-by-side in body and heart.

- Meanwhile, the Presbyterian Washington Office (PWO) tracks federal legislation that is supportive of the self-determination and self-advocacy movements that are central towards the full-inclusion of persons with disabilities in the wider society. This includes monitoring Medicaid funding that provides health service for more than fifty million individuals, including low-income Americans and people with disabilities; monitoring federal legislation that affects housing and employment opportunities for people with disabilities; and monitoring any changes in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). And yet, sadly, people with disabilities have been the victims of harassment and hate crimes since the passage of the ADA in 1990. We need to expand our support of people with disabilities by preparing for incidences of backlash.

- “Fran” contracted polio when she was a teenager. She routinely discovers sanctuaries where she is unable to move her wheelchair to a place where she does not stick out because there is no distributed wheelchair seating in most churches.

- Another young person with multiple disabilities, “Molly” shares her frustration over how hard it is for Christians to practice what Christ preached. She felt like the token disabled young person in youth groups where she attended meetings, but was ignored by other young people. She no longer attends the church youth groups.

- A pastor whose daughter lives with Down's syndrome told of how appalled she was at a Presbyterian camp where she heard a young person say, "God, sometimes you're so stupid! You act like you have Down's syndrome or something."

### Conclusion: The Body of Christ Moves Forward

The parable of the Great Banquet Feast concludes, "... Go out into the roads and lanes and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled" (Luke 14:23, NRSV). The master of the house—God—sends the servant—Christ—to go out and bring more to the household, which was not completely full. To this very day, there is still plenty of room, and we are sent out by Christ into this world to compel people to come in.

All people are invited to come and be part of this Banquet Feast, God's Realm. Our task, as the body of Christ, is a moral and ethical act, a gracious gesture, of Christian community: to be the welcoming and fully inclusive body of Christ. In so doing, we show forth not only a model of the kind of church Christ calls us to be but also the kind of community God longs for all the world to share: a community where all people are welcomed and blessed. Infused with a passion for the Gospel, the Good News, God's Spirit thrusts us out into the world as God eagerly awaits one and all, anticipating with love and joy, our good company as we enjoy God and live fully with one another. Led by God's Spirit, the whole Church not only embodies the justice love of God but prophetically challenges the world to accept and embrace the full humanity of all people.

### Appendix A

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## Appendix B

### The Journey of the Task Force on “Harvesting Seeds of Justice: Ministering in Church and Society with Persons Who Have Disabilities”

The Task Force on “Harvesting Seeds of Justice: Ministering in Church and Society with Persons Who Have Disabilities” was appointed by the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) in response to the referral the committee received from the General Assembly, “to develop a comprehensive disabilities policy, including learning disabilities, disabilities prevention and all other disabilities identified by the Resolution on “Disabilities Concerns ...” (*Minutes*, 1999, Part I, pp. 41, 308–309). The charge for this task force did not, however, include issues facing people with severe mental illness, which will be addressed by the ACSWP’s Task Force on “Comprehensive Serious Mental Illness.”

The task force included clergy, elders, and laymen and laywomen, young and old, and racial ethnic members. Members of the task force included: Geraldine Adams-Jones, Ellen Gillespie, Dorothy Jean Henderson, David Kiely, Joo Hai Kang, Sue Montgomery, Sarah Nettleton, Nancy Olthoff, David Swihart, Ruth West, Trace Haythorn (chair), Brett Webb-Mitchell (writer and consultant). Margaret P. Elliott resigned from the task force for family and work reasons. Staff support was provided by Peter A. Sulyok, former coordinator, Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP), and Belinda M. Curry, associate for policy development and interpretation, Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP).

The task force worked for three years, meeting together five times in various locations to gather information and to grapple with disabilities issues and the church’s role in addressing these concerns. The first meeting was November 2002 in Louisville, Kentucky. This was an orientation for the task force, in which they examined the prospectus and heard from members of the Presbyterians for Disability Concerns (PDC) network. The task force agreed to meet in a variety of contexts throughout the country to afford the members the best listening opportunity for both the blessings and challenges that people with disabilities face in the PC(USA). The task force changed the title of the proposed policy from “Harvesting Seeds of Justice: Ministering in Church and Society with Persons Who Have Disabilities” to “Living into the Body of Christ: Towards Full Inclusion of People with Disabilities.”

The second meeting was March 2003 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The task force met with pioneers in ministries to and with people with disabilities.

The third meeting was October 2003 in Washington, D.C. The task force met with policymakers, advocacy groups, and legislators.

The fourth meeting was April 2004 in Pasadena, California. The task force met with community advocates and seminary representatives from Fuller Theological Seminary.

The fifth meeting was November 2004 in Hunt, Texas. The task force received and edited the first draft of the proposed policy. The task force received and edited two additional drafts of the proposed policy statement in February and May 2005.

Throughout the years the task force conducted focus groups in their hometowns as well as at the 216th General Assembly (2004) in Richmond, Virginia. The task force was intentional in listening for the breadth and depth of concerns of, by, and for people with disabilities. The task force was also involved in helping design The Presbyterian Panel’s May 2004 Survey on “Disabilities Issues.” Feedback from this survey was taken into consideration by the task force in the development of the proposed policy statement on “Living into the Body of Christ: Toward Full Inclusion of People with Disabilities.”

