

# Disability Awareness Sunday

## July 26, 2026

### All Abilities. One Body.

Greetings from the Commission on Disabilities of the Virginia Conference! We are pleased to provide this guidance for Disability Awareness Sunday. Our focus this year is on Neurodivergence. Not all brains process the same way and God can use all those gifts in the church! The term celebrates the natural variations in human neurology rather than viewing them as deficits, including variations such as autism, ADHD, and dyslexia, which affect roughly 15-20% of the population.

In addition to the worship elements you are encouraged to explore the worship experience as a whole including setting (physical space) and tone (emotional space) as you plan.

In addition to showing accessibility in worship, opportunities for discussion around accessibility and belonging are meaningful on Disability Awareness Sunday. Feel free to share some of these resources with your congregation or complete the ability privilege scorecard or accessibility audit together. Consider questions like:

- How do our worship spaces welcome different ways of thinking, processing, and communicating?
- How can we create environments where neurodivergent people do not simply attend church, but truly belong?
- How can the church celebrate the gifts neurodivergent people already bring to the body of Christ?

No church is too small to participate. No effort is too little. Awareness grows one faithful step at a time. Thank you again for helping our churches become places where all people are welcomed, valued, and empowered to serve. Because in Christ, we are not many separate bodies. We are *All Abilities, One Body*.

#### **Helpful Tips for offering accessible worship:**

**Visual Orientation:** Before worship begins, display the flow of worship for your church. For example:

Today in Worship:

- |                      |                  |
|----------------------|------------------|
| 1. Call to Worship   | 6. Sermon        |
| 2. Singing           | 7. Offering      |
| 3. Opening Prayer    | 8. Prayer        |
| 4. Passing of Peace  | 9. Sending Forth |
| 5. Scripture Reading |                  |

**Built-in Reflection Time:** Many autistic and ADHD worshipers experience less anxiety when they know what is coming. Many neurodivergent people need processing time. After the sermon consider saying something like: *"We will spend one minute in quiet reflection. You may pray, write, draw, hold a prayer stone, or simply rest in God's presence"*

**Movement Moments:** Consider normalizing movement. Before the sermon consider saying the following: *"Before we hear God's Word proclaimed, I invite you to take a deep breath, stretch, adjust your posture, or simply settle comfortably where you are."*

Include movements during prayer such as holding your hands to your heart during reflection, then opening your arms to send the prayers out to God.

**Visual Considerations:** Use a minimum of 12 pt. font that is easy to read- Arial or Open Dyslexia fonts are typically easier for visual processing than more stylized typefaces.

Fluorescent lighting, bright light or glare can cause discomfort for some; consider using lower light or natural light when possible for parts of the service.

**Auditory (Hearing) Considerations:** Loud music or sudden noises can be overwhelming for some with sensory processing differences. Consider this in your musical selections and audio settings.

Others may need additional support for hearing. Providing printed copies of worship materials or assistive listening devices are ways to support auditory processing.

- Disposable ear plugs, or noise cancelling headphones are helpful to have on hand. Offer space and reminders that these options are available. Such as: *"We will begin with a joyful hymn this morning. If you find louder sounds overwhelming, please feel free to use headphones."*

### **Call to Worship:**

Welcome, beloved, to this sacred space.

**No matter your background, your doubts, or your abilities, you are welcome here.**

God gathers us in all our beautiful diversity—different stories, different struggles, and different strengths.

**We come just as we are, a mosaic of humanity woven together by grace.**

Let us draw the circle wide, making room for every voice, every heart, and every mind.

**Come, let us worship the God who creates us, redeems us, and calls us all beloved!**

### **Opening Prayer (in unison):**

Gracious God, Creator of all. We thank you for the beauty and diversity of your creation and for the many gifts, abilities, perspectives, and experiences you have woven into the body of Christ. Where we lack understanding, grant us wisdom. Where we hold assumptions, grant us humility. Where barriers divide us, grant us the courage to create communities of welcome, belonging, and participation for all your children. Be present with those who are experiencing sensory, physical, emotional, or spiritual overwhelm. Grant comfort, strength, and peace. Help each person to know they are loved, valued, and created in your image. Give us resilience and courage as we face the challenges of daily life. Remind us that your grace is sufficient for us and that your Spirit works through every member of Christ's body. Teach us to honor one another's gifts, support one another's needs, and celebrate the ways you work through each of us. Fill our hearts with hope, joy, and compassion, that together we may reflect your love to the world. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### **Affirmation of Faith (in unison):**

We believe that every person is created in the image of God,  
worthy of love, dignity, and belonging.

We believe that the Spirit gives gifts to all people—  
gifts of compassion and wisdom,  
service and leadership,  
creativity and encouragement,  
teaching and listening,  
justice and mercy.

No gift is too small,  
no person is without purpose,  
and no one is excluded from the work of God's kingdom.

We affirm that our differences are not weaknesses to overcome,  
but sacred expressions of God's creativity.

Together, we are called to share our gifts freely,  
to honor the gifts of others,  
and to build communities where every person can serve, lead, and flourish.

With gratitude and hope,  
we offer who we are and what we have  
for the healing of the world and the glory of God. Amen.

**Prayer of Confession & Hope:** *(from a prayer written by Jonathan Bryan, a 16-year-old who used eye movements with an alphabet board to compose the prayer – sourced at Through the Roof, Disability Awareness Sunday 2022, Surrey UK)*

Loving heavenly God. Thank you for the beautiful diversity of people you have created, and that we are all fearfully and wonderfully made. We praise you for the variety of gifts you have given to your people.

