

How accessible is your congregation?

For the next few months, when Bishop Knoche comes to congregations and meetings, he will be in a wheelchair, since he cannot bear weight on the foot that has had surgery until the breaks heal. This will be a good opportunity to see how accessible your church building really is for people with physical handicaps.

As Bishop Knoche may preach or lead worship from the wheelchair, our openness to those God has called who have disabilities will be challenged.

The first woman ordained in the American Lutheran Church ministered from a wheelchair, but there have not been many since. There are, however, many in our congregations who are differently-abled. Some may be visibly so, walking with canes, using wheelchairs, relying on service dogs; others may have conditions which are not readily apparent. Sometimes congregations think accessibility simply means putting railings in a single restroom stall - but it's much, much more.

The ELCA has numerous resources available to help you determine how accessible your church building is and how welcoming your congregation is.

- *Toward the Goal* is identified as a resource "for full inclusion of people who are differently-abled into the life of the church." It helps congregations recognize not only architectural barriers but also attitudinal barriers. Copies are available from Augsburg Fortress, (800)328-4648. Request a copy by ISBN number: 6-0001-6928-0.
- *That All May Worship* is a handbook designed to help congregations of all faiths welcome people with disabilities. It is available through the American Association of People with Disabilities, <aapddc.org> via the new AAPD Interfaith Initiative. Contact Ginny Thornburgh, (202)457-0046, x34.



- *The ELCA Accessibility Guide: How to Plan an Accessible Meeting* is a guide available upon request from the ELCA Office of Disability Ministries, (800)638-3522.
- To learn more about the ELCA's commitment to being a hospitable church to people with disabilities and their families, visit the Disability Ministries homepage, <elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Ministry/Disability-Ministries.aspx>.
- Also visit the Accessibility homepage, <elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Ministry/Disability-Ministries/Accessibility.aspx>. Be sure to note the annual ELCA Accessibility Awards for which your congregation may qualify.