In addition to its work as a task force, the chair and several members of the task force shared in presentations of its work to the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) at its summer meeting in 2005, to a Synod Consultation on Living into the Body of Christ in the fall of 2005, and to the commissioners to the 217th General Assembly (2006).

## Appendix C People First Language

The issue of language is of high importance among people living with disabilities, and thus should be for all of us. For example, many people with disabilities remember days when all people with disabilities were considered “handicapped,” referring to the begging gestures of putting one’s cap in the hand and asking for alms. To this day, there are many publications that do not use “person-first” or “people first” language: putting people in front of the disabling condition.

What further complicates this issue is the following: in some countries, mental retardation is a learning difficulty, or a learning disability, but a learning disability in the United States is not mental retardation. The other complicating variable is that the language of what is a disability continually changes, given the lobbying efforts of disability groups,

or what the United States Congress or citizen-groups of persons with disabilities choose to be known by. Again, the deaf culture has chosen not to be considered disabled.

We invite all who write, preach, teach, conduct workshops, or speak in an ecclesial or public context about people living with disabilities to consider the following: First, is our knowing that someone has a disability an important part of referring to that person? Second, if knowing that someone is disabled is important, how would the person with a disability want her or his disability to be addressed or known?

# ***A Study Guide for Living into the Body of Christ: Towards Full Inclusion of People with Disabilities***

*Prepared by Kate Wolfe-Jenson*

## **Introduction to the Guide**

The 217th General Assembly (2006) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) approved the policy statement on *Living into the Body of Christ: Towards Full Inclusion of People Living with Disabilities*. This policy calls for the church and its members to “give prophetic witness regarding issues related to people with disabilities, recognizing that disability concerns are a matter of social justice” (p. 2).

This study guide introduces the theological elements of the policy and its practical recommendations for individuals and congregations. The guide seeks to help participants to take steps in the “creative movement from awareness, through accessibility and integration, to full inclusion. . .”(p. 1) of people with disabilities in their lives.

## **Four Sessions**

This guide provides a study of four sessions. Plans for each session include prayers, Bible study, exercises and ideas for discussion.

The sessions are organized around four themes:

- 1. The Body of Christ:** In this session, study members get to know each other. They begin to explore how disability can lead to exclusion and consider how Paul’s idea of believers as the body of Christ puts forward a model of interdependence and affirmation.
- 2. Old Testament Caregiving, New Testament Caring:** This session explores society’s responses to people with disabilities. How has our theological understanding of body and illness contributed to these responses? How has this affected people with disabilities in the church?
- 3. Towards Full Inclusion:** This session more thoroughly explores what it means to be the body of Christ in the world. It considers “The Great Banquet” as a sneak peek of God’s realm. How does movement towards full inclusion open each of us to give and receive more completely? What does it mean for disability concerns to be a matter of social justice?
- 4. Creative Movement and Prophetic Witness:** What does it mean to be called to prophetic witness? How would our lives—and our church—be different if we were living out the vision described in the report? What practical steps can we take to move ourselves forward towards inclusion of people with disabilities?

## **Preparation for Leaders**

As a leader, your roles include administrator, host and timekeeper.

As administrator, please review the class materials ahead of time. Publicize the class in advance. Set up the classroom as appropriate (see below). Please adjust these materials as necessary to fit your needs. If you have a small group, ignore instructions to divide the group. With a large group, divide into groups of three or four and have more than one group do the same task. Sessions are designed to be about an hour long. If your time is shorter, consider cutting some of the exercises. The session goals may help you decide where to focus your time. Choose a meeting time and day that invites broadest participation.

Each session suggests an optional guest speaker. If you have more than an hour, you may want to have less discussion. Alternatively, if you know of a great resource person, consider inviting them to speak. Suggest a time limit for the speaker and allow time for questions and discussion.

As host, you may want to issue specific invitations to individuals and families who have first-hand personal and/or professional experience of disability and to church leaders serving on committees whose duties may be discussed in Session 4. Part of a leader’s host duties have to do with full inclusion.

Encourage those who are shy to contribute to discussion. Try to make sure the pace of discussion varies. Allow silences.

As timekeeper, let participants know when it is time to move to the next exercise. Try to keep the discussion moving and gently facilitate closure when needed. Time estimates are included in parentheses as an aid for facilitators.

## ***Classroom Setup***

Set up the classroom in a way that allows participants to see each other and to interact with each other throughout the sessions. Class members will need to interact with the whole group, a smaller group, or sometimes just one other person. Please make sure that there are enough required materials (Bibles, hymnals, pens/pencils, newsprints, etc.) for all participants.

Pay attention also to the accessibility of the room and materials. Arrange furniture so that people using assistive devices (e.g., canes, walkers, wheelchairs, etc.) can enter the room, get to a place without rearranging furniture, and be included in discussion and activities as easily as those who are able bodied. Consider accessibility of materials and discussion to those with sensory disabilities and make appropriate arrangements.

