

The Presbytery of the Twin Cities Overture
Overture _____

On Instructing the General Assembly to Take Action to Implement the PCUSA's
Approved Policy on Inclusion of People With Disabilities

Recommendations

The Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area respectfully overtures the 220th General Assembly (2012) to take the following actions to implement *Living into the Body of Christ: Towards Full Inclusion of People with Disabilities*, the policy approved by the 217th General Assembly in 2006.

- Affirm that persons with disabilities are distinct cultures within the rich multi-cultural makeup of the PCUSA.
- Direct the General Assembly Mission Council, the Office of the General Assembly, the Presbyterian Foundation, the Presbyterian Investment and Loan Program, the Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, and the Board of Pensions to form a working group that includes Human Resources staff from each entity and representatives from Presbyterians for Disability Concerns (PDC) and the disability consultants in order to develop a plan for training all entity staff, commissioners to GAMC, and all commissioners to General Assembly in disability awareness and inclusion. The working group will meet three times before the 2014 General Assembly and report back its plan at the General Assembly in 2014. The plan may include contracting with a third party if agreed to and approved by PDC and the disability consultants.
- Direct the GAMC to fund, with new money, the disability consultants at a level that includes travel expenses and to fund, with new money, disability consultants and PDC volunteers for travel expenses for consulting with PCUSA staff in developing the new training plan.
- Direct all entities in PCUSA to use “people first” language in all publications and official communications of the PCUSA and to encourage church-wide study and use of “people first” language.
- Instruct OGA to encourage event planners and committees on local arrangements to recruit and include people with disabilities in planning and to include people with visible disabilities and other disabilities in church-wide worship leadership.
- Direct PCUSA entities to report back to the 221st General Assembly the progress that has been made since the 220th General Assembly and the plan that fulfills the recommendations in this overture.

Rationale

WHEREAS all members of the body of Christ, including people who live with disabilities, have been given gifts for serviceⁱ and are called to share them with the church for the glory of God,ⁱⁱ

WHEREAS the Old Testament prophets called God's people to “do justice”ⁱⁱⁱ and included people with disabilities in the gathered people of God,^{iv}

WHEREAS Jesus called all people, including the marginalized of his society, to share in God's great banquet,^v

WHEREAS Jesus' ministry of healing was ministry of inclusion that restored persons to their communities,^{vi}

WHEREAS persons who live with disabilities have gifts of wisdom, knowledge, and insight that have come out of their own faith experience as they have faced barriers and exclusion, and as the church is poorer without these gifts,

WHEREAS including people with disabilities in leadership, including worship, is a powerful and visible witness to God's love for all persons and God's gifts to all persons,^{vii}

WHEREAS the PCUSA is called to be a prophetic witness and to model justice for all people in our society,^{viii}

WHEREAS persons with disabilities^{ix} are a minority^x culture within church and society^{xi} and have in common the experience of facing barriers and exclusion in both church and society,

WHEREAS the Constitution of the PCUSA instructs the church to "hear the voices of people long silenced,"^{xii} and the voices of people who live with disabilities are not being heard in the church,

WHEREAS *Living into the Body of Christ: Towards Full Inclusion of People with Disabilities* calls the church to do justice for people with disabilities and offers a vision of God's dream for the world and for Christ's church,^{xiii}

WHEREAS person first language affirms that persons with disabilities are created in the Image of God and are persons first, not defined by their disabilities,^{xiv}

WHEREAS *Living into the Body of Christ: Towards Full Inclusion of People with Disabilities* includes no call for disability inclusion training for staff of the six entities of the PCUSA, for members of the General Assembly Mission Council, or for commissioners to General Assembly,

WHEREAS resources are available within PCUSA to work with human resources staff in developing a plan for training,^{xv}

WHEREAS it is now time, in 2012, for the 220th General Assembly to follow the words of scripture, the instruction in the Constitution of PCUSA, and the policy approved by the 217th General Assembly in 2006 in order to move the church forward toward full inclusion of people with disabilities, therefore, see recommendations

Footnotes

ⁱ “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” (I Corinthians 12:4-7)

ⁱⁱ “... we are all called, regardless of our abilities or limitations, to grow and live into the body of 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).” (*Living into the Body of Christ: Towards Full Inclusion of People with Disabilities*)

ⁱⁱⁱ “He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8)

^{iv} “See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north, and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, those with child and those in labour, together; a great company, they shall return here.” (Jeremiah 31:8)

^v “Then the owner of the house said to his slave, “Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.” (Luke 14:21)

^{vi} Kathy Black, *A Healing Homiletic: Preaching and Disability* pg 46
“For first century people, it was one’s sense of *being* in the community that was most crucial ...”

^{vii} Sarah is a young woman who lives with disabilities. She “speaks” through assistive technology and needs accommodations because of her multiple disabilities. When she was a child, she could never learn to ride a bicycle. She could not believe that God really loved her. Finally as a young teenager, she saw and heard a person with a visible disability leading worship at a church-wide service. By seeing a person with disabilities leading worship, she discovered and understood what years of Sunday school had not demonstrated – that she is a beloved child of God, created in the Image of God.

^{viii} “Give prophetic witness regarding issues related to people with disabilities, recognizing that disability concerns are matter of social justice.” *Living into the Body of Christ: Towards Full Inclusion of People with Disabilities*, II. 2, b, (1)

^{ix} “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." (This was the PCUSA definition in 1990 and consistent with the ADA of 1990. In 2008 ADA was amended to cover a broader category of disabilities)

^x According to ADA, people with disabilities are "a distinct and insular minority who have been faced with restrictions and limitations and subjected to a history of purposeful, unequal treatment, and relegated to a position of political powerlessness in our society ..." (This is a citation from ADA 1990. The 2008 law reaffirmed that people with disabilities continue to face barriers and discrimination.)

^{xi} It is estimated that at least 20% of the general population has some form of disability and that as many as 90% of this group are unchurched.

^{xii} Brief Statement of Faith, PCUSA (line 70)

^{xiii} . "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'." (*Living into the Body of Christ:*

Towards Full Inclusion of People with Disabilities, II)

^{xiv} Examples of Person First Language: The Power of Words
(excerpts from the Policy on Disabilities,
Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area)

In describing a person who lives with a disability, name the person first, not the disability. Using words that give dignity affirms our belief that all people are created in the Image of God.

Say	Instead of
People with disabilities	The handicapped or disabled
The child is blind or visually impaired	The blind or visually impaired child
The Council member is deaf or hard of hearing	The deaf or hard of hearing Council member
Mary uses a wheelchair	-- confined to a wheelchair or wheelchair bound
The child with Down syndrome	-- mongoloid
The commissioner has a physical disability	-- crippled or lame
The commissioner has a learning disability	-- is learning disabled
Don needs an accessible room	-- a handicapped room
Charlie lives with mental illness	-- crazy, insane, emotionally disturbed

For more examples see Kathie Snow's website: www.DISABILITYISNATURAL.COM

^{xv} The PCUSA has disability consultants in the following areas: mobility, vision loss, hearing loss, and developmental disabilities. Consultants respond to questions and concerns across the denomination. In addition they work with Presbyterians for Disability Concerns (PDC) as advisors and they cooperate with PDC in developing print and on-line resources for the denomination. Their combined compensation is \$800 per month and includes no travel expenses. This funding will end in 2012.

PDC is a network of Presbyterian Health Education and Welfare Association. Members of the leadership team are chosen for their experience and knowledge of disability issues. During the past year, mid 2010 - mid 2011, team members reported six hundred volunteer hours of service directly related to their work as members of PDC/PHEWA.