Lord of life and love...**Hear our prayer.**

Forgive us for the times we have marred your image within us. We are sorry for when we have made assumptions about people different from ourselves, and excluded those Jesus went out of His way to include.

Lord of life and love...**Hear our prayer.**

Help us to reach out to those on the margins. Enlarge our vision to value and actively include everyone who is differently abled. Lord of life and love...**Hear our prayer.**

We pray for people who feel disabled by society's assumptions and who are prevented from reaching their full potential. Lord of life and love...**Hear our prayer.**

Thank you for organizations working hard to unroof the lives of people with disabilities. May your church lead the way in demonstrating life in all its fullness. **Amen.**

## **Liturgy:**

God created all living things. God created humans in God's image, and God said that creation was good!

**So we, too, believe that people of all abilities and ways of thinking are created in the image of God.**

God called leaders like Jacob and Moses, whose bodies and speech were imperfect, to lead God's people!

**So we, too, welcome leaders with a variety of abilities and diverse ways of thinking, learning, and communicating.**

The Psalms proclaim that we are fearfully and wonderfully made, and loved by God before our birth!

**So we, too, celebrate every person as a unique and beloved gift from God.**

Jesus welcomed those who were excluded or misunderstood and made them part of the community!

**So we, too, commit ourselves to congregations where all people are fully welcomed and valued. All people, period.**

Paul taught that the Church needs people of all gifts and abilities to be the Body of Christ!

**So we, too, honor the gifts each person brings, knowing every mind and every person has something sacred to share.**

Only God is perfect!

**We are all human, called not to perfection, but to love, justice, and belonging as followers of Jesus who bring hope to all people. AMEN.**

**A Prayer of Thanks and Assurance (in unison):** *(Based on a prayer from Lynda Herbert, a Church of England reader, disability advocate volunteer and wheelchair user. Sourced Through the Roof, Disability Awareness Sunday 2022, Surrey UK)*

Loving God, we come before you in prayer,

Praising you, worshipping you and thanking you,

For the life changing transforming love we have in You;

A love that reaches out into our lives,

A love we find in friendships, community and worship;

Reassuring, comforting and guiding us.

Today we give thanks for all who reach out in support and friendship,

Enriching the lives of disabled people;

Enabling and welcoming all into worship,

Into the presence of the Savior, themselves; to bring us to Jesus

And so, may we reach out in fellowship to all.

Help us to find new ways of welcome,

of acceptance for those who would love to come into your presence

but struggle to find a place to worship.

Teach us your ways Lord; and help us to be those friends

who go through the roof to bring people to Jesus.

Lord, help us to reach out in fellowship knowing your love knows no limits.

May we too be limitless to welcome and value all people. Amen.

## **Benediction:**

Go now in the love of God, who created every mind, every voice, and every person with purpose. Honor the gifts in yourself and in others, making room for all people to belong, contribute, and flourish. And may the grace of Christ, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, and the welcome of God go with you now and always. Amen.

Song/Hymn suggestions - Offer permission to worship in a different way - For example: "You are invited to sing, listen, read the words, or pray quietly as we worship through music."

UMH #560 Help Us Accept Each Other

UMH #114 Many Gifts, One Spirit

UMH #558 We Are the Church

UMH #454 Open My Eyes, That I May See (additional song suggestions from UMC DMC

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1TND67JcOxVF4WLTqqodIWNmxUAnAA0Hu/view>)

## Scripture/Sermon Prompts:

Psalms 139:13-18: Created by God we are fearfully and wonderfully made- sermon highlighting the diversity of people as worthy and known by God even before birth. Precious in thought, the diversity in ways of thinking and seeing the world are unique and bring value in all the wonderful ways.

*<sup>13</sup>For you created my inmost being;  
you knit me together in my mother's womb.*

*<sup>14</sup>I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;  
your works are wonderful,  
I know that full well.*

*<sup>15</sup>My frame was not hidden from you  
when I was made in the secret place,  
when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.*

*<sup>16</sup>Your eyes saw my unformed body;  
all the days ordained for me were written in your book  
before one of them came to be.*

*<sup>17</sup>How precious to me are your thoughts, God!  
How vast is the sum of them!*

*<sup>18</sup>Were I to count them,  
they would outnumber the grains of sand—  
when I awake, I am still with you.*

1 Corinthians 12:12-31: One body in Christ. Focusing on the end of the scripture- highlight the diversity in thought processes, communication, and perception that each person brings to the congregation and life of the church are necessary.

*<sup>27</sup>Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. <sup>28</sup>And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues. <sup>29</sup>Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? <sup>30</sup>Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? <sup>31</sup>Now eagerly desire the greater gifts.*

Romans 12:4-8: One body in Christ- Each one required with diversity of brain make up. Highlight neurodiversity and how to include the gifts that each unique brain brings to the table. Share the gifts you have noticed in others and how they enhance our world and should be welcomed in the church.

*<sup>3</sup>For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.*

*<sup>4</sup>For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, <sup>5</sup>so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. <sup>6</sup>We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; <sup>7</sup>if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; <sup>8</sup>if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.*

John 9:2-3: Neurodivergence is not a result of sin. Many people with autism, ADHD, or other neurodivergent conditions experience shame and exclusion for their conditions that can cause them to act differently from societal expectations, however it is up to us as the church to welcome and include those people with all of their gifts and differences.

*<sup>2</sup>His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"*

*<sup>3</sup>"Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.*