## ***Sensitivity to All***

Discussions about faith and disability are conversations about some of our most private and personal beliefs and experiences. It is important to show sensitivity to all and to establish a climate in which people feel they can speak honestly and openly. As a leader, it may be helpful for you to review the [Guidelines for Presbyterians During Times of Disagreement](http://www.pcusa.org/peacemaking/guidelines.pdf) (<http://www.pcusa.org/peacemaking/guidelines.pdf>) and share all or parts of it with participants, should the need arise.

This study guide uses “people first” language, as does *Living into the Body of Christ*. “‘People’ or ‘persons’ are always spoken of first, before mention of ‘with disabilities’ or a similar phrase... This ‘people first’ language expresses the priority of our shared humanity. And for us as Christians, it underlines that our primary identity is found in Christ, not in social labels or medical designations” (p. 1). Please use “people first” language as you lead class discussions.

## ***Beyond the Study Guide***

Please see the Resource List included as [Appendix 1](#) to this guide (p. 37), and the Bibliography included as Appendix A of *Living into the Body of Christ* (p. 20).

## ***Background on the Study Guide’s Writer***

Kate Wolfe-Jenson is a member of North Como Presbyterian Church <http://www.northcomochurch.org> <<http://www.northcomochurch.org>> in Roseville, Minnesota. She has been living with Multiple Sclerosis for nearly twenty-five years. An artist and writer, Kate’s work frequently deals with issues arising from disability and chronic illness. Two of her essays (“[The Household of God: Practicing God’s Economy](http://www.wolfe-jenson.com/essays/godshouse.html)” <<http://www.wolfe-jenson.com/essays/godshouse.html>> and “[The God of Lost Causes](http://www.wolfe-jenson.com/essays/lostcauses.html)” <<http://www.wolfe-jenson.com/essays/lostcauses.html>> have been included in PC(USA)’s Access Packets. You can learn more about her work and her book (due out in 2007), *Dancing with Monsters: Chronic Illness as Creative Transformation*, at <http://www.wolfe-jenson.com>.

### *Suggestions for Preparation for Session 1*

- Read the policy statement, *Living into the Body of Christ: Towards Full Inclusion of People with Disabilities*.
- Consider inviting someone who can speak about her or his personal experience with disability and the church. Ask him or her to talk about times of exclusion and inclusion, hurt and triumph, ignorance and care.

## Session 1: The Body of Christ

### **Session Goal**

In this session, the participants get to know each other. They begin to explore how disability can lead to exclusion, and consider how Paul's idea of believers as the body of Christ puts forward a model of interdependence and affirmation.

### **Opening Prayer**

Gracious God, Thank you for creating us as the body of Christ, each with different limitations, skills and gifts. Help us to attend to each other, serve each other, and celebrate each other. Help us envision and create your realm on earth. Amen.

### **Sharing Our Stories** (20 minutes)

Spend some time introducing yourselves to each other. Tell your name and identify one limitation and one gift of someone you know who has a disability.

Divide into small groups of three or four. Distribute one of the “**Stories on the Road to Full Inclusion**” (pp. 7–8) and also the poem entitled “**Access Your Heart**”<sup>1</sup> (pp. 6–7) to each small group. Within the group, share a story of a time when you were (or a companion was) excluded from a place, group or activity because of a difference. Describe the thoughts and feelings surrounding the experience. Make a list of words describing the experience. Read the story provided and add to your list.

With one person serving as scribe, have the group as a whole list words arising from the small group exercise that describe the experience of exclusion. Are stories of exclusion because of disability different? If so, how?

### **Bible Study and Reflection** (20 minutes)

*Living into the Body of Christ* explores the Pauline idea of the church as the body of Christ. “The Apostle Paul’s declaration that the Church is the body of Christ is central to the way people with disabilities and people without disabilities may perceive, understand, and learn to live more fully, personally, and communally, in and as Christ’s community with one another . . .” (p. 8).

Divide the class into small groups and have them read either **Romans 12:4–10**, **1 Corinthians 12:12–26**, **Ephesians 4:11–16** or **Galatians 3:28**, and discuss the corresponding comments from *Living into the Body of Christ*.

After about ten minutes in the small groups, have a representative from each group report to the larger group (with a scribe taking notes up front):

- What does each passage say about our relationships to each other?
- How does it inform how we think about and deal with differences among us?
- Look at the list of words you used to describe exclusion. Make a quick list of their opposites. Does the new list describe the body of Christ? What words would you need to add or subtract?

### **Closing Prayer**<sup>2</sup>

One: Creator God, we are integrally related, members with one another in this mysterious, wondrous, yet very earthy and real body of Christ

**All: We are called to grow and live into the body of Christ!**

One: We cannot stand in judgment of persons with disabilities, regardless of the origins of their conditions. Help us to recognize that all of us—those with and without disabilities—have spiritual gifts and natural abilities that contribute to your work and glory.

**All: We are called to grow and live into the body of Christ!**

One: We are sent forth from our communities of worship to help in the transformation of our whole world. We are called to work for a just society.

Our ministry in the world helps overcome injustices by changing attitudes and structures of society that are barriers to full participation in our common life.

