

CHURCH SELF-ASSESSMENT

A guide to deeper engagement with
people affected by disabilities and special needs



**Disability and
Special Needs
Ministry**

INTRODUCTION

People affected by disabilities and special needs are among our nation's most vulnerable and least reached communities. Church efforts to serve, include and disciple these communities have grown in the past decade, but there is still a tremendous gospel opportunity on our doorstep.

As a relatively new or unfamiliar area of ministry, many of us have a lot to learn about best practices in the development and facilitate healthy programs and environments. We see leaders eager to learn and grow, but they may not know the right questions to ask to guide their church toward the vision God has given them.

We believe that “*better starts anywhere and has no endpoint.*” As followers of Christ, we yearn always to better serve people, disciple people and see people as our Master does. Wherever and whoever you are, we hope you will join us in this pursuit of better.

With this in mind, the EFCA Disability and Special Needs Ministry Team has developed this Church Self-Assessment, a tool for local churches hoping to grow in their care and ministry among those affected by disabilities and special needs.

This self-assessment requires true honesty and introspection. It may cause pain or disagreements or even challenge your self-image as a church. Human society has always discriminated against people with disabilities and every church has aspects of its culture, programming, language or ideology that can create barriers to participation.

As a community redeemed and regenerated by the Holy Spirit, however, we have an opportunity to uproot those devaluing practices and offer an alternative way of living together. As Mark says, we must examine our traditions and discard those that get in the way of loving our neighbors (Mark 7:6-13).

Carefully and prayerfully answering these questions will give you a good snapshot of where you currently are in ministry. Reflecting on the results will give you insights for moving forward with a vision for stronger ministry. It may be confirmation of your existing plans or a wake-up call to make a change. We do not know exactly what that will mean for your church; every church is different in their calling and capacity. But everyone can take small steps forward in faith, confident that God will meet them as they go.

Dr. Jeff McNair
EFCA Disability and Special Needs Ministry Team

HOW TO USE THIS TOOL

The first step to growth is assessment. Knowing your strengths, weaknesses, resources and needs will help you identify God's call for your church, deploy your people and resources effectively, tweak your programming and strengthen your culture. This tool will help you gain insight into the ways your church is intentionally and unintentionally succeeding or failing to serve, include, disciple and empower individuals with disabilities and special needs.

Who should use this tool

We recommend that this assessment be completed by several leaders and members with a broad knowledge of life in the church and the experiences of people affected by disabilities or special needs.

You can solicit answers in a group conversation setting, by conducting individual interviews or by requesting written responses. Each method has its strengths and weaknesses, so you should consider the participants' preferred communication styles and limitations, as well as their familiarity and comfort with each other or with you. Do whatever you think is most likely to encourage open, honest and thoughtful responses.

Here are some **leaders** you might ask to participate:

- Senior pastor
- Outreach director
- Discipleship director
- Worship leader
- Youth pastor
- Children or family pastor
- Small group leaders
- Sunday school teachers

We also strongly recommend including **those affected by disabilities or special needs**, both the individuals themselves and their family members or caregivers. Surveys and our own experience have shown that church leaders and those they seek to serve often have a very different perspective on the church's ministry effectiveness. Your assessment will be incomplete without their input.

For all participants, create the expectation that this is an exercise in pursuit of learning and growth. There may be need for repentance and reconciliation but the purpose is not blame and punishment. Be sensitive to expressions of frustration, guilt, defensiveness and resignation; make space to process those emotional responses in a healthy and constructive way.

How to interpret the results

Compile the responses you have collected from the participants. In general, “No” answers indicate areas that may need improvement. Look for common themes, unique insights and blind spots. Pray over the information you have gathered, asking the Holy Spirit for wisdom and clarity. Compare the responses to your church’s mission and beliefs about God and about people.

Look for areas of strength and success and ask, “**How can we celebrate this and make it stronger?**” Look for areas of weakness and ask, “**What would be better?**”

Ultimately, no church is the same and no tool can perfectly guide you to a solution. We believe the areas identified are important for each church to consider, but the “correct” answer is between you and the Holy Spirit. The goal is not perfection; the goal is growth in maturity and Christlikeness as individuals and a church body.

Next Steps

Your next steps after completing the assessment will depend on what the assessment revealed. Here are some potential options to consider:

- **Read the article** “[What Would Be Better: Social Role Valorization and the Development of Ministry to Persons Affected by Disability](#)”
- **Continue the conversation** within your church, with the participants in the assessment or others, about how to move forward.
- **Find resources** on the basics of disability and special needs ministry or on a particular topic.
- **Look for partners** in the community who bring resources, expertise, or opportunities for ministry.
- **Contact a church** that has a ministry that reflects your vision and ask for guidance.
- **Seek out a coach** who can work with you to make a plan.

The EFCA Disability and Special Needs Ministry Team is creating and improving tools and resources to serve churches like yours.

1. **Recommended Resources**
2. **Recommended Speakers and Coaches**
3. **Affinity Group for Ministry Leaders**
4. [Facebook Page](#)

Please contact us if you have questions, resources, or feedback. We are also looking to serve you better.

disability@efca.org

CHURCH SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

EFCA Disability and Special Needs Ministry

Presence

1. Are the settings where church members with disabilities spend *most* of their time typical church settings?
2. Are the settings where *adult* church members with disabilities spend *most* of their time age appropriate, considering design, furnishings, decorations, etc?. Imagine a naïve observer looking at these settings and guessing the age of the people who spend time in them.
3. Is the time of assembly when church members with disabilities spend *most* of their time at church the same time that the majority church members come to church?

Integration

4. Do church members with disabilities spend *most* of their church time mixing in and participating with a wide range of other church members, across all ages and abilities?

Friendship

5. Are church members with disabilities being invited to friendship as often as other church members?
6. What signs will we look for to know that church members with disabilities are forming genuine and mutually enjoyable relationships with other church members of all ages and abilities?

Participation

7. Are the roles and activities that church members with disabilities spend *most* of their time doing the same kinds of roles and activities that other church members do, or do the roles and activities offered to church members with disabilities imply that they are something other than regular members? Is there a reason for the roles and activities staying this way?
8. In what specific ways are church members with disabilities contributing to the life of their church community?

Language

9. In our spoken and written language, our conversations, our correspondence, and our church bulletins, sermons, etc., do we use fair, respectful, age-appropriate language to and about church members with disabilities?

Settings

10. Are the church settings physically comfortable, easily to access, welcoming and useable by people of all ages and abilities?

Community

11. When we think about our biblical vision of community, who is there? How can the inclusion of people with disabilities better reflect the Gospel's vision and therefore strengthen our church community?
12. In what ways are we supporting families of persons with disabilities in prayer, worship, fellowship, celebration, and mutual aid/support?
13. In what ways are we supporting individuals with disabilities in prayer, worship, fellowship, celebration, and mutual aid/support?

Perspectives

14. What efforts have been made to gain a biblical understanding of the experience of disability and in what ways has this understanding been shared and nurtured for people with and without disabilities?
15. In what ways might the process for becoming a member of this church create unreasonable barriers to membership for people with physical and/or intellectual disabilities?
16. Does the way we do church, as seen in our practices or traditions support ideas of separation or do we communicate that we are all members of an interdependent body?
17. When people with disabilities are present, how does that impact our understanding of how discipleship and faith development should happen for everybody?
18. What signs of growth in faith do we see among church members with disabilities?

Cultural change

19. In what ways, do the church's core values and mission reflect the changes that need to happen for the church to really include people with disabilities?
20. What evidence can the church collect for itself, to keep track of its progress in the participation of people with disabilities in the life and ministry of the church?