**All: We are called to grow and live into the body of Christ! AMEN.**

***Suggestions for Preparation for Session 2***

- Identify someone who is being excluded and find a way to include him or her.
- Learn to recognize when you are judging someone and identify the gift she or he brings to the situation.
- Find three examples of barriers to inclusion and imagine how each might be overcome.
- Consider inviting someone from an organization near you that works for disability rights. This may be a center for independent living, state disability council or an organization that works for employment of people with disabilities. Encourage him or her to talk about progress made and progress yet to come in both practical and attitudinal realms. The individual needs to be aware that the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is not binding on religious organizations, though many seek to conform with its provisions.

***Endnotes***

1. "Access Your Heart" is a poem written by Ms. Sarah Nettleton, a member of the Task Force on Harvesting Seeds of Justice: Ministering in Church and Society with Person Who Have Disabilities.

2. The closing prayer for this session was adapted by Ms. Kate Wolfe-Jenson from *Living into the Body of Christ*, p. 14 (last paragraph).

## Session 2: Old Testament Caregiving, New Testament Caring

### **Session Goal**

This session explores society's responses to people with disabilities. How has our theological understanding of the body and illness contributed to these responses? How has this affected people with disabilities in the church?

### **Opening Prayer**

If possible, sing together the hymn, “**Just as I Am, Without One Plea**”<sup>1</sup> (*The Presbyterian Hymnal*, #370) or have someone read the words aloud.

### **Sharing Our Stories** (10 minutes)

Share with one another one event during the past week having to do with the suggestions for preparation for this session. What exclusions did you notice? What did (or would) it take to transform them to inclusions?

### **Bible Study and Reflection** (20 minutes)

Review together the comments from the last session about the body of Christ. Divide the class and have each pair or small group read one of the biblical texts below and discuss the corresponding comments from *Living into the Body of Christ*.

1. *Imago Dei: All Persons are Created in the Image of God*

**Read** Genesis 1:1–2:4a

“We believe that all people—regardless of our abilities or limitations, or what any society labels as an ability or disability—are created in the image of the Creator God, created to be in relationship with God and one another” (p. 9).

2. *The Old Testament: God Calls Israel to Be Inclusive of People with Disabilities*

“In the history of ancient Israel there are at least two different perspectives on treatment of people with disabilities...” (p. 10).

**Read** Leviticus 21:16–23

“We have the scriptural heritage...lacking in scientific understanding, and sometimes prone to attribute disabilities to sin” (p. 10).

**Read** Deuteronomy 27:18, Leviticus 19:14, Isaiah 43:5–10

“The Old Testament witness in these passages is clear: the people who are considered disabled are to be included among the throng of followers who are under the covenant of God’s love, promise, and hope” (p. 10).

3. *The ministry of Jesus is one of full inclusion (Being the Body of Christ with One Another)*

“It is through Jesus’ explicit ministry with people with disabilities that justice becomes a reality.... Jesus continually kept company and surrounded himself with the outcasts of Jewish society, including people with disabilities” (p. 10).

**Read** Mark 1:40–45, Mark 5:1–13

“Jesus practiced a ministry of being with others, not a ministry of always doing to or for others, even in his healings” (p. 11).

**Read** John 9:1–7

“Through the ministry of Jesus, we witness a new day, a new approach towards and with people living with disabilities. We are to be a people who live with each other’s strengths and weaknesses, abilities and limitations, living in solidarity with one another. We come to understand that the ‘weakest’ brother or sister is sometimes the strongest” (p. 11).

After about ten minutes in the small group, have a representative from each group report to the larger group (with a scribe taking notes up front):

- What does this passage say about our relationships with each other?
- How does it suggest we think about and act towards people with disabilities?
- How might a person with a disability feel about him or herself in a community that held the beliefs reflected in the passage?

**Historical Context** (15 minutes)

Take a few minutes to read Appendix 2: “Disability Rights in 20th Century United States” (p. 39). As a group, discuss:

- What strikes or surprises you about this history?
- What access or rights have you taken for granted that people with disabilities have only recently gained?
- What responsibilities do those with disabilities have to both church and society?

**Closing Prayer**

Loving God, in Jesus Christ you have shown us a different way of being together. You call us to be a people who live with each other’s strengths and weaknesses, abilities and limitations. You call us to *be with* each other as much as *to do for* each other. Help us to transform all we are and do into your service, whether that service is through strength or weakness, doing or being. Amen.

**Suggestions for Preparation for Session 3**

- Notice times in the coming week when someone asks you for help. Notice times when you help someone without being asked. Notice times you fill silence with busyness.
- Notice times in the coming week when you ask for help from someone. Notice times when you *think* about asking for help, or *wish* you could ask for help, but do not. Try asking for help when you do not “need” it.
- Consider inviting someone who is involved in working on social justice issues to come share about their work with and for persons living with disabilities.

**Endnotes**

1. This hymn was written in 1834 by Charlotte Elliott (1789–1871). In her youth she wrote humorous poems, but following a grave illness in 1821 she lived for her last fifty years as an invalid in Westfield Lodge, Brighton. Over two hundred hymns bear her name. This hymn first appeared in leaflet form in 1835, and then in *The Invalid’s Hymn Book* (1841). Elliot wrote this hymn as a confession of faith in the face of her disability. The opening phrase of each verse draws on words addressed to her twelve years earlier by the evangelist Dr. César Malan of Geneva, with whom she corresponded for forty years. She had claimed to be unworthy to come to Christ—perhaps having internalized the “not good enough” messages society often gives to people with disabilities—but he told her to “come to [Christ] just as you are.”

## Session 3: Towards Full Inclusion

### *Session Goal*

This session more thoroughly explores what it means to be the body of Christ in the world. It considers “The Great Banquet” as a sneak peek of God’s realm. How does movement towards full inclusion open each of us to give and receive more completely? What does it mean for disability concerns to be a matter of social justice?

### *Opening Prayer* **“An Interfaith Litany for Wholeness”<sup>1</sup>**

Leader: Let us pray for all God’s people.

For people who are blind and cannot see, and for those who can see but are blind to people around them,

**Response: God, in your mercy help us touch each other.**

Leader: For people who move slowly because of accident, illness or disability, and for those who move too fast to be aware of the world in which they live,

**Response: God, in your mercy help us work together.**

Leader: For people who are deaf and cannot hear, and for those who can hear but who ignore the cries of others,

**Response: God, in your mercy help us respond to each other.**

Leader: For people who learn slowly, for people who learn in different ways, and for people who learn quickly and easily but often choose ignorance,

**Response: God, in your mercy help us grow in your wisdom.**

Leader: For people who have chronic illnesses for which there is no known cure or relief, and for people who live in unholy fear of developing a chronic illness,

**Response: God, in your mercy help us and heal us.**

Leader: For families, friends and caregivers who serve people with disabilities, and for those who feel awkward in their presence,

**Response: God, in your mercy help us see each other with your eyes.**

Leader: For people who think they are worthless and beyond your love, and for people who think they don’t need your love,

**Response: God, in your mercy help accept your love.**

Leader: For people who feel isolated by their disabilities, and for people who contribute to that sense of isolation,

**Response: God, in your mercy change our lives.**

Leader: For all the people in your creation, that we may learn to respect each other and learn how to live together in your peace,

**Response: God, in your mercy bind us together.**

**All: AMEN**

### *Sharing Our Stories (5 minutes)*

Review the suggestions for further reflections from the last session. Share with a partner one event during the past week having to do with these reflections. What did you learn about independence, dependence and interdependence?

## **Bible Study and Reflection** (5 minutes)

**Read (unison):** Luke 14:8–14

“Along with Jesus’ ministry of presence with people with disabilities, Jesus offered a ‘sneak peek’ into the ways of God’s reign, with various parables....This powerful parable may truly influence our ecclesiological imagination, encouraging us to find ways to welcome people with disabilities in light of the Host’s invitation that unlabeled the disabled” (p. 12).

Discuss:

- How does this parable “turn on its head the way in which we perceive persons with disabilities” (p. 12)?

*What does it mean to be the Body of Christ* (5 minutes each on each item)

Have one person read a lettered item below and spend a few minutes as a group discussing the questions that follow it. (Again, you may want a scribe to take notes.)

(a) *Being the Body of Christ:* In Paul’s references,

- (i) There are no restrictions cited about who can or cannot be a part of this body.
- (ii) This body has no division or hierarchy based on one’s gender, economic class, ethnic or national heritage (Galatians 3:28).

Discuss:

- How do we divide people and create hierarchies when it comes to disability issues?
- How would dissolution of those separations change things?

(b) *Sharing Roles, Gifts, Services, and Talents in the Body of Christ*

Like each of us, “the person living with a disability brings to the body of Christ his or her God-given gifts. The sense of being the ‘lone pioneer’ and buying into the need to be self-sufficient...is not present in this model of ministry...[T]he life we live is one...of dependence upon God and interdependence with one another” (p. 13).

Discuss:

- How do you—as an individual—resist the idea of interdependence?
- How do you see the church resisting interdependence?
- Name one way in which things would be different if you/we embraced interdependence.

(c) *Being the Body of Christ with People with Disabilities: In Unity and Solidarity*

“Among many advocates on behalf of people with disabilities, including people with disabilities, the motto in regards to civil rights is ‘nothing about us without us,’ arguing that the very person with a disability is to be included in all discussions regarding the overall life of persons with a disability. We are proposing that we go further: bringing the future into today, by proposing that there be no more ‘us’ and ‘them,’ but that we live in the ‘we-ness’ of the body of Christ. That is the solidarity, the unity that we aim for in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Indeed, it is the solidarity we seek throughout the world” (pp. 13–14).

Discuss:

- The slogan “nothing about us without us” was created to address an exclusionary decision-making model. What would be important to consider about decision-making if we are living in “we-ness”?

(d) *Striving for “A More Excellent Way”*

“So how do we become a fully inclusive body of Christ? We do so by striving for ‘the greater gift...the more excellent way’ (1 Cor. 12:31, NRSV) . . . As Frederick Buechner reminds us, ‘When Jesus tells us to love our neighbors, he is not telling us to love them with a cozy emotional feeling.... On the contrary, he is telling us to love our neighbors in the sense of being willing to work for their well-being even if it means sacrificing our own well-being to that end, even if it means sometimes just leaving them alone’ (Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking* [New York: Harper Row, 1973], p. 54)” (p. 14).

Discuss:

- What sacrifices might we be called upon to make when giving up divisions and hierarchies, in order to move towards full inclusion of people with disabilities?

(e) *The Body of Christ: Growth for All*

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has a history of valuing academic study. “Because of this academic focus (a blessing and curse for some Presbyterians), many times people with emotional disorders, behavioral disorders, learning disabilities, developmental disorders (such as autism and mental retardation), sensory and hearing impairments, and speech and language problems, have been excluded from Christian education, exiled in nursery classrooms or in other activities that fail to stimulate or nurture their spiritual lives” (p. 14).

Discuss:

- Does our church offer learning opportunities that fit a variety of learning styles? How could we improve?

*Reconciliation in the Body of Christ: The Confession of 1967* (10 minutes)

Have one person read this section and then discuss it.

The Confession of 1967 includes a strong call for reconciliation and justice in response to racial and ethnic discrimination, war and poverty (See *The Book of Confessions*, 9:43–47). *Living into the Body of Christ* invokes that Confession and goes on to apply its language to disabilities concerns.

“There has been a barrier separating people who are considered by the world to be disabled and those who are not disabled. This wall was torn down by Jesus Christ...As the body of Christ, the Church is called to tear down the dividing walls that exist in society as well...For us to remain indifferent to those who are needy, in this case those with disabilities who have been marginalized and disenfranchised from various parts of society, is to make a ‘mockery of reconciliation and offers no acceptable worship of God” (p. 15).

The policy calls us to “recogniz[e] that disability concerns are a matter of social justice” (p. 2), which involves tearing down walls and more.

Discuss:

- Why was it important to identify disability concerns as a matter of social justice?
- How does doing so change the way we respond to disability concerns?

## **Closing Prayer**

God, you challenge us to move beyond where we are. More than that, you challenge us to envision your kingdom and take action to create it on earth. Grant us the courage it takes to be agents of change. Make us impatient with injustice and patient with each other. Help us depend on you as we work for transformation of your world. Amen.

### ***Suggestions for Preparations for Session 4.***

- Over the coming week, watch news magazines, TV news, etc. for examples of news stories, policies, or legislation affecting people with disabilities.
- Watch also for “walls” being built to separate people. What are the building blocks in the wall? Take one action to erode a building block. Dare to move beyond your comfort zone.
- Consider inviting church leaders and representatives of various church committees to the next session.

### ***Endnote***

1. *The opening prayer is “An Interfaith Litany for Wholeness” written by the Reverend Kate Chipps, and adapted by Ms. Ginny Thornburgh. It was taken from That All May Worship, a resource published by the National Organization on Disability (See <http://www.nod.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=page.viewPage&pageID=1430&nodeID=1&FeatureID=514&redirected=1&CFID=9531994&CFTOKEN=90820191&noheader=1>). Permission to use the Litany in this study guide was granted by Ms. Thornburgh, Vice President & Director Religion & Disability Program for the National Organization on Disability.*

## Session 4: Creative Movement and Prophetic Witness

### *Session Goal*

This session explores: What does it mean to be called to prophetic witness? How would our lives—and our church—be different if we were living out the vision described in the report? What practical steps can we take to move ourselves forward towards inclusion of people with disabilities?

### *Opening Prayer* “A Vision of Living into the Body of Christ”<sup>1</sup>

One: As the body of Christ, we are to welcome everyone to the banquet feast of God’s love in this world. The feast of God’s love is open to all and fully inclusive of people from all pathways of life.

**All: We are living into the Body of Christ.**

One: We envision a church in which the designation or naming of a person’s disability is less important than who that person is as one of God’s people.

**All: We are living into the Body of Christ.**

One: We envision a church in which everyone welcomes and reflects diversity and inclusiveness in worship, education, fellowship, service, justice, leadership, and evangelism.

**All: We are living into the Body of Christ.**

One: We envision a church in which all the members of the body of Christ honor, respect, nurture, and support the gifts, talents, and services of every other member.

**All: We are living into the Body of Christ.**

One: We envision a church in which every child of God can realize her/his full potential, and through which society is consistently engaged and challenged to become more inclusive.

**All: We are living into the Body of Christ.**

One: We envision a church that embodies the creative movement from awareness, through accessibility and integration, to full inclusion, and thus bears healing witness to the world.

**All: We are living into the Body of Christ.**

One: We envision our church as a leader in promoting and manifesting this vision of a just world, serving with and empowering people with disabilities to engage in this ongoing work.

**All: We are living into the Body of Christ.**

One: Living into this vision draws us closer to the fulfillment of God’s redemptive will

**All: “on earth as it is in heaven.” AMEN**

### *Sharing Our Stories* (5 minutes)

Review the suggestions for preparation from the last session. Share with one another one event during the past week having to do with the assignments. What news did you hear? What barriers did you notice? What actions did you take?

### *Exploring the Recommendations* (20 minutes)

In addition to recommendations to congregations, *Living into the Body of Christ* included recommendations to the 217th General Assembly (2006), to the General Assembly Council (GAC) and its entities, to the Office of the General Assembly (OGA) and its entities, to the middle governing bodies, to sessions, to local leaders and members, to the Board of Pensions (BOP), to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Investment and Loan Program, Inc. (PILP), to the Presbyterian Publishing Corporation (PPC), and to the Presbyterian theological institutions and those related to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) by covenant agreement (See pp. 2–6) .

Divide into several groups and have each group consider one or two of the recommendations. (Ideally, some small group should consider each recommendation.) Give each group newsprint (one sheet per recommendation) on which to brainstorm answers to the questions

- What is our church already doing in this regard?
- What could our church do to take action on this recommendation?

Remember that brainstorming means all ideas are welcomed and captured without judgment or extensive discussion.

### ***Evaluating*** (10 minutes)

Still within the small group, look at the list of actions you generated and write beside each one:

- What entity in your congregation (individual, committee, etc.) would be most likely to take this action?

- How hard would it be to take this action? (See scale below)

1 = Easy

2 = Would take some effort, but fairly easy

3 = Would take significant effort, but could be accomplished

4 = Would be somewhat difficult

5 = Would be very difficult

### ***Focusing*** (10 minutes)

Come back together as a large group. Take a few minutes to look over the work of each group. Take another few minutes of silence (or with meditative instrumental music) for each individual to contemplate the question:

- Which of these actions is calling for me to be its champion?

After some time, feel free to share—or not—your thoughts with each other.

Make a plan to communicate the results of your work with the appropriate church entities. Decide who will take responsibility for this step.

### ***Closing Prayer***

Gracious God, we know that you invite all to come and be part of your Banquet Feast. You call us to be the welcoming and fully inclusive body of Christ. In so doing, we become not only the kind of church Christ calls us to be, but also the kind of community you long for all the world to share: a community where all are treasured and blessed. In the name and Spirit of Jesus Christ, Amen.

### ***Endnote***

1. The opening prayer for this session was adapted by Ms. Kate Wolfe-Jenson from *Living Into the Body of Christ*, pp. 7–8.

## Appendix 1: Selected Resources

This is a list of resources that may be useful to those working with the study guide for *Living into the Body of Christ: Towards Full Inclusion of People with Disabilities*. Recommended resources are marked with an asterisk. Some of the websites cited include lists of print and video resources. Unfortunately, web addresses change frequently. This list was current in October 2006.

### **Presbyterian Resources**

Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) < <http://www.pcusa.org/acswp> > This site includes more information about the role and work of this committee.

[Presbyterians for Disability Concerns](http://www.pcusa.org/phewa/pdc.htm) (PDC) < <http://www.pcusa.org/phewa/pdc.htm> > includes information on the annual Access packet and establishing a Presbytery committee on disability concerns. The resources at < <http://www.pcusa.org/phewa/resources/resources-pdc.htm> > list printed publications, videos and links to websites.

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s Disability Concerns Consultants < <http://www.pcusa.org/phewa/disability.htm> > The Social Welfare Organizations/PHEWA office has four paid consultants who are available to help the church with challenging questions about disabilities issues.

### **Resources on Disability and Religion**

[National Organization on Disability \(N.O.D.\) - Religion](http://www.nod.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Page.viewPage&pageId=9) < <http://www.nod.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Page.viewPage&pageId=9> >

This greatly expanded section of the N.O.D. website offers a wide variety of resources and links relating to religion and disability in general, accessible congregations, and current events and information. Includes "Journey of a Congregation: A Self-Assessment and Learning Tool of the Accessible Congregation Campaign" and a more detailed "Audit of Barriers." Has sections on Money and Ideas, Accessible Congregations Campaign, Conferences, Publications, Facts & Statistics, and News & Updates. Some of the sections are links to information about publications available for purchase rather than online.

[Bibles and Other Sacred Writings in Special Media](http://www.disabilityresources.org/DRMreg.html) < <http://www.disabilityresources.org/DRMreg.html> > Page from the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped lists bibles and sacred texts of many world religions that are available in Braille, large print, or recorded format. Materials available for loan or purchase.

[Center for the Study of Religion and Disability](http://www.jeffmcnair.com/CSRD/) < <http://www.jeffmcnair.com/CSRD/> >

A resource for those looking for information relating to support given by local churches to those with disabilities. Includes articles, research projects in progress, and related sites. Its Director, Dr. Jeff McNair, also publishes a blog: Disabled Christianity weblog <http://disabledchristianity.blogspot.com>

[Christian Council on Persons with Disabilities](http://www.ccpd.org/) < <http://www.ccpd.org/> >

This is the website of a consortium of evangelical Christian organizations working in disability ministry. It includes a quiz on "How Accessible Is Your Church?" as well as information about the organization and its publications and services.

[DisabilityResources.org—Religion](http://www.disabilityresources.org/RELIGION.html) < <http://www.disabilityresources.org/RELIGION.html> >

Wonderful list of annotated links to resources relating to religion. See also their list of resources in your state at < <http://www.disabilityresources.org/DRMreg.html> >

### **Websites with Historical Data:**

[Disability Rights Timeline](http://courses.temple.edu/neighbor/ds/disabilityrightstimeline.htm)

< <http://courses.temple.edu/neighbor/ds/disabilityrightstimeline.htm> >

A history of efforts for disability rights and an antidote to pessimism over the efficacy of advocacy and activism.

Disability History Museum (DHM) by Straight Ahead Pictures, Inc. <[www.disabilitymuseum.org](http://www.disabilitymuseum.org)> This is an online resource. According to the DHM's website, via recovering, chronicling, and interpreting the stories of people with disabilities, this organization seeks to promote understanding about this group's historical experiences.

The Minnesota Governor's Council on Development Disabilities <[www.mnddc.org/parallels2](http://www.mnddc.org/parallels2)> This organization promotes independence, productivity, self determination, integration and inclusion for people with developmental disabilities and their families.

### ***Other Disability Resources***

[National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities](http://www.nichcy.org/index.html) <<http://www.nichcy.org/index.html>> Offers free fact sheets on specific disabilities, state resource sheets, parent's guides, and resource lists, in English and Spanish.

[Untangling the Web--Disability Links](http://www.icdi.wvu.edu/Others.htm) <<http://www.icdi.wvu.edu/Others.htm>> An attempt at a comprehensive list of online disability resources.

## Appendix 2: Disability Rights in 20th Century United States

The following is a very condensed list of national milestones highlighting events and legislation that affected disability rights, focusing on physical disability issues. For a more complete list, please visit <http://courses.temple.edu/neighbor/ds/disabilityrightstimeline.htm>

**1883**—Eugenics is a term that was coined by Sir Francis Galton in his book *Essays in Eugenics*. Americans embraced the eugenics movement by **passing laws to prevent people with disabilities from moving to the U.S., marrying or having children**. Eugenics laws led to the institutionalization and forced sterilization of disabled adults and children. By the 1970s, over 60,000 disabled people had been sterilized without their consent.

**1935–1950**—The Social Security Act was passed. This established federally funded old-age benefits and funds to states for **assistance to blind individuals and disabled children**. The Act extended existing vocational rehabilitation programs.

The National Federation of the Blind was formed. The American Federation of the Physically Handicapped, founded by Paul Strachan, was the first **cross-disability national political organization to urge an end to job discrimination, and lobby for passage of legislation**.

**1950–1970**—Social Security Amendments eventually create **insurance programs for disabled workers**. Medicare and Medicaid provide **federally subsidized health care**. **Deinstitutionalization efforts** begin.

**1970s**—Architectural Barriers legislation prohibits architectural barriers in all federally owned or leased buildings. **Independent Living Movement** begins. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is passed. Key language in the Rehabilitation Act, found in Section 504, states “**No otherwise qualified handicapped individual in the United States, shall, solely by reason of his handicap, be excluded** from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.” The Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (PL 94-142) required **free, appropriate public education in the least restrictive setting**. This Act was later renamed The Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

**1977**—189th General Assembly of UPCUSA adopts *Overture 16. On Responding to the Concerns of the Handicapped*, one of the earliest denominational policy papers on disability.

**1980s**—Disability rights advocates’ lobbying preserves the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975. The **Telecommunications** for the Disabled Act mandated telephone access for deaf and hard-of-hearing people at public places. The **Voting Accessibility** for the Elderly and Handicapped Act mandated that polling places be accessible. The **Air Carrier Access Act** was passed prohibiting airlines from refusing to serve people simply because they are disabled and from charging people with disabilities more for airfare than non-disabled travelers. The Fair Housing Act amendments **prohibited housing discrimination against people with disabilities** and families with children. It also provided for architectural accessibility of certain new housing units, renovation of existing units.

**1990s**—George W. Bush signed the Americans with Disabilities Act. The Act provided **comprehensive civil rights protection for people with disabilities**. Closely modeled after the Civil Rights Act and Section 504, the law was the most sweeping disability rights legislation in history. It mandated that local, state and federal governments and programs be accessible, that businesses with more than 15 employees make “**reasonable accommodations**” for disabled workers and that public accommodations such as restaurants and stores make “**reasonable modifications**” to ensure access for disabled members of the public. The act also mandated access in public transportation, communication, and in other areas of public life.

In *Olmstead v. L.C. and E.W.*, the Supreme Court decided that individuals with disabilities must be offered services in the **most integrated setting**.

**2006**— “Despite passage of the ADA in 1990 and the advance of accessibility and mobility technologies — people with disabilities *still* face an uphill battle...”

- Children with disabilities are routinely denied admission into childcare, voucher programs and charter schools.
- Archaic healthcare regulations still force people of disabilities of all ages out of their communities and into isolated nursing homes and institutions.
- Only 32 percent of Americans with disabilities aged 18 to 64 are working, but two-thirds of those unemployed are able and want to work.
- Poverty rates for Americans with at least one disability are more than twice as high as for those with no disabilities.”

Source of 2006 data: <http://www.adawatch.org/AmericanDream.htm>





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